

# THE CAPIRANO REVIEW



“ . . . a sense  
of us, breathing the  
preserved & instant voice”

— JOHN MARSHALL

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*The Capilano Review is published four times a year from Capilano College, 2055 Purcell Way, North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.*

*We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of The Canada Council, the Capilano College Humanities Division, the Capilano College Student Society, the Government of British Columbia through the B.C. Cultural Fund and Lottery revenues.*

*The Capilano Review is a member of the Canadian Periodical Publishers' Association and COSMEP. Microfilm editions and reprints are available from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan.*

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*Printed in Victoria, British Columbia, by Morriss Printing Company Ltd.*

*Second Class Registration Number 4593*

*ISSN 0315-3754*

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Number 18

1980

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### COVER

*Painted Photograph of Dick Ritchie, age 23, Strathyre Ranch, Kamloops, B.C. 1914, by an unknown photographer.*



*He said, "Could you ever love me enough to be my wife?" I said,  
"Yes, of course, don't be so stupid," and those are the words I used.  
That is perfectly true!*



Colin Browne / STRATHYRE

## INTRODUCTION

*Strathyre* was the name given by a young immigrant Scot, Colin MacKenzie, to a quarter section of land near Kamloops, B.C., which he homesteaded in 1912. At that time, the CPR owned all the land for twenty miles on either side of the track, and homesteads were offered for \$10.00, providing the owner built a house, a barn, and fenced the property within the first three years.

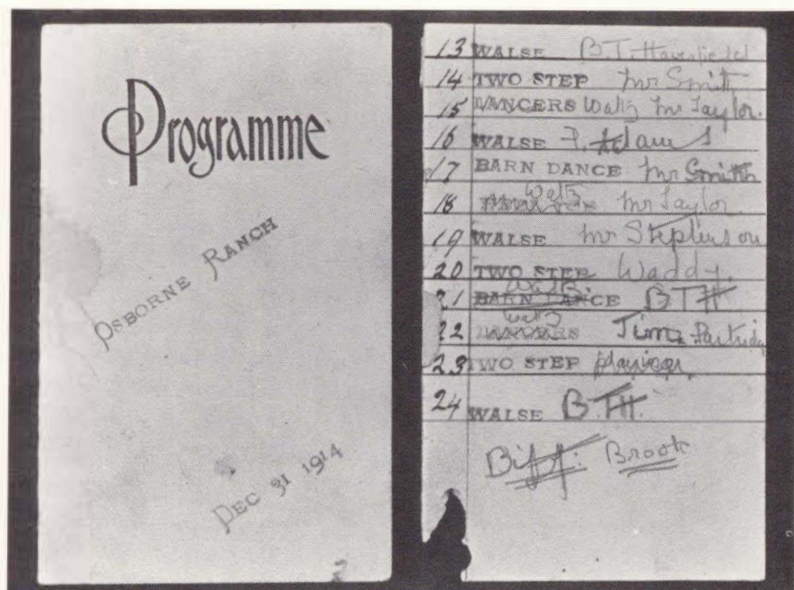
Colin married Nora Guernsey in Victoria in 1913. They removed to the homestead immediately, and in early 1914 she bore their first daughter, Margaret. That summer a school friend of Nora's arrived from England to help her out. Enid Stuckey brought her Kodak with her, and from July 1914 until February 1915 documented daily life on the ranch. Long winter nights were spent glueing the snapshots into an album and writing captions beneath them.

Enid had been corresponding with a young Englishman named Dick Ritchie, who, it seems, had also decided to seek a life in the Canadian West. Enid and Dick decided to rendezvous at Strathyre ranch on the last weekend of October. They became engaged in the little front room in a chair which collapsed under their weight and which consequently became a house landmark.

Dick Ritchie left for England and officer's training school. Enid followed him as soon as she could find someone to travel with (a young lady would never travel alone), and they were married in Felixstowe in spring 1915. Six weeks later Dick left for Mesopotamia, where he was killed at the Battle of Ctesiphon.

Colin and Nora MacKenzie stayed on until 1917, when Colin left for overseas, where he served with the Seaforth Highlanders until buried alive in a shell crater. Returning to the ranch, he found it too small, and he and Nora moved to Victoria and a succession of jinxed jobs which drove him back to Scotland in the early 1930's.

The structure of the film is a journey made by Colin MacKenzie's grandson, Colin Browne, and Dick Ritchie's grandson, Colin Ritchie, to look for the ranch and to recover a pair of chaps left behind by Dick when he left on November 1st, 1914. He had always planned to return.



## INTERVIEW WITH COLIN BROWNE

*INTERVIEWER: Penelope Connell*

*August 1979, North Vancouver*

*PC* Okay . . . so, how you began it, then . . .

*CB* Well, Colin [Ritchie] was really the one who was interested in the ranch, he knew about it before I did, because he had already come out to Canada, almost in his grandfather's footsteps, really — come out and worked on a ranch outside Calgary. So it was he who first started telling me about the ranch and he'd heard it from his grandmother so we decided that we'd go up and look for it. Then it occurred to me that it would be a good opportunity



— a good idea to make a film *about* . . . and he came back from England with all his albums, photographs and everything and I took one look at them and realized that if we could pull it off we'd really have something that was quite unique. And to me it was unique because I'd been working in the museum, making films for them about what I call "public" history, and I'd become sick of public history because it's a vast fiction anyway and it's not a fiction that you can do anything with. So I realized that the only way that I could ever deal with anything historical in a way that was satisfactory to me was to talk about personal history. And that's tied in with public history too, it's not separate. That's the thing. What still absolutely obsesses me is the period that occurred just before the First World War, because I don't think that we've ever gotten over that, that we've never been able to make any headway since that time. It's crippled all of us, in terms of being able to have faith in things, to have trust and spirit, the kind of spirit that we're talking about when we looked at these photographs.

*PC* The War comes across as a sort of fate, it simply causes people to vanish, it doesn't have any other particular effect. The people you have filmed don't experience anything except that their men disappear and never return.

*CB* Yes, you really see it from my grandmother's point of view. And — because she becomes the narrator of the film and her view was that they had to go and that they did their duty and it was a dreadful tragedy, but there was no question but that they had to go. That kind of statement is implicit, I think. But I think it's also really interesting to hear someone say — it's the first time I ever heard someone say — well, we didn't think about going at all, didn't even occur to us that it meant anything to us until we got the letter from my mother.

*PC* Okay, well, given all these albums and the written stuff, why didn't you write a novel, an illustrated novel?



*CB* Well, because I really wanted to chronicle the process of us going to look for this ranch. That was the important thing. And I really wanted to do it without any planning at all, without any setting up. I wanted it to be absolutely as fresh as possible and I realized that you can't do that in a novel. But when you make a film, I think you have a pretty good chance of doing that and so I really wanted for both Colin and I never to have seen the place before when we got there. And I wanted that to be our part of the saga, if you like.

We took Karl Spreitz with us who, as far as I'm concerned is the most sensitive camera man in the province. When we first arrived there, Colin and Ann started walking towards the house and we had to go and grab them and bring them back and say, don't go and look yet. Karl had to get his camera loaded and go with us when we looked. But he did go with us everywhere for the first time. Just — everything that we're doing there is registering for the first time. Well, we did set up a couple of shots where we sit on the porch and talk, but we're ad libbing and we just did it, just like that. And that, if the live part of the film has any value, that's it.

*PC* So, that's where the emotional freshness comes in.

*CB* Even Guy, with his joke with the photograph did that absolutely spontaneously. And everybody was quite wonderful and I think it's because television and radio trained people — especially old people — to know that at some point some young kid is going to come up with a tape recorder and get their story. They've listened for so long that they almost know how to behave. When we walked into the store, in fact, the lady in the store did not know we were coming in with the camera. We walked straight in and started talking with her, to the annoyance of some of the customers who finally left. And the lady in the sweater did not know that we were going to be photographing her. She walked straight out to the van and just started to talk. So both these — there was no practicing, there was nothing. And in fact the whole scene at the ranch was shot in four hours, four and a half hours. And that was it, we didn't have any more time. It's not a novel because a novel is a different structure altogether and that kind of visual freshness and tension too, you just can't get. And that to me is where film can be really valid.

*PC* Well, it sounds like you think of people as already walking around in a film, don't you? If they know how to act before a camera, are ready to become part of that . . .

*CB* I think that in 1979 people are absolutely aware of acting in front of a camera. I think people have forgotten how to pose, I think they know how to be natural now in front of cameras. And that's why Nina Rijinski has people posing. I've worked with the Film Board since, they set up those shots for hours. It seems a little strange. We didn't know what we were going to find and I was absolutely adamant that if we got a flat tire we would film the flat tire. If the car blew up we'd get the pieces. And if we found no ranch we'd film the hole in the ground and it was the intention from the very beginning that we would film everything no matter what happened and that would be the film, and we would not cancel the film if we went out and found out there was no ranch. And I had faith that that would work because I already had a structure to plunk it all into, and that moves into the novel or fiction part. We have an entire historical structure operating through us.

PC The structure is, in fact, your life.

CB It is our life, yeah, so we know the structure of that group of people who did the same thing we did, we know that they came out, we know the dates, we know where they went, we have the photographs and everything. And in fact, that's one of the interpenetrating processes that's going on — their process of coming and then finally leaving. And then we have our process, and it doesn't matter exactly *what* it is, just *that* it is, and the job in making a film is to see how those two processes fit together. And to find where they fit, because it's like sympathetic vibration between the strings of two instruments. So it wasn't as if we went up there and lolled around and enjoyed the place. In fact I sometimes think that I have to go back and get to know it. But at the same time I'm sure that we squeezed everything out of it that we possibly could anyway, and if I went back and spent a few days there I'd just be in a movie. We went at exactly the same time that Dick came down to become engaged to Enid; the weather was probably exactly the same for some bizarre reason, it should have been snowing. If you want to go farther it was All Hallows' Eve when we were there, it was All Saints' Day, it was the time of the spirits, death. So that we latched onto exactly the same time, we wanted to be open to that vortex — to let the similarities and the parallels and associations occur. I guess we all wanted to be mediums in that way really. Of course I haven't told you the whole story about the medium.

During the war there was a great spiritualistic revival and huge meetings at the Albert Hall. Well, Enid's mother — this was after Dick had been killed — Enid was in widow's weeds. Thousands of women all over London, just miserable, going to a lot of these meetings. Enid's mother was also going and she kept saying, why don't you come along dear? I'm sure you'll feel better. So Enid finally gave in to her mother's request to go to the Albert Hall. She left the baby who she called Dick — Richard Duncan after his father — with Marjorie for the evening and





The engagement is announced between Richard Ayers Ritchie, Lieutenant 3rd Battalion Norfolk Regiment, second son of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Ritchie, of Overstrand, Cromer, and Enid Kathleen, eldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Wilson Stuckey, of 91, Cromwell-road, Hove.

On Oct. 31 the mind of all-work, ~~became~~  
Enid K. became engaged to a cow-puncher  
by name Dick Ritchie from Chilcotin.  
This important event happening while the  
above two were occupying (?) the arm  
chair near the stove in the Strathgryse  
parlour. The chair is still considerably  
swollen and refuses to resume its  
normal shape. B.H. *over*

went off with her mother, you know, I'll please Mum, I'll go along to this meeting. Well, wham! first message of the evening was Enid and of course it was Dick and he said, "Enid, don't worry about me, I'm alright." That's what they always say, and it's wonderful to hear this, the experience is very exciting. "Things are fine here, I'm waiting for you forever." It was just about over, and then speaking through the medium he said: "Well, I have one more thing to say." And he'd already said: I love our baby, I think he's a wonderful baby, I'm very pleased, very very happy and proud father. "But there's one more thing," he said, "I'd like if possible for you to change the name of our child, because I want there to be only one Dick in your life."

The most exciting thing about editing a film this way, is when you run into those kinds of parallels that work when a phrase or sentence comes in, fits exactly with the picture, where they meet in that harmony, the strings all buzzing in harmony and then you know you have another piece that fits. For instance, when — after the two photographs of me appearing at the house, we're in the house and I'm tour-guiding around and on tape my grandmother's talking about the wooden stove and then about the piano. Well, in actual fact, although I didn't remember that, we talked about those in the same order when we were there, the wooden stove, and then the piano. The film of us in the house and the tape I did of my grandmother are precisely in synch, and so what happened is that while I'm standing there describing the dimensions of the wooden stove and the height and the pipe going out here, my grandmother sitting in Scotland 61 years later is describing exactly the same thing on tape. And then she goes on to talk about the piano. So what fit at this time was my grandmother's description, while I in fact was saying the same thing, but being much more expressive with my hands, so I cut the voice out and used my grandmother's voice. And then when I finished talking about the stove at exactly the same time as my grandmother switched to the piano, I started talking about the piano, so I cut my grandmother's voice at that point and used my voice talking about the piano. We were right on at that point. Absolute fusion. And that was another wonder, that's the kind of thing that I see all the time in the film. And often I wasn't keenly aware while I was doing it.

It wasn't until pretty well after high school that I first met Marjorie and so I appreciated her instantly and loved her enormously as did everyone in the family. She went to the grave with all the secrets, and some wonderful tales. They became very profound sources of finding out about myself. Those people were never cynical, they believed. What they believed in wasn't necessarily what I would believe in but they had a strong faith, if nothing else, in human nature. They hadn't found out that they should be cynical in the 20th Century. There's a quality in those people that, despite the fact that there needed to be economic and political changes very very badly, it was very nice to be an educated young man and have the wherewithal to come out to Canada and go back to the land. They could have lived in Kamloops and gone to movie houses during the week, so they weren't really pioneers. They made that choice to go there to live in that way, and they had the opportunity to leave it whenever they wanted. So they set off and did something, in fact, in opposition to what, in some respects, was really exciting at that time, which was not happening in North America, but in Europe the Vorticist movement in England, the painting movements in France — that's where things were actually happening. So they left that, they had no interest in that kind of thing and probably didn't know anything about Gaudier-Brezska or Ezra Pound or Wyndham Lewis. For that matter, those people would never have touched them; I doubt if they would have even known them. So it's not really their intellects that I'm after and it's not their political or economic side that I'm after, it's some other quality. And I guess that's really what the film is all about, that quality.

*PC* And this is not a nostalgic film. There's too much, even in things like the tinting of the photographs, there's too much artifice inherent even in the things that might otherwise be nostalgic for you to think about all that sentimental stuff. It's being created, even while they're living it.

CB Well, you see, that's the essence, when you look at old photographs and you look at the young men and women in them and you say: these were *people* at fourteen years old. If you look at the polaroids that are being taken around here, kids fourteen years old, there's nothing on their faces, it's just dismay. I sought that quality which says I am, and I know who I am, because I made it up. What Reaney means is not that you identify particular elements but that in identifying something, you find a point of unification of all things, and so to actually identify something when Reaney uses the expression, is to unify a thing. The other two terms that Reaney uses are myth and documentary. By myth I mean an imaginative constant, which is a constant imaginative structure that is the essence of millions of stories and when you reduce them all down like whale blubber you find that they have the same inherent structure in one culture. You call that structure a myth and that becomes one of the details that fits possibly into another myth or imaginative structure, which in the case of *Strathgryre* hinges on the whole myth of the Garden of Eden in some respects and a golden age, that kind of myth. And when you identify that interpenetration of the imaginative constant and the details, realize that those are working in synch, to use a film term, that fills you with such delight and awe that you know you have an identification. And that's really the excitement, I think, that we felt. And that's what we were trying to do.

Now, when I said there were several levels in all this, there really are, because we have the myth of the Golden Age and the Garden of Eden, for instance, and we have the grandfathers and grandsons and grandmothers, and all of those things work, all three. I don't know if I'm even able to say if we're mythologized. We've found those — if you want — luminous details that make up this interpenetration. We have discovered the constants in those details. For instance, when my grandmother talks about them not going to the war, that the war wasn't my grandfather's first interest, that tends to debunk a myth that all those men really wanted to go right away. So, I hope the film has managed to uncover what was closer to the way they really thought.



*PC* I don't think you can make any pretention that it's spontaneous. It's structured just as are the captions in the album, it's that kind of — not a carelessness, because it's absolutely careful, but an uncaring for how it's regarded later. Just that statement of it.

*CB* It's not really not caring, it's an identification of what has happened in a way that Reaney uses the term Identity, when he talks about himself as an identifier, and I think that I feel like an identifier. Enid, I'm certain, felt herself as an identifier. When I was back in Montreal not long ago Steve McCaffery was there saying how he never watches films, because they're totally passive and he refuses to let himself be put in that position. It's curious that in *The Deer Hunter* somewhere along the line the instructions must be to crank the sound up to full volume, it's the noisiest film I've ever seen. So, what does that say about film? Somehow they're desperate for attention, they want people to really listen. And the sound is interesting in *Strathyre* because there's a lot of sound, but I think because it keeps itself on a conversational level much of the time you can move through the sound in *Strathyre* and not have to hear, but hear what you want to hear. And so in a way *Strathyre* has that quality.

*PC* Books about films which include little strips of the film always interest me. They have the little side bits running down and I always wondered why they do that. It's unnecessary even though it's part of the film; to writers on film, the actual film strip that runs through the projector is as important as the images.

*CB* Yeah, that's absolutely true because that's its medium. In fact the only film I've thought of making recently is a ten-minute film of a projector going. The projector is a very forgotten part of the film but nothing happens without it and it seemed to me that a true exploration of the projector would be a most serious and most profound study. I sort of don't like projectors; they're clunky, they're noisy, they break, they get out of whack, they don't play the sound properly, they scratch film — they're very obnoxious things, really, projectors. I think they're like people's internal organs that they don't want to know anything about. The projector's like the lower colon and the kidney and those things in some respects and because in a way the projector's not the brain either. So, it would be that kind of thing, to look into the projector.

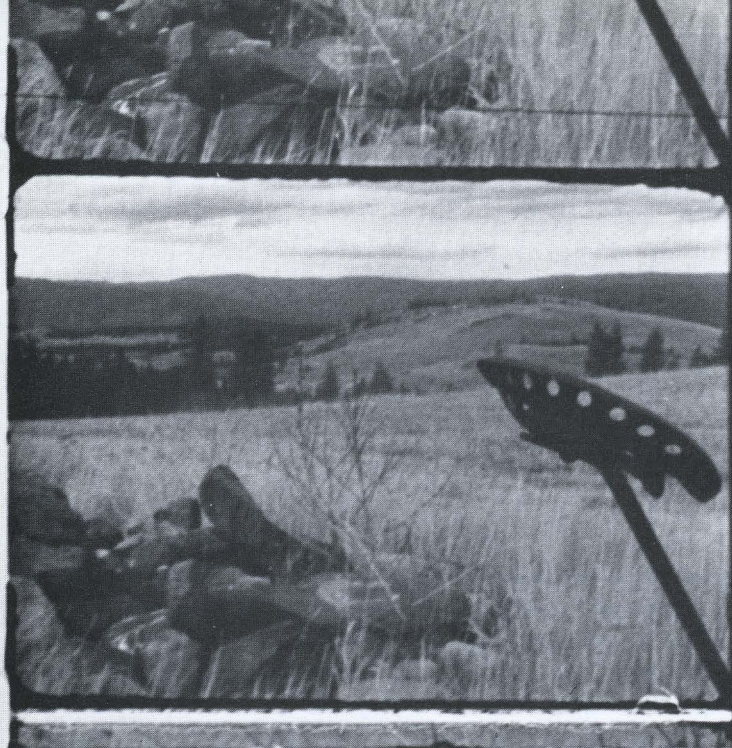
*PC* The intestines.

*CB* Yeah. I mean, when you look at the intestinal way in which the film goes through the projector . . .

*PC* Yeah, it does wind about and get all messed up in the middle.

*CB* And it goes in one end and comes out the other, and something is happening, what's happened, a bunch of plastic has gone in front of the light. Pretty interesting. So —

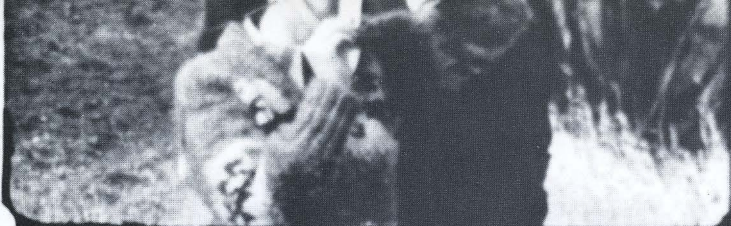
*PC* . . . transportable and as you said, the sound system is so inferior to the visual system, just as language is inferior to the image in a film. . . . a little metaphor going . . . (laughter)





*At that time, there was a great cry for young men to go West, particularly where there was a family of sons. I said the general thing was for the oldest one to go into the Army, the second into the Navy, and the third into the Church. And then, if there was nothing left, the younger ones went West. And that's probably what Dick Ritchie did, as he was actually the third son.*

*During the years Colin was there, when one thinks back now, he built the house, and the stable, and the granary, and the bunkhouse, and so on — the chicken house — and fenced the place, and had cropped at least three years of wheat, and oats chiefly, and so on, and had grown pigs which were fattened for market — for a bachelor's establishment, if Colin had continued without a wife and three children, he no doubt could have made a living there!*





*When Dick Ritchie arrived, ah, he came straight down from the North, he left some of his things behind. Amongst them were his chaps, the lovely, white furry ones that the men wear for riding in the cold weather — you can get them in either black or brown . . . — but his were white and really very distinguished-looking ones. And they were going to be no good for taking back to England, so before they left we took a photograph of him, and Enid, and Enid by herself, wearing the chaps. And when he left to go overseas, he left the chaps with Brook to look after, until he came back from the war, in his care.*

*We were so far, so utterly remote on a ranch south of Kamloops in British Columbia, the war meant nothing to me, and, really, nothing to him. At that time, there was no question of saying I must go and join up at once or anything like that; we went on with our daily life on the ranch, you see. And it was only some weeks later — later — my mother wrote to me, and she said I suppose Colin will be going shortly to join up. It never entered my head that he should go! At that time, I never considered our life on the ranch would come to an end with the war, or anticipate the results of war, but by the time we had left and realized the children were growing up, we knew we couldn't go back to that — we'd have to go forward to some other type of life.*

*And for Enid, of course, it was complete . . . , she was desolate. I think in her heart she would have loved to come, her and Dick, to return and make their home in a ranch life.*

*There's no sense of that freedom anymore, even, I think, in any country in the world. And there, really, you were free to do as you liked, to come and go as you liked. . . . I consider it was an ideal place, and if I was young still I'd head for that life again.*

# The Strathgrye Alphabet

(with apologies to Charles Stuart Calverley-)

A is the Acreage he's trying to handle,  
B is the Bed which starts all the scandal;  
C are the Chores taking most of the day,  
D is the Dinking which suffers delay;  
E stands for Evid the attic adorning,  
F are the Fowls which she feeds right mornning  
G is the Garden in which he works late,  
H is Humidity taken at eight;  
I is the Interest running up on one note,  
J is the Joy when another he'd float.  
K is the Kitchen - a most tidy room,  
L is the Larder - "must finish it soon".  
M stands for Margaret as quiet as a mouse,  
N stands for Nora who's mending the house.  
O is the Omnibus in use when its cold,  
P stands for Percy whom love's got hold:









## Mark Slade / STRATHYRE: A DREAM OF NORA'S GARDEN

*For it seems that everything  
is keeping us a secret.*

*Rilke*

STRATHYRE is a film fable. Two grandmothers, one mutely through her collection of old snapshots, the other in a voice vibrant as new-turned sod, tell how two young men, each named Colin, go into rolling cattle country in search of their grandfathers.

They go in a bright orange and cream Volkswagen bus.

An autumn sky streaks liquid amber shadows on all old things in the landscape, on old wood, on weeds, on enduring hillsides. But despite the fact that the two Colins are looking here for traces of their past, it is not old men they seek. Rather, if they can track them down, they want to find the two grandfathers still in their prime.

The two Colins are really looking for a couple of young men like themselves in their mid-twenties, men whose sap is running, whose future seems to lie ahead. In an interesting way, STRATHYRE is a film in which two young men seek themselves.

But to accomplish their quest a thick rind of years must be unpeeled to reveal the ghostly life within. First the two grandfathers must be dug out of sixty-one years of memory. Tempered in centuries of Celtic contradictions — moral vigour, steadfast good-humour, austere, even proud, independence — the Colins' forbears will be chronicled at the single most triumphant moment of their lives: when they and the world are one.

Firmly in control, these settlers are confident fate will play no tricks on them. As pioneers, there can be no doubt they will ride and master this wild and mountainous country with the same ease they keep in check the young animal within them. In another era, in other circumstances, the two Colins carry their seed. In addition, of course, they are heirs to the bewildering moment when all controls snap — when the countryside retreats back into wilderness.



I find it interesting to see film, a medium of the instant present which totally lacks a past tense, transforming the past into a current dream. History is reconstructed in such a way that many of the more troublesome aspects of change are permanently suspended. The amalgam of past and present is made very comfortable. Apparently aware of this the film-maker starts the narration with 'once upon a time. . . .'

In the Volkswagen bus with them is Ann.

Wife of one of the grandsons, Ann seems to be shut out from the male quest. She seems out of place as though asking herself what she is doing on this search in the hills for traces of Scottish blood. In a curious way Ann reminds me of those unenlightened Australian women, who, upon stumbling by mistake into a hornets' nest of ancestral male secrets, are put to death.

But her Australian counterpart had to be killed for discovering a raw truth: that the secret power of all male ritual is based on a dream. Secret power is the power of illusion. Naturally a woman caught seeing through the secret shatters the dream, unmans it.

In STRATHYRE, however, no known truths are threatened. Almost imperceptibly, almost unbelievably, Ann teases the dream back into flesh with her ingenuous question: Where was Nora's garden?

The Colin who answers her seems a bit excited. Down there, he says, waving his arm: down there where it was swampy. Remember that picture? The one of Colin ploughing?

Ann is a true Anna after all. Apart from this single question and a rare monosyllable she is as silent as Enid, the old lady who makes the snapshots available. She helps to give the film the same kind of presence that, later on, when the film is screened, the audience will also contribute to it. Ann's hair flows golden into the tall autumn grasses, blends there, shining.

Also there's a dog. Two men, a girl and a dog in an orange and cream Volkswagen bus, almost new, trying to evoke our suppressed past. STRATHYRE throws this past like a net over the present. The viewer, caught in a net of beautiful images, painstakingly arranged, is allowed to discover a sense in which the two aspects of reality, past and present, flesh and dream, continuity and discontinuity, coincide. But there's a penalty for coming together like this. The third reality that emerges is more abstract than either reality that it replaces. The new myth that is born is difficult to grasp.

One of the Colins puts on the past, dresses up in it. Is he putting us on, too? Nora, in the narration, tells how Colin Ritchie's grandfather left behind a fabulous pair of white chaps. You could, she explains, get them in black or brown. But his were white. They looked 'very distinguished.' Chaps were full-length fur leggings without a seat worn by cowpunchers in cold weather. The two Colins succeed in tracking them down. As Colin Ritchie gets into them we become acutely aware of how glibly media allow us to slide in and out of tense. Past and present merge the way sand and cement are mixed for mortar.

Meanwhile Nora stands in her garden in Inverness. She plucks a dead rose that is going to seed. Framed in straight cropped snow white hair a smile escapes from her very pink face. Compared to Nora's fragile hair the fur chaps look quite yellow.

A strong wind blowing across Lake Okanagan tugs at the few remaining leaves. The two Colins, Ann and the dog approach a family of strangers to claim the legendary chaps. Colin Ritchie carries a bundle of photograph albums. There are photos showing his grandfather Dick and his grandmother Enid taking turns to pose in these wonderful fur leggings. These pictures were taken close to the log house built by the other Colin's grandfather — also called Colin.

You can't help noticing how good cameras were in the first decade of the century. I suppose these were among the first grandfathers to record for an indefinite future snapshots that warp them in reversible time. It is still difficult to grasp how their linear, unidirectional time becomes our omnidirectional film time. On the other hand, their omnidirectional, living space is now our unidirectional, dead, two-dimensional film space. Perspectives shift. Our senses try to catch up.

Earlier Colin Ritchie has said that the fur chaps are his only tangible link with his grandfather. Now as he puts them on he says, "This is the only thing — material possession — of my grandfather, that my father never saw . . . that I never saw." And he climbs back into history. He muses about how it's fifty-one years to the day since that photo was taken. I believe he means sixty-one years to the day. But who will miss that decade? Laughing, he adds: "This is a great chunk of the odyssey, anyway."

The other Colin laughs with him, an outrageous laugh, the laugh of a mad puppeteer who knows which string he's going to pull next. He is the film's director, Colin Browne, grandson of Nora and Colin.

As the Volkswagen bus heads north the wind follows. They ask directions. First at a little country store and then from a lady wearing a kerchief on a windy hill. All around them land slopes out to the edge of the sky. There the stillness of ranch land joins tufts of racing cloud. On most of this landscape with its softly bending contours generations of settlers have left few human marks.

Slowly the Volkswagen bus moves up and across a cattle trail. It is caught a moment on a frowning horizon before it dips. Then we see the steep roof and amber scorched logs of the homestead built by Colin Browne's grandparents at the turn of the century. The homestead is snugly rooted in a marshy hollow of bare aspen. Here the wind has taken nearly every leaf from the trees.

Down from the Chilcotin and along the Okanagan valley there must be enough abandoned log relics to furnish a flourishing ghost town. Most cameramen looking at one of these ruins would size it up pretty quickly, in about three shots. Not Karl Spreitz, cameraman for STRATHYRE. For Karl Spreitz, Nora and Colin's decaying place is an overflowing treasure chest of images. His camera is everywhere, approaching and alighting with the circling grace of a great bird.

Again Colin Ritchie carries a photo album. Colin Browne runs on ahead. The latter leans into a gaping black window, reaches out and tears a bit of mouldy green burlap off the wall. "Yes; this is it," he announces triumphantly. "See, here's the green burlap they put on the wall!"

Next they explore the house. Nora, voice over, describes how well Colin Browne's grandfather planned it. This is where layers of time meet in new, fresh and magical distributions of space. A contrived perspective, multiguous but integrated, begins to unfold.

Images of 'now' and 'then' flit in and out of consciousness. They invariably combine as an untouchable 'now'. And it is characteristic of the 'now' to be always timeless. For example, in quick succession we see three people standing inside the house, right in the crease of the time warp, while simultaneously the room they stand in is intercut with images of the way it looked sixty years ago.

They look around the kitchen and family room. Through the window on the autumn hillside change endures, framed, for the time being, in shards of glass and a few tatters of Nora's curtain. Then instantly we see this room with the table laid, comfortable kitchen chairs, their legs and backs turned on a lathe. Then Colin Browne speculates about where the piano might have been.

Nora tells about her old cook stove, the best thing she ever cooked on. And sure enough, collapsed in a corner, are the recognizable remains of iron and nickel that once swelled its makers and owners with pride on account of its extravagant rococo trim and unequalled efficiency. Now time has squashed it.

The fact is established that this is the room with the rocking chair; the room where Colin Ritchie's grandparents became engaged, while, as Nora says, Colin Browne's grandparents 'very sensibly went off to bed.' The two Colins stand in awe. Out of frame somewhere the dog is inaugurating yet another reality, forever mysterious.

Up in the attic, which once served as Enid's bedroom, the group of three is caught in a lattice of sunlight and shadow. Sunlight comes through chinks in the roof. Cedar shakes have been worn by weather to a jagged fringe, leaving the building vulnerable to the acid work of destruction. But right now a lattice joins the three people horizontally in bars of light and slices across them vertically in bands of shadow. Or it may be vice versa; I can't be sure. In any case this is the traditional icon of how the axis of the past cuts across the axis of the present. The two axes, as usual, form a cross, a grid of handy co-ordinates.

Now the camera allows us to view in close-up the joints of the logs. The logs join one another like knuckles of two giant hands clasped together. It will take a lot of weather and time to part them. From a reverse angle we also see the Colins at a double attic window. Across one of these openings a single board is nailed. Ann, after some hesitation, finds a place at the window a little behind the film director, Colin Browne. There's a pause as they all look down at us.

And it's shortly after this shot that Ann tries to locate Nora's garden. And we discover that it existed where it was 'all kind of swampy.' The three of them are sitting outside against a wall of the log house. No sooner has Colin Ritchie wondered where Nora put out her washing than we flash back sixty years to see Nora down in the

swamp scrubbing. Colin Ritchie says her washing would dry fast in this wind. It is a beautiful juxtaposition of images which seems to fall together as much by chance as by design.

Soon they are exploring the near distance. Decency prevents them from identifying the biffy where these ancestors discharged their animal wastes. But they do linger close by at the low rock entrance to a root cellar. A brief inventory of the crops stored there is made: potatoes, turnips. . . .

In the very same space that Enid took a snap of her future husband wearing the fur chaps, Ann takes a picture of her husband, Colin Ritchie. But if the corresponding picture of Ann is taken it doesn't appear in the film. A lightning image of Dick wearing the chaps fills the interval, an attempt, of course, to make the time as identical as the space, trying, in fact, to make past and present intersect *exactly*. This is as though the film-maker wanted to hold the film together in a lasting time-space matrix similar to the lattice of sunlight and shadow.

There's a bit of the funeral here as well as the fable. Certainly if the two young men are seeking themselves (whatever that might mean) then what Colin Browne is trying to discover in Nora's garden puts him on the same track as Rilke in the 3rd Elegy:

*. . . not one, one coming  
but the countless ones teeming; not a  
single child, but the fathers who rest  
in our depths, like the ruins of  
mountains;  
but the dry riverbed of foremothers;  
but the whole silent landscape under  
the clear or cloudy destiny: . . .*

The fact that past and present are a poor fit for the two Colins is borne out in their attempt to bring together the spine of an antiquated piece of machinery with the triangle of struts that it once made conjunction with. One of them comments that it is twisted beyond repair. Neither one knows what, if anything, the strange implement was used for. Like amateur paleontologists, they try in vain to reconstruct the limbs of an extinct giant insect.



Besides, by peering deep into the time warp you can see that the first in a series of great wars has begun. Colin Ritchie's grandfather is killed, his body thrown with other flesh into the River Tigris. Colin Ritchie carries his seed. The white fur chaps are churinga, sacred relics to be touched on occasion by succeeding generations as they decipher a code written in junkyards of geodesic domes, fallen A-Frames and abandoned solar panels wrapped in a black plastic in an odorless sea of gray styrofoam.

Colin Browne's grandfather is wounded. In his mind a dream of killing drains away a tithe of meaning. He returns to his homestead to find not only time but space changed. The scale is changed. Those huge logs with their big knuckles have shrunk, closed in on him. Everything that he had done that seemed big, expansive, courageous, now seems small. His head scrapes the ceiling of the kitchen (Enid's temporary floor). Once the landscape submitted eagerly to human handling. Now it withdraws to the horizon. Or advances implacably over Nora's garden. For this soldier, too, it was hard to make past and present fit. Colin Browne carries his seed.

To imagine that a flood of images will arrest the erosion of a present forever exposed to the attacks of the past may seem paradoxical. We live in a world different from when Emerson could say the hours should be instructed by the ages and the ages explained by the hours: rather the one is hellbent on devouring the other. That is when past and present most closely co-incide: when they are least differentiated.

Film places its net of co-ordinates over the hours and the ages, brings them together in a contemporary system. In this respect film and Nora's garden are both intent on survival programmes of reclamation. In STRATHYRE (and in any garden) we notice that an exquisitely delicate balance holds the amber resonance from falling into decay and stench. Nora lives it. The film dreams it.

What the two Colins seem to have inherited from the two grandfathers is a society much too immediate to tolerate much past. A society that has no history, only events. Its memory is instantly banked in a kind of electronic syrup. Film's preoccupation with events, with the current scene, necessarily arouses primitive sensibilities.

In this discussion of STRATHYRE I believe we are dealing with what we need to recognize as a savage organization of society. I have therefore had before me these words of Levi-Strauss:

*The characteristic feature of the savage mind is its timelessness; its object is to grasp the world as both a synchronic and a diachronic totality and the knowledge which it draws therefrom is like that afforded of a room by mirrors fixed on opposite walls, which reflect each other (as well as objects in the intervening space) although without being strictly parallel. A multitude of images form simultaneously. . . .*

*In this sense savage thought can be defined as analogical thought.*

C. Levi-Strauss, *Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1966), p. 263.

Originally referring to wild woodland, later the word savage was applied to ferocious animals. Later still, savage was used almost exclusively to assign whole societies to their proper place on a cultural scale that optimistically placed the civilization of England at the top and everyone else somewhere lower. Englishmen calling the Scots savage is the earliest recorded pejorative use of the word. In *LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST*, Shakespeare compares someone to a "rude and savage man of Inde." [IV (iii)]

The word continues to tease. That is because we continue to entertain the most inflated conceits about the superiority of our own culture over cultures sharply different from ours. So I am saying here that one thing we learn from a film like *STRATHYRE* is that moving image media, compelled to adopt primitive time-space structures and analogical, mythic procedures, effectively close the gap between cultures said to be at the highest stage of development and cultures said to be at the lowest or more savage stage. Lower and more savage than what? And I believe it is easier to identify this interesting process in a modest film like *STRATHYRE* than in a great *tour de force* like *APOCALYPSE NOW*. In the latter, adrenalin drenches us in the sap of our wildest beginnings: judgment is defeated.

In his use of film Colin Browne eliminates the time gap between himself and his immediate ancestors. He erases time, creates co-existent lives in a coalescent landscape. Whereas costume history films in drag mock the present with a travesty, STRATHYRE makes history a current event. That is what history was for all savage societies: a chamber of interlocking mirror images, existing in the now (synchronic) or not at all. But the timelessness with which film charges the seized moment should not be confused with eternity. In eternity, presumably, the tightening of spaces or intervals does not go beyond acceleration to total elimination. Rather time-space ratios of perfect harmony and balance are established, space and time making out in a mood of reckless ecstasy. In eternity boundaries and limits are neither here nor there.

Given our kind of potential with timelessness, however, plus our savage capacity "to grasp the world as both a synchronic and diachronic totality," a serious imbalance prevails. Analogical processes are soon whipped into digital processes. Quite manic. Timelessness in current history creates the geography of the fifty-minute hour, a relatively bleak landscape, spaced-out, strung-out, up-tight.

Of course, this point of flip comes only when all the cultural wires are stripped. At this point, in savage society, it is common to insist on the insulating effects of ritual, protocol and decency (i.e., art), as well as unassailable connections through common blood to very remote ancestors. These are also the qualities Colin Browne attempts to recover in his film. But for savages the past is represented by a great deal more than a grandfather: their media are mythic, a fabled refuge from a reality all our grandfathers find perplexing.

Apart from this I believe I have located the grandparents' old piano. In an old shed beyond Nora's garden. Its ghostly strains are being played almost honky-tonk by Tom Durrie all the way through the film. The reason Tom Durrie hits the keys in such a playful way is to ensure that no one will ever take Colin Browne's film STRATHYRE as seriously as I do here.

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March a daughter of Major Stuckey, of  
tenant Ritchie, who was only 24 years of  
Canada when war was declared and re  
e and obtained a commission from the C  
ing Corps.

## LOCAL OFFICER KILLED IN MESOPOTAMIA.

the list of casualties issued this morning  
ars among the killed the name of Lieut  
Ritchie, 3rd Norfolk Regiment (attach  
alion). He was the second son of Mr. and  
Ritchie, of Overstrand, and married as re  
March a daughter of Major Stuckey, of  
tenant Ritchie, who was only 24 years of  
Canada when war was declared and re  
e and obtained a commission from the C  
ing Corps.











MACKENZIE — Colin Rae aged 86 years in hospital, Inverness, Scotland. He leaves his wife Nora, 3 daughters, Margaret, Inverness; Kythe, Victoria; Christine, Australia. He was pre-deceased by daughter Molly, Victoria, 1972.

RITCHIE. — On Feb. 22, 1975, suddenly at his home in Reigate, Capt. R. DUNCAN RITCHIE, C.B.E., M.V.O., Royal Navy (Retired), aged 59 years, the greatly loved husband of Diana Teresa (Terry), dear father of Colin, Graham and Clare, grandfather of Jonathan, Duncan and only son of Mrs E. K. Ritchie, of Crowborough. Funeral private. No letters or flowers, please, but if desired donations for King George's Fund for Sailors, may be sent to The Northover Funeral Home, Reigate.

RITCHIE. — On April 18, 1975, peacefully, ENID RITCHIE, of Crowborough, Sussex, widow of Richard Ayres (Dick) and mother of the late Richard Duncan, captain, R.N. Funeral service at Tunbridge Wells Crematorium on Thursday, April 24, at 3 p.m.

In memory of those who are gone before, & the happy years shared long ago at Strathgrye Ranch as I plough on at age 81.

Nina C. Mackenzie

Oct: 18<sup>th</sup> 1975

## Paul de Barros / IN A DRAW

*for Richard Gates*

*Vancouver. Home is where the heart is. The hearth is. Soon, he thought, my heart will be where my home is. The blackbirds crowed alone, each by each, atop the rooves when spring came they did. They were larger than the blackbirds at home. Also, their wings had creamy speckles and their beaks were slightly orange, stood out against the sky. They went to a party over there, stood in the kitchen drinking beer when they could get one. He heard a sound, as if it were raining, which he fully expected given the dripping hemlocks, only to find, as he reached the porch, that the sound was of a rushing creek. They were in a draw.*

It became the hottest, stillest, quietest day of the fall. Voices and airplanes cracked the daylight sharply dividing the silence, then disappeared, leaving no wake, only vastness. Across the lake the colors were gone, off the face of the ridge, those bright yellow seas which in the bar that day at Lac La Hache had reminded him suddenly of something at once totally familiar yet unretrievable, had invited him to sit staring out across the lake through the apparently tinted (polarized) glass at the hillsides, wondering what it was (the lake there rollicked like San Francisco Bay, was dark, cold, gunblue) . . . a place, yes, a place, but where? . . . what was it about those patches of Inca gold that would not let go his eyes? He searched in them over two, three, four beers, then suddenly graced once more by that child's eye view, he got it: it was the hills of California he was seeing there! Thanks to a momentary optical illusion, the raised bunches of poplars against the evergreens had shown as patches of golden grass among the oaks. The oaks, the oaks, the oaks, and golden wild oats in early summer . . . and the air, too, today had reminded him of that same California benevolence, a word which could so

rarely be applied to the Canadian bush it had begun to paralyze him. Even the berries, the fish, were somehow niggardly and pinched when he thought of those lush Yokuts valleys, Castanoan shellfish and Spanish extravagances. Here the fall and winter moved in over the landscape like a frigid god: the trees were sered, stripped and milked of their color then left to freeze like so many sticks, bare masses of grey across the lake, trunks and branches mottled between the dusty firs and spruces, pines. Who could call it beautiful?

Worse, he felt in himself the same gradual dessication of generosity that was going on outside, and knew that he was as helpless to combat that as he was to contest the coming of winter. This air, thin and warm, marked the fulcrum of the seasons. He and Katy had seen it many times before — always it had signalled their departure and the conclusion of an industrious summer working on the house. But never before had they felt so absolutely sapped.

He looked out of the window of the little cabin they had rented — the cold had finally driven them out of camp — and watched a beaver glide by, or rather the beaver's nappy head, as the rest of him worked beneath the surface. "Raise the level of the pond, then live beneath it." *Canadian Mammals*, 1974. Canadian indeed! And yet, was it not just that line across the map which had seemed to present such an obstacle to their freedom of movement? Hadn't they found, whenever they approached the border driving north that the shell of velvet sky over the Pacific Northwest suddenly cracked and left them pinched into the southwest corner of something else? Here on the mouth of the Fraser lay the far-west polis of another space. Perhaps, perhaps if they were to go there where all this water was going . . . (the beaver had gone, his wake only a faint disturbance among others on the surface, presumably across the bay to the lodge they'd watched him building) . . . maybe that might ease the pain which gripped them each time they set out for either place, these poles they'd imposed on their world — San Francisco and Bridge Lake. Vancouver? It was worth a try.



It had started to rain. Imperceptibly, the puffs of morning cloud had dissipated into stratus, as they often did towards noon, and filled the sky with water. He allowed his head to sink slightly toward the checkered vinyl tablecloth. In his dreams there roamed witches, gigantic birds and horses. "The horses are avengers," Katy's cousin Nathan would say at Francois Lake, "of violated innocence. Terrible in the night." "The visual," he noted in his book, as his mind leapt backward to that astonishing moment in Lac La Hache, the beer in the glasses mirroring the poplars' yellow leaves . . .

He shook his head free, rose, and stoked the tiny cookstove. Katy would be disappointed when she got back from town that he'd done nothing on the house. But even if they did finish cutting and nailing all those endless rows of cedar shakes, the dormer windows (Snoring in the dormer! — that's where he wanted to be, asleep) there remained the floorboards, the windows to be installed: they'd never get into it this year, not sane, anyway. No, they'd have to go back to California, only to turn around six months later. He remembered what a traitor he'd felt when little Mary on Shotwell Street had cried when he told her they were leaving. Was that all it meant to be a citizen — pure sentiment? It was easy to be unsentimental about this plywood cabin. He chuckled. The last resort.

If only they could finish the house, it would no longer be necessary, this wandering around, living in other peoples' places. He imagined them as having no space to live in, none, at least, which did not force them into elaborate contortions. Yet he also noticed that they carried patterns with them wherever they went, and imposed them rather arbitrarily. Here the car would be parked, there the scrap metal stacked; there the mustard, here the firewood. He remembered that in the campsite visitors had often unwittingly urinated on the living-room carpet, mistaken furniture for natural phenomena. One had only to build one's house around one's habits. At the architect's, his drawing mapped the traffic, rabbit runs, they'd wear it in the cold, inhabiting the house like . . . rabbits, in their hutches, nests or dens, they'd have their room at last, their rooms. "*Cabe uno mas*," the cabbies said in Mexico, expressionless behind their thin moustaches, and for him it meant squeeze in beside that dress, those legs. Always he felt squeamishly they did not fit; cramped.

"When they finished the house": it had become a litany, a reckoning. "When they finished the house" they could, for example, spend long winter evenings together, drinking rum and reading aloud to one another instead of this ceaseless shouting of instructions about things which neither of them understood. When they finished the house, they could travel, catch that Yugoslavian freighter they'd always planned to out of Chicago, tour Italy, then turn on their heels and head for the house. Waiting would be the cords of firewood, the black stove and the baby in his crib, perhaps grown a little hungry in their absence, but, after all, sober and content. Life itself would be a sober, balanced affair without these troublesome ups and downs. "Happy as a clam," he'd heard her cousin say.

But wasn't the subject, after all, not the house itself, but the attractions it held in store? It seemed to function like a maypole, so that wherever they might go, they were never allowed to strike off at a tangent from the circle described by its pull. In Mexico even, they had felt it tugging at their sleeves, had cut their journey short. Each time they left, it seemed to have more of them than when they had arrived. They certainly talked about it in those terms, as a storehouse, a vault, almost, where they might store things of value. Even the walls were fortress-like, as it grew, windowless, doorless; they'd felt relieved to finally cut the chunks out for the door and watch them topple to the ground. What were they preparing to protect in there? — this nest, this — Yes! It was their future they were banking there.

He knew what was bothering him now but resisted squaring off with it. In no way could he imagine the space he might command as father. It was, after all — the house — to be nothing more for him than an expanded bedroom, one he could recall from childhood. Katy and the others, whoever they might be, he had obviously envisioned as mere characters on the landscape. But then why — if that were really so — why was he sponsoring the destruction of that very childhood, by setting out to house some other child there? For that was the plan, wasn't it, their tacit meaning built into that second dormer window? He suddenly had a rare memory of himself as an eight-year-old squatting on the cold cement of the garage, humming as he nailed together scraps of wood with string and rags to make a sailboat. Wasn't that him, here, now? — humming as he split the cedar shakes? Had there ever been room for anyone but himself?

Or closer to home, did he really want to make room? Obviously a part of him did, the part that had been trying to open up a space deep in the pines for them to sleep together in; while another part had been resisting — that was clearly the “something” he had sensed out there all summer that was “out to get them,” reducing him to tantrums every time he stuck his head back in beneath the hood of that accursed truck! But it wasn’t just himself he quarreled with: Katy, too, carried some imperative about the house which he felt tethered by. “But we’ve got to get back there and finish the house!” she’d blurted out to a surprised old friend in Berkeley at the New Year’s Eve party when he reproached them yet again for leaving town. “Don’t you understand?” The house had grown around their marriage, almost bound it now, he felt. Stood for it. And this word marriage, too, was like a maypole, always he pictured streamers with it or carnations. It was as if they could not share that bed without the house surrounding them. It was their wedding ring.

How had this happened? How had their marriage become contingent on what sheltered it? He went over in his mind as he had a thousand times the sequence of events which had brought them here — Katy’s cousins . . . But no, it was more like a list:

1. Katy’s cousins in the Kootenays (Vietnam . . .
2. Wanting a cabin in the country.
3. Katy’s four years in Mexico . . .

He put down his pen and went over to the stove. It always came back to that, didn’t it, that he was not expatriating and she perpetually was. Outside the orbit of her family — mother country, fatherland — she felt free, where he felt homesick and confused. Tugged back to those oaks and hills. And yet, he had a nagging intuition that if they did go home now, back to that nostalgic vision (“And why not?” he’d challenged at the pub. “Why *put* ourselves through all this?”) they’d never share a household of their own. Not here or anywhere.

He sat back down at the little table with his coffee. Okay then. Vancouver. There was a curious pleasure, even, in just surrendering to it. Some place not on this private map they’d drawn and followed. “The coast,” the ranchers called it. A neutral ground to wait the winter out against. His mind flooded with the grey sky of it. There would be no color, no movement, no attachment. They would barely even be there. They would be noplacé.

No place.

He knew it wouldn’t last. But he could hardly wait to tell Katy.



## John Marshall / SIX POEMS

### I was doing the dead-man's

I was doing the dead-man's  
float

    waiting like I'd been told  
where & who I am

I had to muscle my way thru  
I have paced out this rough perimeter

    & I do not mean to  
suffocate in air

## In High Water

slash fire off  
Sechelt

part red sky,  
red rising tide

all the possible  
blues

a backwash,  
sunset

& thru the channel  
a moon

so high  
the words  
burn out

## Lighthouse

half circles, the ocean  
the trees

looking out  
for stars, the specific

wrecks, of one

coast

& all the names

we gave

to ships



## Meteor Shower, August 1976

the image the trailing  
after-image

pointing out at the  
dead&gone

the collapsed

*that* *did you catch*

time

gradually

we are given to  
understand

## Jeune Landing

is there a home  
town what were all  
the float camps,  
lives at the mouth  
of rivers what if you  
fell in, the one armed  
cook to pull you out  
from under what if it's  
a woman's voice claims  
you & the magic is coming  
from the green &  
blue books what if it  
was the inland waters  
the tides, rise &  
fall rocked you what if  
it's the little loud planes  
every few months, one inlet  
another

## Wages

camp, community of all  
nationalities the community of  
speech, to be  
ourselves  
reaching out of the names  
to be found in  
an uncorrected present, a sense  
of us, breathing the  
preserved & instant voice



## Diana Hartog / THREE POEMS

### LOVE POEM

You come to me as waters flood,  
without knock, beyond keys,  
too late to save  
what seems important at the time.

Scattered poems, nightgowns,  
open, underlined books — all  
ravished by your mere presence;  
the lick of rug beneath my feet,  
even my blue china cups  
neat on their hooks — betrayed.

My knees notice first  
and then my thighs go;  
Dürer's wing, luminous in its frame,  
blurs. Nothing matters.

Your lips fade the flowers on the wall:  
one by one fall the numbed roses.

## ON THE OCCASION OF A DEATH BY SUICIDE

I

A delicate subject, followed in the journals:  
some propose the mind hovers above the brain.  
Others, materialists, have it    kit & kaboodle.

Some, past theory, merely aim up  
through the mouth.  
Fact/pain — we all know the general direction.

A neighbor, one who assumes odd jobs, cleaned up the mess.  
I imagine him standing on a chair, stretched,  
picking the shards of skull from the ceiling.

I can follow him this far: the evidence  
each piece by itself. Right at the last minute  
my thoughts stray.

## II

### COWBOY

The bullet starts again, fires  
whip whip whip  
the horse billowing under him, her mane  
lifting like kelp  
his spine buckling  
his spine buckling  
his knee his knee his knee  
the shute warping out  
the mare and him  
buckling into the dark

## III

There should be at least three poems  
for this man.  
Already I see the pattern: a breath tightly drawn,  
then a pretense at letting go,  
both poems  
watched with the anxiety of one who distrusts air.  
It's becoming clear that this is me, breathing,  
using this death.

## IV

The house is empty. Lights on  
and a man unable to hear the lake.  
He has scattered himself — the walls,  
every room has been reached, as when the heart, twisted,  
explodes in its cavity.

Hours of only moths.  
Hours of pure companionship — the walls almost gentle  
the way they continue.

## UNTITLED SCULPTURE

You handle rain beautifully.  
Your shape reminds me of flesh, an organ  
pressured into odd angles,

the poem too filling the odd shape of the moment,  
its perfection just that — that it is complete  
and enters every fissure and hole without hesitation,  
with the curiosity of water.

A heart then — huge and black —  
still ugly with mystery  
and that bizarre swelling that happens  
when a familiar word is repeated over and over: Heart

flooding into the fingers of my father's hand  
as if blowing a balloon  
and I hold it like a real hand  
as if it would last forever.



## Robin Blaser / THE TRUTH IS LAUGHTER

art is madness, yes, Melville,  
as the words glow

somedays I think the aurora borealis  
shakes heaven — silver, lemon,  
grass, roses change a restless  
disappearance glimmers at the top  
of the north there are flames  
at the zenith and now and again  
brightness rays up from the horizon  
all this can melt into the moonlight  
left over merry dancers wave  
they are the dust from aurora's  
(if she'll forgive this first name  
intimacy) glittering look  
now new lightnings over again  
the endless game of it fresh  
in this stillness which is after all  
    infinitude as we can  
    come by it  
    on a short walk  
    after dark

after Nansen

## THE TRUTH IS LAUGHTER

the radio said, "Are scientists close to explaining the nature of the universe? Ho! Ho! Ho!"

## THE TRUTH IS LAUGHTER

blindly visited  
Vancouver streets  
high heels  
and cherry trees  
he leans forward  
every day,  
brown eyes  
sharp with  
delirium  
at the corner  
by Hudson's Bay  
around his neck  
the mystery and  
the crucifix  
the mystery  
is tender  
that's why  
he likes it  
we go  
around him,  
sparrows,  
every day

## THE TRUTH IS LAUGHTER

lately, my mind is dark,  
answers  
to a bucket  
with a hole in it  
stands there  
talking of the light-river  
topazes, rubies in sunlight,  
and the verdant short paradises  
my mind says and my heart  
knows it 'I can't,' the song  
sings, 'buy no beer.' the  
texture among radio and  
sunlight and scholarship argues  
di colore oscuro,  
dolce color d'oriental zaffiro,  
such dalliance of odours returns  
o, argues, isplendor light  
visible and such stars  
as I am ignorant of backward  
the dark mind 'winds,' he  
said,  
'still deeper' —



## THE TRUTH IS LAUGHTER

the janitor at the St. Rock National Historic Site said, "When I was in Los Angeles, the O from Hollywood rolled down the hill and cut a station-wagon in half." "It would've been better," he said, "if it'd been a Honda Civic. Front-wheel-drive would let you go on driving."

## THE TRUTH IS LAUGHTER

moving from one room to another a shocked,  
resilient heart, owning nothing, as Yeats says,  
perhaps in the depths of the eyes, the latest  
image held of a shimmering city, of breathless  
trees grown out of holes in the sidewalk, of  
the cold, bent body of startled thought fallen  
solitary, ass over teakettle, or lost in the  
whirl of this destiny or that one. do they spin  
inside themselves? like so many gods we are  
told are projections of our own violence? the  
hunched beauty covering that possibility. the  
bells of the day ring from room to room. the  
restless mind twists around corners, angles,  
over lighted floors, the moment beyond itself  
like the single day, April, 1767, Jefferson  
planted Carnations, Indian pink, Marygold, Globe  
amaranth, Auricula, Double balsam, Tricolor, Dutch  
violet, Sensitive plant, Cockscomb, a flower like  
the Prince's feather, Lathyrus, Lilac, Spanish  
broom, Umbrella, Laurel, Almonds, Muscle plumbs,  
Cayenne pepper, and 12. cuttings of Gooseberries.  
and the country was Argo, he said. a solitude  
conscious of itself a green bottle behind the  
fan *the giant confined in the body's prison*  
*rooms at will among the stars* far, in the  
*projection of infinite love in a finite room*

today, the winter shines winter-shine  
Blake said, 'When Thought is closed in Caves. Then  
love shall shew its root in deepest Hell.' out  
of perspective out of the picture not in the frame  
'I cannot,' he wrote, 'consider death as anything  
but a removing from one room to another.'

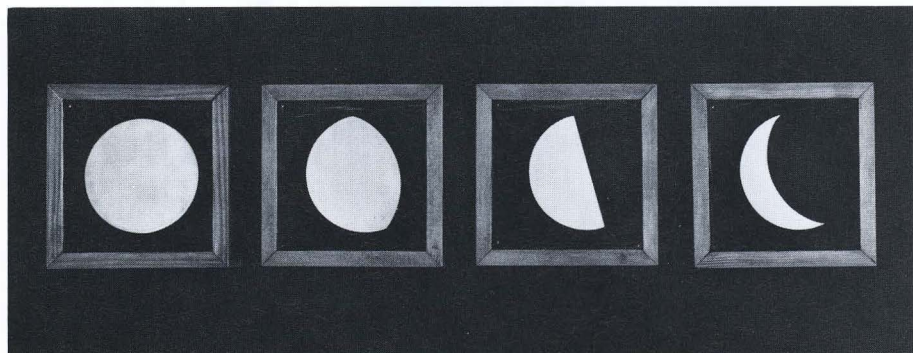
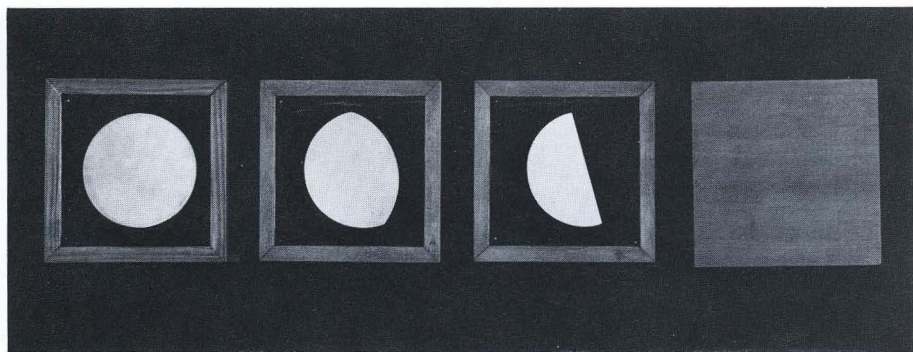
## THE TRUTH IS LAUGHTER

a footnote: *The Wolf Fenrir is fettered by the chain Gleipnir, made of six things: the noise of a cat's footstep; the beard of a woman; the roots of a rock; the sinews of a bear; the breath of a fish; the spittle of a bird. As a pledge that the trying-on of this fetter should not be a trap, the god Tyr laid his hand in the Wolf's mouth. Once bound, and the world, for a time, safe, the Wolf was not again released; but Tyr lost his hand.*

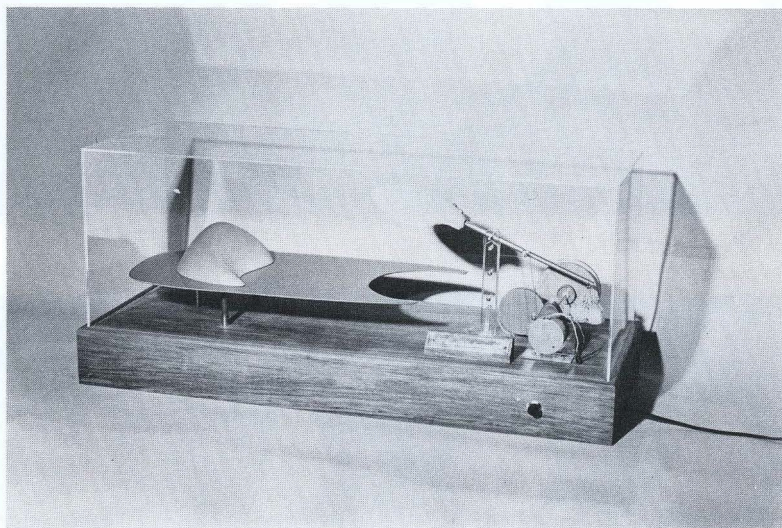
from Fowler







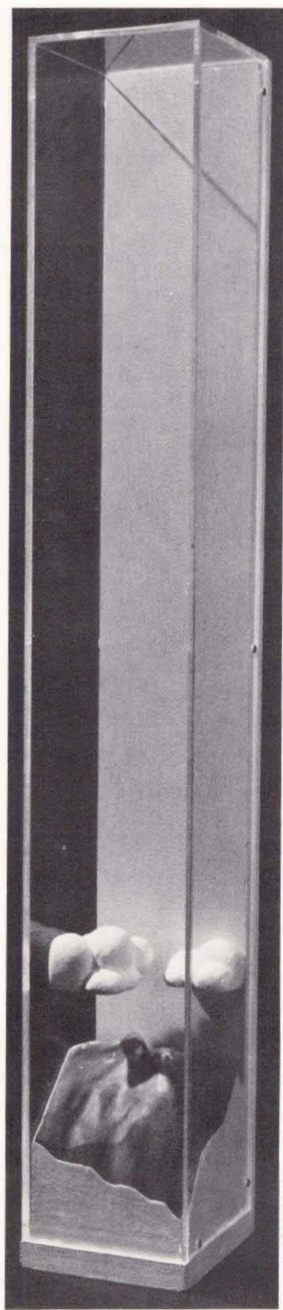
## Richard Prince / STATEMENT



*Richard Prince was interviewed at his home in Vancouver on July 8, 1980 by Lois Redman. The following statement has been abridged and rearranged for publication from that interview.*

Most of the things I did for the first three years had enclosures around them of one kind or another.<sup>1</sup> I'm still very interested in that idea, but for the last three or four years I haven't often been working with it. I've been doing all kinds of other things, although I'm still very aware of the power of putting enclosures around objects, thereby making them mysterious, powerful, altar-like and relic-like. It's the power of seeing things in cases: it removes them from your world.

Right now I'm more interested in working in a direct scale. I used to work in a small scale because it was easier for me to do that. If you want to keep someone away from a small-scale thing, you've got to get some kind of a barrier in there. I don't understand things very much through the tactile sense: I look at things more, and try to encourage the viewer of my works to look at them. I guess I was putting things in cases in order to promote the "looking" as opposed to the "feeling." I'm making things now which are on a larger scale and which, by their own nature and scale, tend to keep the viewer at a distance. That's just an accident of the production of the work.



In the early works the “story” was just excitement, just excitements about where you live, what you see, and how you relate to where you are. It’s a question of trying to locate oneself in that physical sense, and I think those early works are all about that:

“Where am I physically located?”

“What do I like about where I’m located?” or merely, “What do I see?”

I open my eyes and look around Vancouver and I was raised in and live in particular kinds of environments, so I’m just reflecting those influences. I don’t feel that landscape needed commenting upon except in the personal sense that I had to say something about it.

In the electronic pieces<sup>2</sup> I wasn’t using a technical language so much as a personal language. It may have been a touch obscure for some people when I was making electronic machines which would imply the landscape, but, to an electronics person, it would be an absolutely dead-simple apparatus. It was a question of how I could interpret them and get particular excitements out of them by making them in other kinds of concepts or exploring them in other ways.



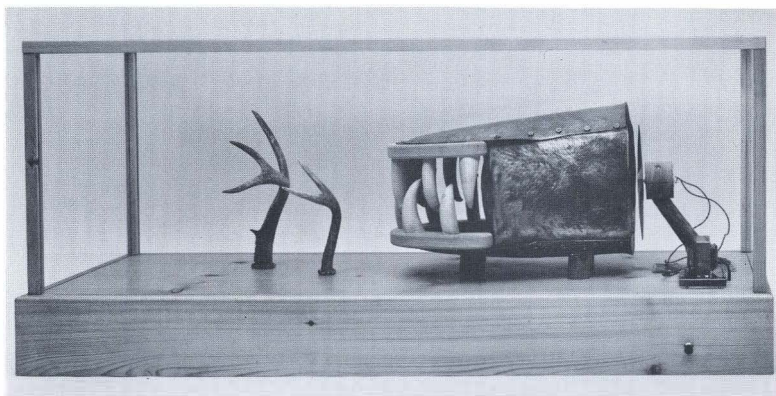


I did quite a number of wind machines. One, for a particular client, made a duplication inside his house of the wind that was outside.<sup>3</sup> The wind was a big excitement because it had an ephemeral and transient nature. Also, I was very interested in taking a grand event and reducing it, so that there was almost a ridiculous comparison between the immense event which is the wind and this small, almost “hokey” kind of presentation of it. In one sense, that, to me, was the magic of the transformation — taking a grand event, translating it to a small event and ending up with something which deepens a particular kind of power. It’s re-interpreted for the individual in new terms, and those terms are the terms of diminished things without the real thing having been diminished.

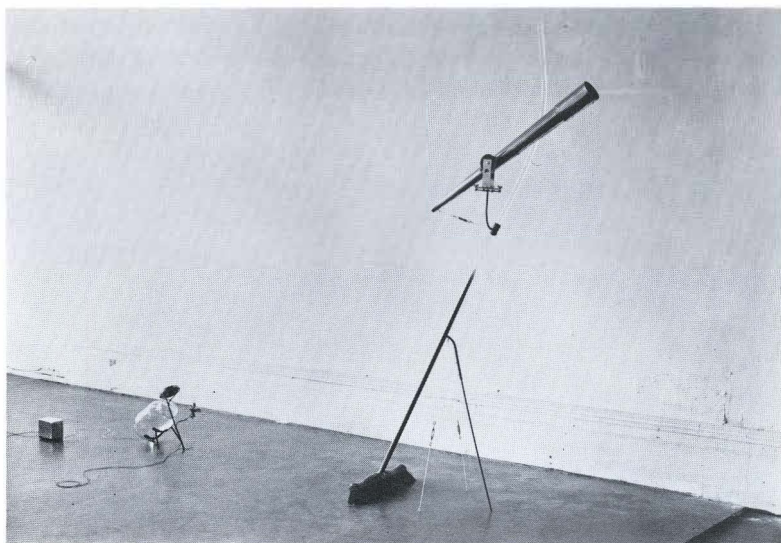


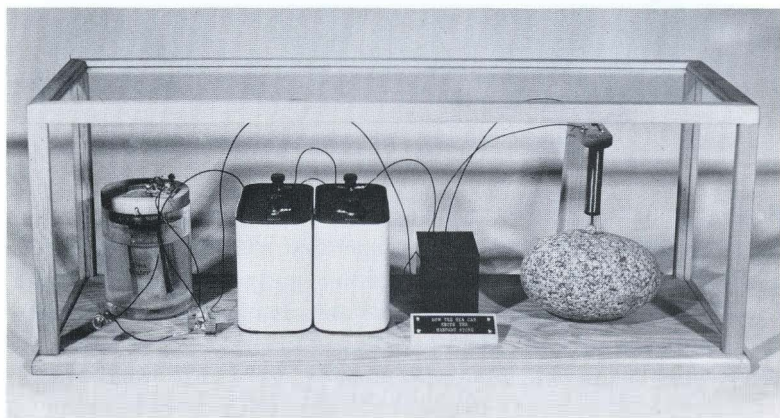
I think that what was often interpreted by others as whimsy was for me what I would like to think of as using things which didn't necessarily have a built-in problematic bias as a theme and not being interested in bringing to bear on them any kind of morose or dolorous sentiments. I don't necessarily have that kind of tragic point of view and I was interested in looking at things from the point of view that I saw things.

I can present objects in a particular configuration, but it's the viewer who actually brings them to life. I just present them in the sense that they *can* be brought to life. However, I'm sure that there are many viewers to whom you could show these and the works would have no life whatsoever because they either don't relate to the viewers' culture, or the way they have to live, or the way they think, or a number of other reasons. When I present an object to myself I can see it as having a certain life and metaphorical nature. "Metaphorical nature" is the way I would describe it because it does have to do with the implication of one thing becoming another, and that's how objects function, I think. Look at Gathie Falk presenting her teacups. She presents them in the sense that they become mystical. A very domestic object becomes cosmic by its removal from context, or its isolation, or by the fact that she's pointed her finger at it. I think that's what a sculptor does. A sculptor takes a particular material and puts it through some kind of transformation — whether it's just altering its space or context or whatever. If you want to take another case in point, look at someone like Bernini. He takes a lump of marble which everyone in Italy at that time would've known as a lump of stone from a particular mountain or nearby mountain, or may have been



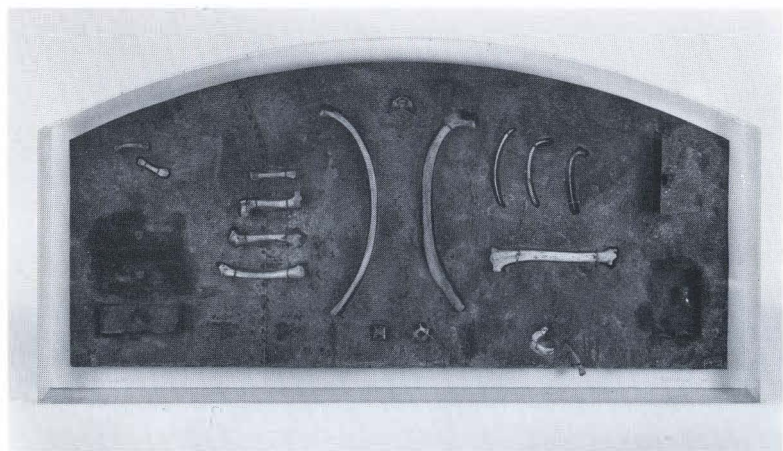
familiar with it as a building material and may or may not have been familiar with it being wrested out of the ground, and he transforms it into a living human being in a particular emotional state or being prepared for some kind of emotional conflict. It's the transformation of stone to simulacrum of something else that's really exciting. The metamorphosis there is profound. I present certain things, objects and materials, in a particular form so that they carry with them a certain power and story — a unified power and story — which is convincing, understandable and meaningful to the viewer.





In some cases, for example, in the later *Ancient Language* series, my titles directly refer to the fact that I'm talking in a larger sense about language and that the things look ancient. They just happen to push the direction of the piece a little farther and a little faster in that way. Other works, however, are much more obviously explanatory by the title. . . . I think *How the Sea Can Erode the Hardest Stone* is one. The title is directly descriptive of the function. If you didn't have the title, you probably couldn't understand the piece, or you would understand it in a different way. I want people to understand in a certain way.

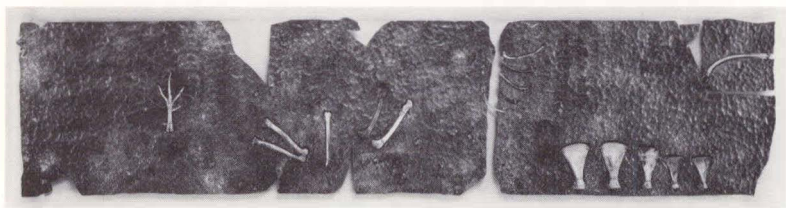
For some pieces the title has come first, say, for example, I'll be reading, or a particular phrase will pop to mind. Well, that happened the other week. I was watching a movie and one of the subtitles said, "Several years have passed." That's interesting, I'm sitting there, and all of a sudden several years have passed. All of a sudden, BANG, there was this set of words which implied something quite large and grand.



Beginning in 1976 or 1977, I did the *Ancient Language* series, a series of works that were on sheet copper that had been pounded with a hammer. I would take a perfect, pristine, gorgeous copper sheet and I would pound it to make it look older and anonymous, make it look like a more raw material. Next I would cut shapes into it in which bones could be inserted, hung with rawhide, and then I would treat the copper with chemicals to give it that greenish-yellowish-blueish tint that copper becomes when it's exposed to the elements. Last April [1979] I did *The Planets*, which was the last work in that series.

I think there are certain parallel relationships between the earlier enclosed works and the *Ancient Language* series, such as the interest in history and things being shifted or removed in terms of time and chronology, and the interest in the landscape, but, beyond those larger points of which I was constantly aware, I don't think there's any kind of hidden relationship between the early landscape-oriented works and the landscape-process works and the copper and bone pieces, which have a tremendously archaeological and anthropological flavour. There was certainly a progression, but it wasn't conscious, and, at the same time, it wasn't unconscious. It's just something that happened as I began to get more excited about certain ideas and could replace one idea with another. I think that one thing which is constant through those changes has been the fact that they're interested in the nature of materials in themselves. I'm very conscious of the choices of materials I make.

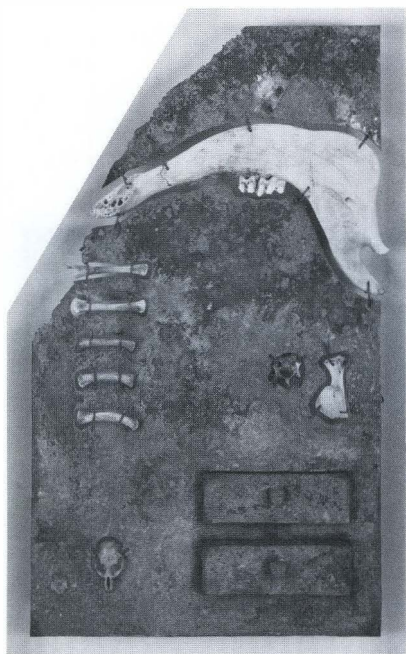




I think I was interested in implying principles and patterns and bits of language — not in any kind of linguistic way, but looking at the nature of language in terms of the way one can classify things, or analyze things, or point out differences and make numerical kinds of inferences and so on. I was just using bones as the vehicle for doing that. I think there's a larger language of objects such that each of the things we look at has a certain implication of history and context. Each thing can have whatever kind of story one wishes it to have, depending on the object and the individual examining it. I use objects which, to me, have associative power and I hope they have associative power to other people.

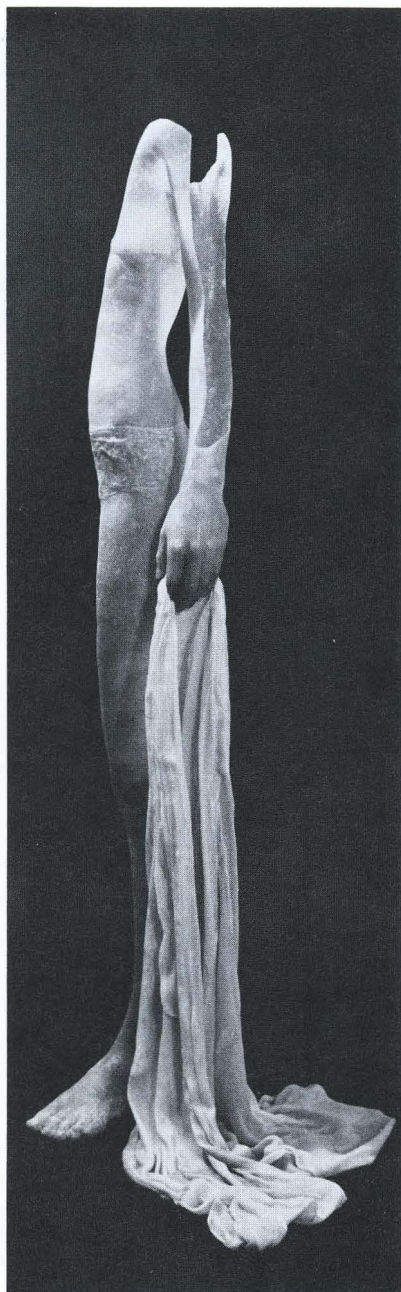
I present an object and that can be the touchstone for a tremendous number of expansions and developments of ideas using that object in context with another one, and what that can imply in the realm of meaning, all the sets of meanings and the intersection of those sets of meanings, and so on. That's where the excitement comes in art: you can present one thing and get so many more things out of it. It doesn't stop at any point. Although I was using bones as a non-living thing, the fact is that virtually everything has some kind of a history brought with it — bones are a little more exciting because we always keep thinking of our own deaths, whereas, say, a spoon might not at first seem quite as interesting.





The concept of history in the *Ancient Language* series is very complex because it has to do with history directly and history indirectly. I was making obvious “museum pieces” — things that looked as though you could find them in a museum — yet, at the same time, I was very conscious of the fact that I was doing it in an art context, which is different from the historical, museum context. I was playing a game with that — you know, the point at which one actually sits to look at objects is the historical point of view one takes on things. I wasn’t making a piece from just one chronological framework, but kept shifting the frameworks. I could see myself

as the person actually making something like that, and was aware of the techniques which might have been used at that time. Nevertheless, I also realized that I’m a person living in the twentieth century who can buy sheets of copper which were mined in B.C., and probably processed somewhere in eastern Canada, perhaps, or the States, and sold by a Swedish firm. There are all those kinds of global inter-relationships which occur the minute you buy a sheet of copper. I can sit in my basement in middle-class Vancouver and cut the copper with tinsnips, and I’m quite aware of the fact that there was an historical chronology applied to the thing which was different than what the pieces directly suggest. They suggest someone who’s trying to retreat himself into the past, and that’s not it at all. It was just that I wanted to make my own museum.



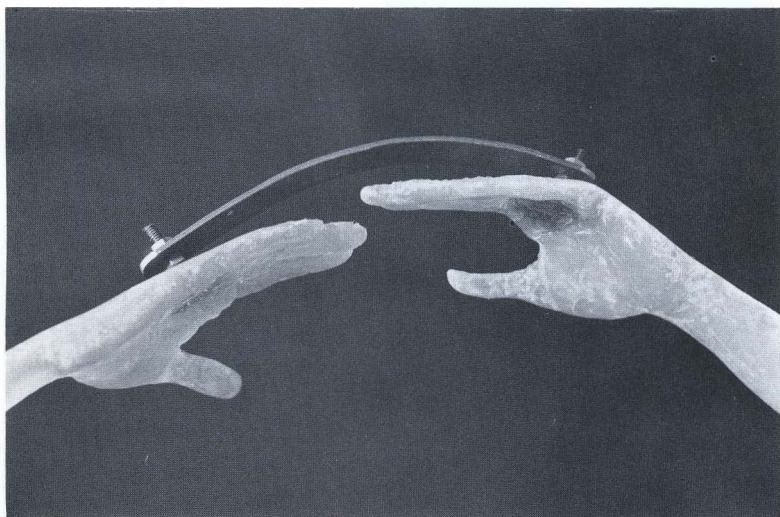
*Structural Analysis with the Figure* was the first title of the Burnaby Art Gallery show,<sup>4</sup> but I shortened it to *Figure Structures* because it was so much easier and I suddenly realized that what I was doing was making sculptures in fibreglass which had allusions to architectural references but really didn't analyze the architecture, and I don't think they really analyzed the figure — certainly in no anatomical way. I was presenting the surfaces of figures because I was excited by the shapes and surfaces I could get and the implications of structure that they brought with them.

I think those figure structure works were very different from the works I'd done previously.

They were fully constructed out of raw materials as opposed to using found materials, and they didn't look like my early works, or the works I'd done previously — the copper works and so on — and they were, to

some extent, a kind of self-imposed formal exercise. In another sense, they were just a response to making something which I had an opportunity to make in a particular context,<sup>5</sup>

and which I continued to make and develop because I got interested in them. I'm still very interested in them.

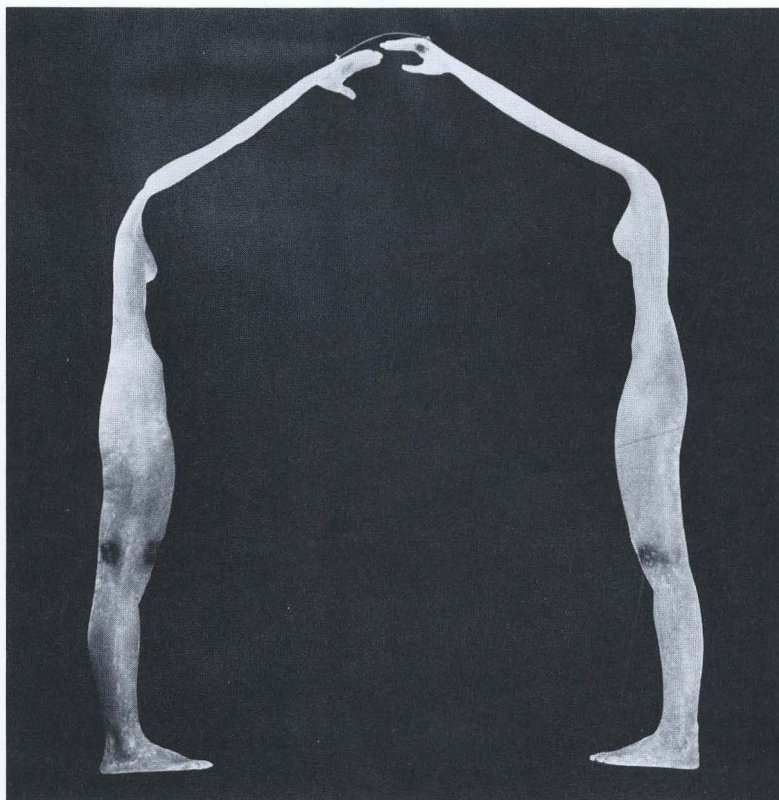


I would pose the models in a way that would seem to refer to an architectural form without necessarily depending on the actual physical principles of some of those structures. For example, when I did the *Mother and Daughter Arch*, a true arch would have demanded real compression of structure through the entire length of the arm. Now, there obviously was a certain amount, but, at the same time, there wasn't. I'm not really making an arch; I'm implying an arch and talking about arches in a more remote sense. The look of things — I'm interested in the look of things, and what they might mean.

I think the descriptions of them as being “shells”<sup>6</sup> and “husks”<sup>7</sup> are very appropriate. To me those words always imply that their substance has left the objects and, in one sense, the physical substance had left the objects that I made. I would have a particular individual stand in a place and I would make a shell from her, then she would leave and I would be able to work with that shell. I was making just the shells, but I was hoping that they would imply the rest of the form as well.

They were allusions — that one form can look somewhat like another. There are certain things that we all forget about. If you do any studying or reading in physics you realize that those obscure rules you learn have real application to your daily life, for example, the fact that your legs really do function like columns. There are a lot of





those similarities between things we look at as being pure structural form and “out there” that actually do have a relationship to our own selves. There is a relationship and it’s absolutely direct. I think that’s, in one sense, the way the figure structures came into play. I just happened to choose particularly obvious architectural references which everyone in Art History has to learn about. For example, “Palladian” comes directly out of Palladio.

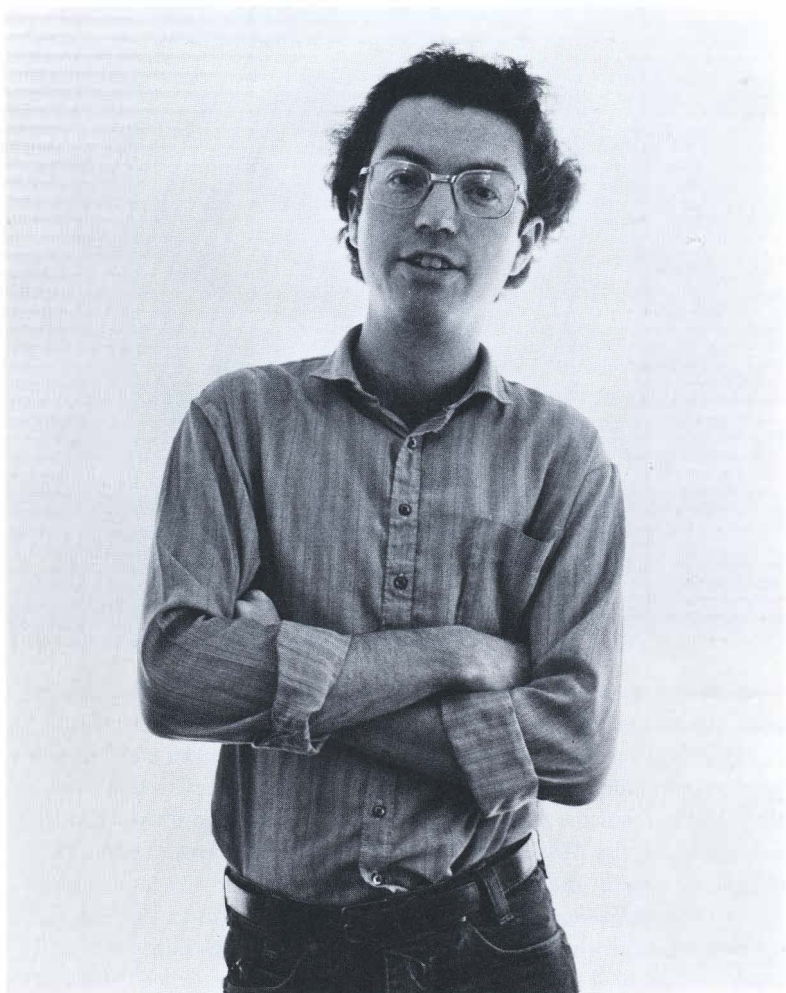






I was very interested in that sense of similarity and difference. An arch, no matter how perfectly you make it, cannot be a true mirror image unless you're a wondrous builder. There has to be a difference between one side and the other. At the same time, they're the same in that they're from the same artisan's hand, or the same drawing, or whatever. So, the *Mother and Daughter Arch* was just an expansion of that concept in the wonderful opportunity which was presented to me in the mother and daughter models. I then began to look for opportunities in which that similarity and difference could be expressed again. I made the Palladian window piece called *The Twins — A Palladian Window*, in which there was even a more direct relationship than in the final piece in that series called *The Sisters*,<sup>8</sup> which utilized two sisters as its basis.

*The Sisters* does have the faces completing the figures in order to give the sculpture an appropriate visual balance. The other pieces somehow didn't seem to need faces. For example, in *The Twins* I'm not interested in depicting the psychology or the attitudes of two twins as might be expressed through their faces. I was really interested in just the minimum description of form that I would need to imply the window and to imply the twins: nothing more than that.



“Translating,” “transforming,” “re-making,” “reproducing,” or “selecting” — all these words are appropriate to what I do. The things that first excited me to make things still excite me. I find myself continually reworking the same themes in new ways, new materials, and new statements. I think if I could make some kind of statement at this point about what I feel I’m interested in, it would be “depicting what I see or what I think I would like to see” — things that seem real to me. They are always things “out there.” I’m not basically an inwardly-directed person. I’m reinterpreting, through

a personal bias, things that are actually visible in the real world or were at one time visible.

I'm doing a series of works right now that are based on the idea of the northern lights. Actually, I've never seen the northern lights. Other people have, and they've told me about them and I read about them, and so one, so I know they're there. They seem, at this point, a wonderful symbol to use and to make real for me. The fact that I haven't seen the northern lights doesn't mean that I can't make them. They just seem to be a wonderful phenomenon. I'm not trying to make a scientific representation of it or to analyze it in any technical way. I'm interested in the notion of phenomena and the "awesome-ness of awe" — stepping beyond the thing itself and going directly to the excitement. I'm using a physical phenomenon as a touchstone to responses which have to do with the relationship between the way a person sees and the way he or she thinks.





## Richard Prince / IMAGES

*The Moon Boxes*, (image is repeated), 1970, wood, aluminum and cloth, 7.6 x 14 x 14 cm. Collection: Kathy Prince.

*A Breeze on the Southern Isle*, 1976, mixed media, 33.1 x 74.3 x 30.5 cm. Collection of the artist.

*The Lions*, 1972, plastic, wood and paint, 45.7 x 7.6 x 8.9 cm. Private collection, Vancouver.

*Wind Machine*, 1975, two-unit piece — inside and outside (inside pictured), inside unit dimensions, 50.8 x 55.9 x 50.8 cm. Collection: Ian Davidson.

*Coastal Landscape — In the Teeth of the Gale*, 1976, driftwood, wood, copper, whale's teeth, electrical devices, deer antler, 53.3 x 121.9 x 44.5 cm. Collection of the artist.

*Star Trap with Lure, Camouflage Version*, 1978, mixed media, broom height is 213.4 cm. Courtesy: The Equinox Gallery.

*How the Sea can Erode the Hardest Stone*, 1973, mixed media, 27.9 x 76.2 x 25.4 cm. Collection: The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

*Ancient Language No. IV*, 1978, copper, bone, rawhide, etc., 83.8 x 162.6 x 12.7 cm. Private collection, Vancouver.

*Ancient Language Scroll No. I*, 1978, copper, bone, rawhide, wood, lead, glass bottle, plastic, 61 x 231.1 x 12.7 cm. Private collection. Calgary.

*Ancient Language — Fragment No. V*, 1978, copper, bone, lead, rawhide, plastic and wood case, 91.4 x 55.9 x 10.2 cm.

*Standing Grecian Figure — Two Columns*, 1979, fibreglass with cloth, life-size. Private collection, Vancouver.

*Mother and Daughter Arch*, detail.

*Mother and Daughter Arch*, 1979, fibreglass, steel, life-size. Private collection, Burnaby.

Installation view, Burnaby Art Gallery, September-October, 1979.

*The Twins — A Palladian Window*, 1979, fibreglass, steel, life-size.

Portrait of Richard Prince, Nathan Hohn, October 1980.

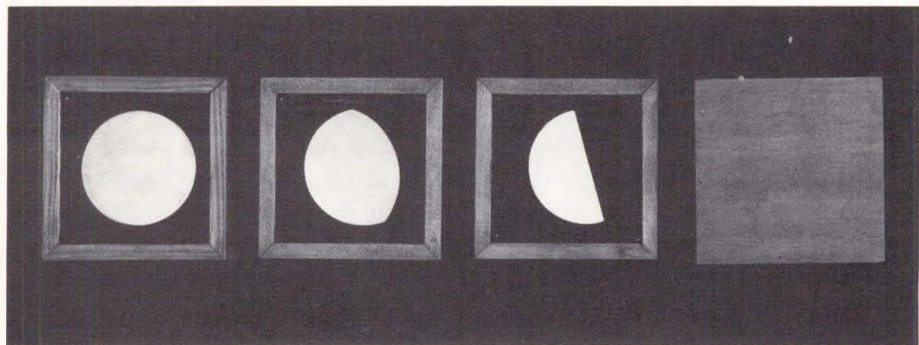
*Casting the Constellations, No. 1*, 1980, fibreglass, metal and electrical devices, life size. This work is part of a recent series.

Photography: With thanks to Robert Keziere and Jim Gorman of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Nathan Hohn, Tod Greenaway and Richard Prince.



## NOTES:

- <sup>1</sup> Prince is referring to the years 1971 to 1974. Some of the "enclosures" he has used have been wooden boxes, plexiglass cases, jars and drawers. Prince's first major exhibition was a two-man show, with Dean Ellis, entitled *New Directions* at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1972.
- <sup>2</sup> Some examples of Prince's earlier electrical pieces are pictured. In *A Breeze on the Southern Isle*, a gear motor running on house current operates the arm to which the seashell is attached, causing a fanning motion. *Coastal Landscape — In the Teeth of the Gale* also uses electricity in the operation of its fan. The *Wind Machine* is an example of an electronic piece.
- <sup>3</sup> The *Wind Machine* operates from an anemometer on the roof which generates a current which Prince has amplified to drive another motor inside the house. The wind vane on the exterior component of the sculpture points direction and rotates a matched slave system which enables it to duplicate the wind's motion on the interior unit.
- <sup>4</sup> *Figure Structures*, Richard Prince exhibition, The Burnaby Art Gallery, Burnaby, B.C., September 19 - October 21, 1979.
- <sup>5</sup> Prince, in the Burnaby Art Gallery catalogue, states that the series arose out of a class discussion and began as a demonstration of a sculptural technique.
- <sup>6</sup> Art Perry, "Prince grows away from puns," the *Province*, September 20, 1979, p. C1.
- <sup>7</sup> Andrew Scott, "It's a fantastic show and a joy to the eye," *Vancouver Sun*, September 21, 1979, p. C19.
- <sup>8</sup> *The Sisters*, 1979, fibreglass, steel and wood, life-size, is shown in the upper left of the gallery installation reproduction. Also shown are *Standing Grecian Figure — Two Columns*, upper right, and the large circular work, *Egyptian Arches*, 1979, fibreglass, steel, wood, life-size, foreground.



## Robert G. Sherrin / statement (excerpts), & THREE STORIES

13 May 1980 NYC

I'm here in room 1238 of the West Side Y, Central Park barely visible between two walls, flies on my ceiling, a TV showing hockey over my head.

It seems that I take forever with things, my work particularly. I seem to be concerned more with ideas than I am with writing; I come from a background that trained me well to think but not to act, not to shape ideas into anything more substantial than fantasy. I wrote my first pieces when I was about 12 and they were fanciful, fruitless things. They were to be historical but were sheer speculation. I maintained Hawaii was 15,000 miles from Toronto. I've since learned that nothing is 15,000 miles from anywhere.

So. I've always dealt with ideas. Writing came to me because I was told to convey information. It was easy. I wrote when I wanted to, which was not often. It seemed like bullshit. Motorcycles & sports & finding girls were more important. I'm still not convinced that writing is what I want to do.

Yet the irony is that I think continually about it. I've been condemned because of my distance, the way I easily — and almost vindictively — dissassociate from others. I live between my ears and often refuse to share — or shape — that reality for anyone else.

14 May 80 NYC

I look around me. NYC stinks. Literally, it is a city with garbage bags like strand after strand of smelly pearls round its neck. People go fast. People bitch. The place looks terrible, the contrasts are horrific. In one sense I can applaud this diversity, this perversity and the acceptance of it. But to write about it requires that I go with whatever remains of NYC after the process of distillation: the cop with an axe handle swinging from his hip, the old woman with skinned knee on the Circle Line Ferry, the kids screaming to climb into the fist of the Statue of Liberty where the temperature was 120° F.

I write what I recall and what I recall best are the things that stick with me, shape me, *because* they remain. I remember the near crash on the road in Germany and I combine that with the death of a friend on a motorcycle. I don't expunge or commemorate. Or idolize. I merely set into perspective, so I (and possibly the reader) can investigate occurrences for any insight we might find.

Life isn't a mystery. Life is simply life. Why we think about it, analyse it, demand so much from it: that, to me, is the mystery.

The "boat" stories are dark, only because it was a dark time for me. I think back on it with a little satisfaction. It wasn't pleasant. It was constructive. It remains clear in my mind because it was *so different* than the rest of my life. It threw my "normal" life into relief and made it nearly impossible for me to reintegrate myself into Vancouver/UBC society after 5 mos. on the ship.

What intrigues me about my "ship" experiences is what intrigues me about many things: irony. That is what these stories deal with, the contrast between me and others, even those I love; the distance, the reluctance to close it. I relate it in images because images are what I know best and images *are* our common metaphor, but it is *irony* that pulls me to write about a time in my life when I wasn't happy.

I hated it but I loved it.

I'd do it again.

15 May 80 NYC

The risk I encounter in my work now is me. It's a question of honesty — a dare to myself. How much do I want to know about myself, about my various self-identities, the way I act them out, repress them, avoid some, indulge others? The risks are purely personal. In some countries, of course, the risk is political and it can be so here. Look at bill bissett. But that is small, cold shit compared to the incarceration of writers & artists in the East. I think the risks are in revealing one's thoughts, one's dirty little autobiographies, one's fantasies, sexual, political, emotional. You name it. The reason for this is at least two-fold. We live in a decadent society. Benevolently so. It is a society that permits (i.e. condones) the sale of babies, the enforced poverty of millions, the gross accumulation of wealth, the sale of anything that is profitable. It also permits one to do pretty much as one pleases. It's a rot that's conducive to the arts, in spite of the anal retentiveness of our federal and provincial governments.

Also, we are a society that feeds on gossip. When an artist or writer uses his own life (inner or outer) as a means of revealing our world, it not only provides a sense of gossip but also a sense of accuracy, two elements that are often mutually exclusive. When they're combined the result can be unnerving. I think of *The Immoralist*; I think of H. Miller, Edna O'Brien, *Latakia* by Thomas. All use a personal ground to run society's electricity through. It can please as much as it can terrify.

I translate, or impose, the activity of photography over my writing. It's making the picture I enjoy. I envision things whole. Even book-length fictions are mentally held before & during work. I make no notes, do no checks on the mechanism, the structure, the vehicle. This is not to say my work is instinctive or intuitive. To a degree it must be or I wouldn't do it, but also, it must involve a knowledge or a sense of it and the desire to investigate. I begin, it seems, with the whole and break it into parts as I build it (physically, conceptually) yet in some ways (instinctively and perceptually) I'm someone fascinated with machinery, someone who searches out engines so I see how they work. Oddly enough, they all work in a similar fashion, but the fused piston rings in one may well provide an insight into the strengths or weaknesses of another.

I use syntax as a barometer of sorts, a test, an indication of what I'm doing. I use my ears a lot. I write then I read aloud. Then I write then I read aloud. If I read a book silently I may appreciate its symmetry. If I begin reading it aloud, I know I've discovered something worth having.

I think writers who work 4-8 hours a day are idiots. Or menaces. Or geniuses. Or in love with process. I don't see my work as romantic, nor the temptation to find out whether I have the moxie to do it relentlessly. I equate that too readily with tasks I find despicable. Yet I think about my work constantly. In that sense, I always work.



## NORTH BY NORTH BY NORTH

Vukovich threatened me last night. I'd been in the hold. He'd been in the can showering terrified again by the great distance between his birthplace and where he is now. I don't think he was used to being constantly in motion scared of water scared of lifeboats scared of men living in close quarters. His bunk like a berth on a train all dark and shrouded with old bedspreads canopied like the beds of kings shut tight like the dwelling places of peasants.

Vukovich has a bread knife. It was sharp when he stole it from the pantry sharper now that he went ashore yesterday and bought a stone and oil and a big bottle of vodka. He liked me to walk with him through the old parts of Ketchikan on the elevated boardwalks past the shacks that we tell him are the places where whores gather at night.

We don't really know we tie up at 1600 and cast off at 1800 never seen darkness there.

Vukovich touched my shoulder when we walked kept watch was taller than me. You wouldn't like him.

He had a hairy chest tufts on his back smelled like mutton even when damp after a shower I'd notice the scent of wool. He used to talk about priests then he talked about fucking and killing.

He kept his knife in his bunk slept on his back one hand on his thigh the other above his head, draped over a cord always near the knife that lay like a snake on the roof of his bunk.

Vukovich sleeps  
when he sleeps at all  
right below me.

He knows you.

He talks about you asks about you wants to hear what you smell like feel like taste like. His is the curiosity of a child. It comes out in quiet bursts in the Cooks' Mess when we huddle over our plates before the last sitting or in the room after breakfast when I lie on the deck and slip my feet under a barbell and begin my situps

two hundred and fifty

I start to count

Vukovich starts to ask starts to query starts to talk

I go: one two three

He goes: she must have soft feet she must taste of salt between her breasts she must smell like parfait. He laughs soft slow soft slow soft thudding of breath.

I count. I go up and down and up and down and I say yes to everything he says then I feel my sweat come out and my hot back hit the cool deck and my hot back hit the cool deck and my hot back hit the cool

where it sounds like fire and the white is like snow and gives like a drift and I fall away and all our little senses are tuned to distant transmitters where our skins are maps where our skins are little rivers and little valleys cooling where our skins are suddenly inside us and no more talk no more motion just the cradle of our rocking and more talk just the breathing preludes and no more thought just the persistence of it like slipping into the small lakes above Skagway so hot so cold they pull you in and cool you off and take you away and we talk no more. We lie in our cool crackling like stilled engines.

And now again my wet back on the cool deck

and Vukovich's feet dangling over his bed the peach in his mouth and fingers wiping his lips and his chest dark with hair and his slippers busted open at the sides, hanging off his toes like gaffed fish coming over the side

and Vukovich with his knife beside him

saying you must be a good one

saying you must practise a lot

Vukovich who waits for me on sailing nights and waits for me to change so he can see the marks on my back and if we're alone and if we're alone

like we always are   like you and I always are in your satin sheets  
or you father's leather couch   or your mile wide wall to wall. All  
limbs interlocked because we have only a few hours   and then it's  
another 8 days   and I never know if you'll be there. Sometimes  
after I return to the ship and you return to your father's house   I  
tremble and for a huge stalled moment dream of Jayne Mansfield  
and the blonde hair bouncing and those breasts still desperately  
jiggling and the wreck slewing away and her eyes not seeing and her  
head so soft and so blonde and so undoubtedly dead   and that  
makes me see you in the Healey rounding the curves   or missing a  
shift   or hitting a wall   or being with someone else who wants you  
to drive him home afterwards

and then we're back on the floor and then I'm back on the ship  
and then Vukovich watches me change   and waits until my shirt  
comes off when he comes to look at my back

and if we're alone he traces the red with his finger and I know he  
is thinking of knives

and I know this as my wet back hits the cool deck  
one last time

and I say 250

and Vukovich's foot bounces as he dangles his leg from his bunk.

Last night I was in the hold. Vukovich was in the shower. He  
stands with his back to the curtain   stands in his old leather slippers  
and they turn mushy in the water   but he is suspicious of places  
where men gather in groups. He is scared of disease. He doesn't sit on  
the toilet seats   he sits on his hands and shits between them. He  
always covers himself   but he looks at others   he watches for  
it   wants to know

what?

wants to know if they look the same   work the same and want the  
same.

Some of us want release

some of us want satisfaction

Vukovich wants out.

So he stays away from most of us is suspicious of men in naked groups afraid of men who touch themselves with their towels and show themselves to each other and talk about it and joke about it and want it all the time and would probably put it in one another just to find

that release

that sad satisfaction

that getting out of oneself that all of us want.

But Vukovich won't talk about it. He speculates as he showers and he showers alone with his back to the curtain and we all shower alone but sometimes there are others in the room or in another stall and the water beats us up and makes us hot and some of us

who are like me

cover our ears and lean into the sound of aircraft and pretend we are not in a shower stall on a passenger steamer always going north.

Some of us

who are like me

weave back and forth in the water that pounds down and we listen for that total silence that means we are truly alone in the company of others and our backs are to the curtain and we move into and out of into and out of the beating of water

and we know who we are

and why we want no one to know

we are just like those who are like me.

So last night Vukovich was in the shower with his knife and he was moving behind the curtain and I was below him in the hold way way down in the V of the ship and I stretched myself on a slanted board and I lay there in my shorts and I took three deep breaths and began to sit up and lie down sit up and lie down sit up and lie down. And Udo worked the weights and he grunted and his pecs puffed out and fell back puffed out and fell back and he said a name every time he moved the weight and he grunted. And eventually he stopped because he couldn't lift the weight anymore and he was wet and his shorts stuck to him. So he lay on the deck and counted for me as I went up and down and thought of

how you put your thumb into the waistband of your Cigarette jeans or your Fiorucci jeans or your D. Hechter's or how you some-



times slide your hands into the front of them with just your thumbs showing and move back and forth on your heels and accuse me of being suspicious accuse me of being possessive accuse me of being intolerable.

And Udo counted and rolled to his side and his gut went in and out as he closed his eyes and counted. His breath was soft and he rocked

back and forth on your heels until I start to imitate you and you start to smile and we both get into your car and drive to your father's house.

He has money so you have money and you do what people are supposed to do with money. You buy things and you use them and then you throw them away. People with money buy things and people without money sell things and people with nothing get bought and sold.

We went to your father's place because he has money and therefore he has all these things: the lean steak in the walk-in cooler and the Jamaican woman who minces it the heavy plates she puts it on and the silver forks we use to lift it to our mouths and the crystal that holds the wine and the speakers that release Steve Reich and the big rooms that are always empty because luxury means having a lot of waste. And your father has a lot of waste and we used it. We rolled in his empty rooms and we went to your room and we danced in the mirrors and we played over and under your satin sheets. They look like water in the sunlight. They sound like fire when we move.

Water sounds like silk pulled over rough wood.

And last night my back was wet and the slanted board was coarse and it soaked me up and Udo counted and counted until he said 180 and I stopped and I was too weak to talk but he reached up and pulled me down and we lay on the cool deck saying nothing. And he was dry but I was wet and water moved all around us. And after a time I got up and he was still naming names then said he needed a shower and I did too so we marked our numbers on the chart and climbed the ladder out of the hold.

I was making for the can. I had a towel round my waist. Udo was in his cabin looking at a skin mag with Moon and they nodded to me and called me over and showed me: a blonde woman with big breasts on a couch with a pig. And she looked like she was having an enema but she wasn't and she looked bored and the pig looked bored and the men in the room who looked at Moon's books were quiet. No one said a word. No one was excited. They all looked disappointed. I closed the mag it was called BIZARRE and I gave it back. I wanted a shower. I wanted to be clean.

Udo spoke to Moon

he said it was sick

Moon nodded. It was. He'd been aboard eleven years almost half a million miles always going north.

Udo was coming right after me.

I was in the can. It was quiet. I took off my towel. I looked at my body. It was stained with sweat. I pulled my skin. It was tight. I tapped it. It sounded like a drum. Then I stretched and felt dizzy for a moment but I looked down at my feet in their plastic thongs and I felt better. Then I moved forward and yanked at the curtain and was going to step into the shower when I saw Vukovich. He wheeled. The water wasn't running. There was no sound. There was just the light and the darkness of Vukovich turning and he was still turning and his body twisted and he was stiff with himself. His one hand moved to cover it or pull it down and the other snaked out and whipped back and I stood there seeing but not knowing seeing but not seeing

and then the knife was coming and it flashed loudly. It screamed silver and then there it was moving at my face and I was seeing it but not knowing it and I was hearing Vukovich's voice cutting at me and I was hearing the can door being pushed open and I was pulling back and smelling the fever of the knife as it went near to my face and then it went away from me. But its voice and its smell stayed behind. Then Udo was yanking me away and reaching for Vukovich but Vukovich was screaming and spelling things with his knife

I kill you

he was spelling it out for me: I K I L L Y O U

he was talking to me

I KILL ALL OF YOU

He'll always be talking to me

And then he was in his towel and he was gone and I was sitting on the floor and I was sick to my stomach. Udo removed his towel and cleaned me off stood me in a shower and talked to me from the other side of the curtain.

And the water beat me. And I saw you in the stall in your father's bathroom and you are under the silver water and it hits you and hits you and hits you and hits you until you step out and someone hands you a towel

and someone will always hand you a towel: part of the difference between us.

And I felt the water hit me and I leaned into it and I know you lean into yours and you are alone in your father's house except for the one who hands you a towel and wipes you off and powders your skin and touches you more than I do

and serves you better than I do

and loves you like nobody else

because she really belongs to you since your father told her so.

My father told me to bend my knees when I lift and not always do what others tell me to.

Your father tells others to do exactly what you ask of them.

So I lean into my father's wishes

and you lean into yours.

And I'm under the water knowing Vukovich wants to kill me because I saw him stiff with himself

and I'm under the water that beats me and you're under the water that's being towelled from your body

and you're thinking of yourself

and I'm thinking I'm under water and always heading north with Vukovich in the bunk under mine.

And now today and last night still threatens but after I showered and after Udo told me he'd watch out for me, I dressed and went to the galley to eat eggs and talk to Vukovich but he wasn't there.

So I ate eggs.

I did them for 3 minutes in boiling water  
and lopped their tops off with a spoon  
and dipped toast into them

left 3 empty shells on the table in the Cooks' Mess.

I went to the fantail but Vukovich wasn't there went to the hot-box but Vukovich wasn't there went to the wops' room but no Vukovich went back to Moon nothing. Udo told me to sleep in a different bunk Moon told me to drink 151 overproof a saloonsman gave me four lines of coke.

Went back to my room. No Vukovich.

I breathed it in and out all night.

no Vukovich no Vukovich no Vukovich no Vukovich.

I dreamed of you while the Night Saloonsman Silvoed the tableware and placed fresh linen on the deuces. I dreamed of you in your father's house telling Marianne that I was not staying for dinner but that I was staying for lunch and that she could have the afternoon off or she'd have to stay on the main floor

Whichever you prefer Marianne

I dreamed you loved me as the Night Saloonsman grilled steaks for himself and his two juniors. I dreamed you waited for me and read books for me and wrote letters for me while the Night Saloonsman talked religion with the night baker and ate his steak rare with lots of onion and HP and piece of pie right from the baker's oven. I dreamed you shorter than you are with hair longer than it is. I dreamed you in your Healey waiting to drive me south at season's end. I dreamed you dreaming me back to you. I dreamed you showered while the Night Saloonsman took the call from Moon and donned his white tunic and buttoned up the brass buttons and went to the galley to prepare 2 tea, toast and marmalade for the bridge. I dreamed you drove too fast while the saloonsman vacuumed and I dreamed the Healey going over and I dreamed me looking at myself on the roadway looking up at a cop and I appeared drunk because my hand was reaching up swaying like a bullrush but half my face was in blood and the cop couldn't answer the cop wouldn't answer and I couldn't ask him and I felt the wet and I lay back on the cool pavement under the flashing lights after midnight



at the corner of Broadway and Macdonald. I dreamed the answer to my question but you didn't. I dreamed the cop and the lights and the wet and the cool as the Night Saloonsman finished up and rang the engineers to go on watch. I dreamed you over and over until the Night Saloonsman came in and rocked me on the shoulder.

0600 he said to me in his soft voice.

And I dreamed you away and rolled over and got up and donned my stripes and saw that Vukovich wasn't there.

I felt tired as if I'd dreamed my sleep away. I pulled on my shoes and headed for the can. The Night Saloonsman was ahead of me.

He was already in the can. He was already in the can and he was turning to me and his eyes were wide. His eyes were wide as mouths. His hands were pulling at the collar of his tunic and his ankles were awash in water and he was moving his feet up and down like a bewildered child trapped in a puddle of mud.

And the water sounded like eggs frying

and the water was the colour of the roses on your satin sheets and for a moment I saw you in bed and then I saw the Night Saloonsman turn to look again and turn to look again and turn to look again and turn to look at me

and he was gagging into his hands

and his voice was like air pulling on an edge of steel. It said nothing but it told all one has to know.

So I stepped into the rosewater and saw you stepping from your shower and the footprint on the brown shag and I heard my feet hit the water and heard someone pushing on the can door behind me. So I touched the Night Saloonsman and nudged him to one side and looked.

There was Vukovich his back to the curtain and the water beating him and his buttocks plugging the drain and the water lapping over his legs to carry the rose colour out of the stall.

And there was Vukovich with the curtain pinned by his shoulders and his face turned up to take the hits of water and the rose colour all over him.

And there he was with his mouth open and his teeth showing.

And there he was with his throat cut and open like a mouth under his mouth. Like the distended gills of a fish coming over the side still in water but no longer something that swims.

So they put him on ice in the hold and no one lifted weights for the rest of the cruise and they took the knife out of his hand and gave it to the cops who came for him when we docked again in Vancouver.

To the cops who looked down at him and said nothing.

And you waited a long time for me while I talked to the cops who asked me things I couldn't answer who made me hot who made me sweat through my shirt and made me sit there on the cold steel chair.

And I thought of you and the marks you'd leave on me that no one would see when I returned to the ship that night.

## INSIDE PASSAGE

I'm lying on my bunk curtains pulled canopy close light like those in chest freezers. My spot quiet and clean and insular. I still roll side to side with the swell.

Crazy Al sings in the doorway. The Russians already doing arias in the hold. There's a garbage can full of beer on the floor the tappets clink as we push through Seymour Narrows. Below me are the boilers slow mad soft hammers beating.

Heading home.

Crazy Al listens to no music on his headphones. The wire goes under his shirt and out his fly his hips go back and forth. Joe lives in the bunk below wants to kill the midnight gobbler.

I need to go home.

There were 168 days in this season 1008 servings breakfast lunch dinner. There were 8 days in my week 4 men in my crew a Hobart we fed and cleaned. Slop buckets lots of them.

Never told you about that.

You thought I did something dangerous. You thought I scaled rope ladders or wrestled with machinery worked a dirty sweat in crawl spaces the shafts turning gears grabbing at me screws going round and round out there.

You thought I was a sailor

not head dish washer.

Remember the first day?

I told you I worked the Inside Passage. You liked the sound of that. Said you'd meet me again next week wait at the pier's foot wave when we tied up wave when we cast off rock and roll in between.

It was good when it was good then it was no good at all.

I washed dishes 60 people to a sitting 6 sittings a day one dinner plate one side plate one desert plate one ice cream chalice one coffee cup one bread platter for each passenger for each sitting. And the crew didn't eat off paper.

I fire up the Hobart  
scrape leftovers into buckets  
pull them to the shute  
dump them out.

I wear pinstripes  
no pleats or cuffs.  
They go soggy in the crotch.

They're starch  
put pimples on my back  
smell when I put them on  
smell when I take them off.

Sloppy stripes  
matching tops and bottoms.

I bunk near the waterline. On good days Vukovich and I or Robichaud and I used to watch the trollers go by and on the bad saw them fall in the trough tip over the crest. I sleep above the engines I know that if we go down the bed springs will slice through me when the shafts blow and the pistons go up and up on the power stroke. I work near the waterline work in steam that stinks of food I pick medallions of meat off the plates pop them in my mouth leftovers from the French service in the Dining Saloon. Work from 0600 to 2130 sleep in a room with five others. It's about the size of your walk-in closet where you stood that day mirrored six ways and dropped those delicately faded denims. I have a sink the size of the powder puff on your old bed and a footlocker the size of your jewellery box.

We both liked the same music.

Once

I asked you to take the bus when you came to meet me. You didn't care for that.

I sleep too late you complained

So? then I shrugged I'm good at it practise when your back is turned. When you fell asleep after the first time I shrugged and walked about your room paced it off 13 x 22 size of the Cooks' Mess.



I like to drive    you smiled.

I nodded    But what if I ask you to ride the bus?

Why though?

Because I feel better that's why.

No you don't. You feel worse because you'd really like them to see  
you climb into the Healey with me. But it's my car and I like to  
drive it.

So?

I drive. You ride.

That's the way it was wasn't it? All summer long.

You waited at the edge of the lot    and we left quickly    you always  
went through the park to show me how well you rallied. I always  
watched the scenery. Strained my neck at Prospect so I could feel  
the totem slide away as you geared down into the dip    high RPM in  
the tunnel of trees.

Did you want to frighten me?

You did.

The car didn't

the speed didn't

your silvered mirrors and diamonds didn't.

You did. The way you went about me. Relentless. You were some  
kind of current.

Rip tide or back eddy?

You wanted me because you like me

and I wanted you because I wanted to be liked.

You have money. I don't care anymore where it comes from.

Mine comes from the Shore Steward who hands out the cheques  
twice a month when all of us line up in Purser's Square. We all look  
clean because we just showered    we all smoke because we're nervous  
don't want to miss our women    don't want to be forgotten. I have to  
sign a piece of paper    they stamp something in a book    they say  
N E X T    like a barber shop    and I step away with a cheque that  
can't be cashed if it's over a grand    walk down to the freight deck  
onto the pier    start up the stairs to you.

You wanted to know all about me.

I told you the easy things if I told you anything at all told you about the steady break of water as the bow cuts through it how the wave folds up at the same spot all the time how it sounds more like distant fire than rushing water. I talked about the wake at dusk seen from the fantail white foam like a comb scratch on soft dark scalp. The glow of it. The S U N K I S T crates and seagulls strung out behind us.

I didn't tell you about the can with the five toilets and the shower stalls where Vukovich slid beneath it all the washing machines for our stiff jeans to look good on Vancouver Day. Didn't tell you about hitting the can each morning and staring at the tiles how they interlock no satisfaction. The sound of older men farting sighing grunting steady creak of the ship profanities when someone slips or doesn't show up. Didn't tell you about the boys found in linen lockers or deserted rooms who grew scared or confused just started to weep or shake and suspect their friends just shut themselves away and gave up.

Some go crazy like Al who walks about with the phone jack dangling from his pants hip bouncing off the night-tight companionways between the galley and the crews' quarters.

Some see things at night like Joe who has a length of rebar in his bunk and leaps at anyone who enters our room in darkness who's tried to hurt me twice the steel at my head his eyes wide but the knowledge shielded that damp look of incomprehension.

Some retreat like the Russian who's washed pots for 11 seasons and lives in the brig makes his bunk at the beginning of the season strips it down at the end. Tonight he came for a handful of Intensive Care smiled dirty before he left sings in the hold amongst the pallets of tinned clams and sacks of dirty sheets and blocks of ice.

Some of us go inward like me and count the days make calendars out of everything: so many plates to a day so many sittings to a week so many logged off islands to a passage so many times that tall tree south of Rupert slips past at the same moment every eighth day before they tie us up and we linger in the cabin because we know we must go away not return til spring. I count chalices as I load them into the Hobart count inserts as I pull them out the other end. I count dinner plates as I flip them like flat sauna

stones and to avoid the heat carry them away with the heels of my hands. I count saloonsmen who come and go count the lounge-  
porters found in a passenger's room and fired count the customs  
checks when the officers board us haul us out of bed look at our  
sloping faces our shiny photos. They laugh at us talk about wet-  
backs southern accents in a northern. Look us over like you do a  
cabbie who dares to be first off a light.

I like you but I never told you told you nothing. You just  
assumed I did. You thought I said I loved you but I didn't say  
anything. I talked about Skagway that the quietest thing in that town  
was the old cathouse fallen by the tracks full of my footprints. I  
wanted you to see that all sailors don't tie splices or climb masts  
that the north is not always the aurora.

I want simple things like solitude and silver certificates by the  
score

but must do complicated things  
like wash dishes and talk with you  
to get them.

We should be able to make our points without talking but you  
can't listen to me that way.

I didn't say I loved you I said I needed you.

Crazy Al's been singing for half an hour the wops are playing  
checkers Joe's fallen asleep with his shoes on his chest keeps  
them handy to run from the midnight gobbler.

Tonight's the last night of the last trip.

In a while we'll gather the whole crew in the Stewards' Mess  
under the fantail. There'll be pizza the Chief'll make a speech full  
of profanities so we'll know he's one of us the barmen will bring us  
bottles there'll be music. Girls will appear from the passenger's end  
give kisses to those who are retiring: the fishcook is through the  
night baker has found religion. Then there'll be more singing some  
in Italian some in Spanish some in French even English. Then  
the fist fights'll start and the slow ones will have swollen faces and  
the quick ones broken knuckles sly ones will drink from deserted  
bottles and 3 or 4 will take the girls to safety in the suite booked  
always to Mr. Constant so the Chief has a place to party every  
cruise.

Joe will go a little mad will stumble from the Mess into the Dining Saloon. Night lunch will just have ended. He'll take a fire axe slam it into the walnut and plate glass until the Chief leads a charge to subdue him. Then Joe will bring up and pass out.

Last week our last week you said I was the best you always did.

I laughed said you knew how to lie.

You cried but I took it as make believe stepped over to your mirrored room me all around me me above me and behind me. I looked thinner five months in a galley and I'd lost weight. My hair was lank and matted stubbled like that of a new recruit freshly sheared prisoner. My shoulders were bony my knees blunt fragile hinges. I squatted looked around at me.

You think you're so fucking smart you were yelling at me again.

I nodded smiled at my multiple selves I sparkled like a lost diamond.

Your voice was electric with anger You think you're the only one who thinks?

I nodded again I did sparkle like light seen through the grate of a gutter trap. I reached out as if I had adhesive or magnets on my fingers I jerked back: the mirrors were cold as CO<sup>2</sup> the sensation a hot one burned by dry ice.

I don't want you in my room!

When I realized you were getting out of bed I swivelled and pulled the door to. I didn't want to hear you anymore. I locked it I stretched out I looked up and saw me looking up felt like a small craft in rainbow fog too many directions from which to take a bearing thought of latitudes and minutes of the compass put my fingers to my eyes forced them shut nothing more.

Stillness in the heart of inertia.

I woke up a while later opened the door and crawled out. The bed was made my clothes were on the floor. You'd left busfare on the night table.

At Rupert the phone in the pub didn't work. Juneau put me through after half an hour but the time was wrong you were out

to dinner. Skagway was lost to me. I sat in the upper floor of the  
cathouse watched the torn curtains move walked back along the  
tracks listened to the slap of glacial water sun brittle as a host.  
Wrangell was dark only beehive burners glowing drinks on the  
house. I was happy headed south. Then Rupert again and rain. I  
ran my finger round the circle of numbers and caught you in the  
bath.

I'm wet your voice so far away I held my breath to hear you.

I'll dry you off in two days.

The line spat and cackled at us.

I think I heard a sigh That doesn't sound like you you said.

Maybe it isn't.

How would I know?

You wouldn't but I'll show you.

I'm shivering I have to go.

I tried once more in Alert Bay no answer so I went for a walk.  
They pass on so young there: graves of babies graves of brothers  
who died together whole families laid out like paving stones.

They put Joe and Crazy Al in the brig. The Russian slept in the  
hold. They never did find the midnight gobbler. I did the last sitting  
of breakfast and had a shower stripped my bunk packed my clock  
away. I can carry everything I need in a bag the size of your purse  
carry everything I want in a container no larger than one you make  
by cupping your hands can say it all in the volume of a deep breath.

Can do all that.

There's a cleft at the end of the pier a V of space. I saw a seagull  
eat a pigeon there on the first day of the season. I was on the fore-  
peak eating a piece of fruit while the gull shook the pigeon then  
set down to its meal. A rubby stood at the upper wharf railing and  
called to me

Looks tasty to me buddy boy.

I nodded tossed him an apple. He threw it at the seagull the  
pigeon fell in the water the man cursed and walked away.

I didn't know you then never knew I would now who knows  
Do you?

I look up from where I stand. There's no waving no voices it's  
cold here in mid-October. It's the start of the winter season when  
people with money take the first cruise south.



## THIS BOY IN HIS NARROW BED

Perhaps it was you?

Perhaps it was only me looking back from my ledge of sleep.

Me always even when not alone even when in a room of five others even when with you me always me in my narrow bed.

My life's like that don't you see?

As a child I had a rocket radio alligator clips pinched my bed frame tune in Coeur d'Alene dreams of Patti Page or the dinosaurs of plasticine the screams so late at night my father stumbling on the stairs.

Somehow even then I was dreaming you pulling you in from distances so great they were unknown.

Somehow even now as the Cates men move in even as their tugs nudge us from pierside I look away from you and try to think you into a shape that keeps for 8 days.

Won't work.

Even as I look away even as I look at the bosun yelling MOVE IT even as I glance back to see your hand moving in the sun even as I see Robichaud heading for the stairwell even as I bring you into line even as I do all that

I feel my stomach shift

and my knees creak

and my patience dwindle

and my image of you billow like sheets or a belly of water and I lose it.

Even as I wave back and strain to see you and wonder again always wondering what you look like I lose you and turn away and move quickly to go below.

And move swiftly down the stairwell putting my hands on the rails and kicking my feet up and sliding on my palms to the deck below. And now it's the sound of the crew and the sun angling through the holes and the big coins of light everywhere and my head like it is when Robichaud cuts the coke on the dark plastic of his stereo lid and he leans and rolls the note and draws the line and passes the bill to me and says only 13 more trips

only 11 more

only 9

only only only

We apply that word to so many infinities.

only 8 days til you welcome me into the Healey

only you

only me

Now only the voices of men arguing over bunks and the taut faces of the new ones and the hard chuckles of the new ones and the way they sit on footlockers and wait for it all to begin.

And now the screws slowly turning and the slap of water and the air trunk door slamming and the stereos at work and the bottles out and those that aren't drunk from shore leave are drunk from the start of another trip. And I go to my room and there's our newboy with his cigarette and his shaking hands and a pile of stripes beside him and he knows my name and asks me what to do and I tell him not to bend over in the washroom

and that's that

and that's that

Is that how you put it? How can you wave to me when you say that? How can you meet me week after week? What do we do when there isn't that gap to make us want to want?

I pull my curtains the newboy shifts on his footlocker. I'll give him Vukovich's bunk and the newboy can strip the sheets and the canopies and I won't tell him anything

I won't tell him a fucking thing

You understand that surely

I put my head on my pillow and I glove my face with my hand and I hear the Cates bumping on the hull and the newboy striking a match and now I see that the sunlight moves on the ceiling and my blue curtains burn with their own colour and I'm so tired of not

talking to you not explaining myself to you and you are sure I know what's going to happen but I fear that I'll understand that only a long time after it's passed.

And I put my head on my pillow and I burrow into it cross my legs at the ankles and I tense my muscles and stiffen my stomach and close my eyes and my narrow bed is pulled by Cates out into the harbour of Vancouver

for the 12th time this year

only 9 more to go

I hear Robichaud singing as I close my sea green eyes.

Everything falls into place or out of it I work the galley hard been stealing shrimp and crab and beef tenderloin and now I'm determined to steal a knife a good one Solingen and make the cooks go loud and threatening and make the Chef call a meeting and the Chief sit at the back and I'll throw the steel into Wrangell Narrows a straight hard fish going down.

And Robichaud will know it's me and he'll call to me. And Udo will know and he'll nod to me and tell me to be careful and he'll flex his arms and run his shoulder into the bulkhead to demonstrate the strength of the powers I challenge.

But I challenge no one not really it's only my anger dreaming  
It dreams you

I keep my head on the pillow even when I'm in the galley even as I ram fistfulls of crab into the plastic in my pocket even as I go topside during a break and drop it off the forepeak white meat like gobs of water falling back into the swell.

I keep my head on the pillow and you are waiting but the face is gone and all I see is the hand on the gear shift and the feet on the pedals and the hand looking back and the Healey cutting left.

I keep my head on the pillow and see your fingers playing with a cigarette and tapping the ash away and asking me again

Why don't you just quit?

Why don't you quit trying to make me quit?

And Robichaud comes into the room and the newboy looks up and Robichaud looks down and tells him to move his fuckin ass and there is silence then I lean over my bunk and tell the newboy that it's better if he leaves he does but very slowly because he doesn't understand that men in tight numbers detest groups larger than three and will see the proof on Rupert night when the movie is shown on the freight deck everyone is happy and drunk or stoned and the wops sell popcorn and hot dogs then the talk starts and somewhere in the dark a fist moves others join it until someone always called a faggot

is face up or face down or coiled like a sick child on the deck the Chief stands and tells us all to calm down or he'll cut the power so the boys go quiet and we watch the film but there is no substance anymore just the bitterness of not caring whether the guy is dead or hurt badly

nobody cares.

Sometimes violence

brutal violence

sometimes tearing skin from the face kicking bruises into the buttocks snapping off teeth at the gumline

sometimes violence

our goodbyes and hellos are compressed by sailing schedules into a club we wield for only 8 or 9 hours

sometimes all our violence

is the only language we have

And Robichaud comes into my bunk and he's in his tank top and saloon pants and I'm in my tank top and galley stripes and he's carrying his little makeup case and photo album he leans back against the bulkhead and sighs

Only 9 more

He doesn't smile but stares into my curtain and maybe he thinks of Vukovich or the night saloonsman who took a trip off and me who didn't

WHO COULDN'T

Christ what would we have done after a few days of running through your father's house how soon would we have soured on ordering food from his Jamaican lady and occupying his vacant lots of leather couches and Chinese rugs?

And Robichaud's foot kicks out and the toe of his slipper punches my curtain and he boots and boots and boots and boots and his back is pressed to the bulkhead and his hands dig into my bunk and his neck is paralleled with jugulars and muscle and strain and he kicks and the curtain gives and he kicks and the curtain gives and then he stops and heaves his breath out

and starts to laugh

and his head bumps my boot rack

and his shoulders bounce

and his face goes red

and I feel myself smile

and then he is finished

so he looks at me and nods and his grin is wide and he flexes his leg.

Only 9 more his voice so soft I can barely hear it but I sense it clearly like one does a touch before its touching I watch his face.

And I see your face turn and your hand moves up to my cheek and you ask me where I've been while you were tending to what you thought were my needs.

And now Robichaud is turning and his voice is coming over his shoulder like clouds backpedalling over a hill and his voice is still soft

Only 9 more

Then even softer: those fuckers won't get me.

And his hair is black and short and his shoulders are brown and he opens his photo album shows me pictures of women and he has memorized their names and their shapes and their scents and he has uselessly perfected them There are scores of them all 5 x 7's pasted into a red plastic album and he talks of them as one would of lost pets



as one would of a favourite auto stolen

as one would of a prior sensation

and he loves them all from a distance, in their tiny likenesses.

Then he pushes his makeup case to me and I flip it open and take the blade from the mirror and move it into the solid pack of coke and start cutting lines.

Five grams he says and smiles.

He'll do it all in six days.

And later

and later much much later

when the newboy is thrashing about in Vukovich's narrow bed and I lie above him with my eyes open. I know what the newboy dreams. He dreams the dinner plates and side plates and cups upside down in the rack and the rattle and the dank and the steam and the rattle and the yells and the crashes and the silver-rattle and the pot rattle and the trash rattle and the scrap splash and the slop slash and the work rattle and the work rattle and the work rattle and the work rattle

The newboy sleeps the sleep of nosleep.

And I don't sleep because I have slept and here in my narrow bed it is better to stay awake I have slept and I know the dreams by heart the screams so loud no one hears and the sitting up in bed and the sitting up in bed and the sitting up in bed and the hate of being awake and suddenly knowing I've spent half the night trying to avoid sleep.

So I do not sleep. So I lie in my narrow bunk and slip out of my stripes and I spread my legs and I light a smoke and at first I listen to the water going past and it sounds like wind rubbing bushes or soft hands on rough fabric then I hear the thud ping thud ping thud ping thud ping underneath where the engineers move round the twin diesels And then I think and because my head is numb and my sinuses drain bile I cannot think of anything but you.

How you are possibly at home but probably not how you are moving about the city with the top down and they all look at you and you look at all of them and there is a greater distance between you and them than between you and me I know all that But it doesn't make this easier.

You drive all the time. You have plastic to pay for the fuel and a shop that services the car and you sit and smoke while they drain the oil and check the timing and do the plugs and set the carbs and they all look at you through the service door and they trace the lines of your legs and breasts All your hidden places fill their eyes.

And you smoke them away and you lean back and wait until you can be in motion again. You are like me in so many ways you want either to be moving or at rest.

But the difference: Now even when I lie down to sleep I am in motion always always always.

Even though you are further from them than I am from you I'm distrustful.

This kind of cyclical existence makes me suspicious of me. I want only what I want and not what you may desire to give me. This washing of dishes and dumping of slops and taking of drugs is really a taking of my own life

And so I smoke you away  
draw you in  
let it go

And think of Robichaud in the hotbox the room with no windows where the heat collects and the crew gathers to watch private films the pneumatic men and women of Super 8

And think of Robichaud who keeps his compact with him all day long and ducks into linen lockers or washrooms or a quiet windfree spot and takes a sniff and pulls a photo from his back pocket He laughs at himself He points to his head and says: scratch and sniff.

His nose is always running  
His eyes are always wide

He sits alone in his bunk and stares at his photographs and keeps his compact close and sleeps as little as possible Dreams in that way.

He dreams of his women all those process colours combined and the backgrounds dark and all their faces turned to the camera and their expressions calm. They are little icons I suppose little miracles of theft that allow Robichaud to avoid the older women who want him or the lure of the easy way out. The women he's known so slightly so vaguely now fixed and kept like a saint's relic. Did they ever exist outside the camera? But it keeps him to himself helps him to avoid entanglement so he won't end up like us: weeping men found on air trunk stairs or those who play crib all night or sing all day long or lie in their narrow bunks and grow sullen.

The ship renders all of us manic  
Robichaud and his coke  
me and my silence  
the newboy and his panic  
you and your constant motion  
YOU SEE it traps you while it traps me.

Robichaud

He winked at me today. He winked at me when he came into the galley to clear his tray. He winked at me as I swept the scraps of lamb and veg the bits of ash the potato turds from his plates. He winked at me as I slid the stuff into a bucket.

Meet me in the hotbox  
and he winked again.

I went there. I went there because he wanted me to and I wanted to know what made him want me there in the middle of the first sitting of dinner and he was pacing. He wheeled to face me handed me the compact. I cracked it open took my blows then he handed me the photo.

She was beautiful  
just like you you could have been twins.

I looked at her and I looked at you and looked at her and looked at you and Robichaud was laughing loudly spinning about eyes splashing light.

He knew what I was thinking

He grabbed for the compact and dropped to a stool took the blade and began to cut.

This calls for lines not fingerpuffs. He was panting his words.

I looked at him and looked at you and I think I didn't know the difference and didn't understand the photograph didn't realize that it was only a likeness only a resemblance didn't realize it could lie in its emulsions and underexposure And it looked like you and I held it out and stared at it because it looked like you but you are different maybe it was the way her hands went up and her wide eyes and you looked like you were laughing and shrugging questioning the abrupt pleasure of life

which is something you never do

so I knew it wasn't you but I didn't realize the difference.

I stared until Robichaud handed me the compact and the bill. He took the photo from me looked at it studied it.

Claimed it with his eyes.

Ain't she a bitch was how he put it. Ain't she a bitch?

Had met her at the Rupert Hotel would meet her there again on the southern leg. Just stared at her while I did my lines and watched him watch her. I thought of you felt a little sick.

Why wasn't it a photo of you?

Why aren't you like that?

Why aren't you?

I left Robichaud in the hotbox and went back to the galley for second sitting. I felt sick until I had my evening shower.

And then back to my bed and the cigarettes and my decision not to think of you anymore.

**LIVE YOUR OWN LIFE WILL YOU?**

Swim in your pool and pull your top off and dive from the board at noon and do a dead man's float and stretch out in the sun and remove your bottoms and fall asleep until Marianne comes out to cover you in a sheet. Her black hands tuck the white around your pale skin to protect it from the sun.

What makes you so sure of me?

What makes me so afraid of you?

And always the need to sleep countered by the desire to stay awake to stretch out in my narrow bed and see the girl at Clapperton St. who gave kisses and allowed my hands to roam but refused to accept me in her games of spin the bottle in the old tent in the gulley or the boy with the big head who trapped me in front of the library and jumped on my chest until my mother tackled him hit him cried over him as she struck with an open hand and I gagged on the boardwalk welts on my back where his pounding weight had pressed me into the wood.

And what does it mean when I see you and want to slap you or take the Healey and drive it into a tree or refuse to bathe in your father's tub? What does it mean when you accuse me of being a child but turn away when I pull the satin over us or try not to enjoy it then cry at the end because it was good and wince when I touch you afterwards before we fall asleep?

And you  
cruising the city

You have the money to do these things but never enough time to enjoy it. You have a duty to spend recklessly and I think you resent it. I think you resent me having a job where I save everything I earn and come off a season with 10 G's in my account year after year. Now you accuse me of loving money too much but in fact I despise it can think of nothing to do with it.

Actually: what I want to do is give all my money to you to spend.

Would you do it?

Would you accept it?

You'd be insulted.

You have your own money to spend.

I should take care of my own.

I put the cigarette out. I think of Robichaud's picture. I pull the sheet over my shoulder and kill the light.

She was in the corner by herself. Robichaud spotted her pointed gestured to me to follow.

I didn't want to be there

I didn't want to look at her

or talk to her

or have her look at me

You know what I mean you know precisely what I mean. You once said: You are afraid of me and you are right to be.



That was that.

There she was smoking legs crossed eyes lifting. She saw us, dragged on her smoke put it out reached up to accept Robichaud's kiss.

He told her who I was. We shook hands. I felt sick. Beer was ordered. We had only two hours so we chugged a few to get started.

You like Dubonnet. You like Campari. You like ouzo and chichi's and banana daiquiris and your father drinks Chivas Regal and in the photos of your mother I recall there being a bottle of Boodles. You sip whatever you drink but you make it disappear quickly. My Brador equalled three of your camparis and then we'd be in the parking lot and I'd take your wrist as we neared the Healey.

NO Let go.

Let me.

NO I SAID NO.

You'd yank away remember? not with fear or revulsion but with the powerful assurance of someone raised without restraints. You are good with people who know their place you are kind and warm and modest but you recoil from those who assume an equality exists. Don't we all? Aren't we all just a little too unique to be siblings?

Fuck you our steady undercurrent. And you are like that you are like that when we are with women who dress as well as you or who travel as freely or carry their cash in brown envelopes, the denominations neatly clipped together. You yank back. You sit straight and you order another drink and you don't twist your hair or hoist your cigarette. You stare and go quiet and after a while you are drunk and hot and agitated and silent

Then the glass comes down  
a little too hard  
and the chair is moved  
a little too abruptly  
and you're on your feet  
a little too quickly  
and your voice comes out  
a little too loud  
a little too hard  
and the words are brutal in  
their articulate contempt.  
Don't you see?  
It's so easy not to like you.

And there she is putting her glass on the terrycloth and there is Robichaud pushing her another leaning toward her talking about Skagway and his eyes are everywhere and his hands are on her forearm and her arms are touching his and her face is angled towards him and her lips are parted and her eyes are blue and her cigarette burns in the ashtay

And I pick it up and take a pull.

Then they notice me and Robichaud passes me a beer and gives me a wink and the talk turns to summer vacations and how long will she be here and when will she leave and where will she go and Robichaud is finished in October and free for five months and their whole life is suddenly shaped and over with.

You said you'd meet me every week. So far you've missed one and after spending a day in The Orange then the Europa then the Dominion and watching guys pop and guys get their faces punched and guys show fake ID for offsale I came back to the pier and phoned your father's place. And this time he answered and he was drunk and that made it possible for us to talk and after telling me you'd been out of town all week his final words were

She is never here even when she is.

and he burped

and apologized for his lack of discretion

said he didn't feel too chipper

and gently just like your father very gently

put the phone down.

And I knew we'd planned too well and you didn't like the scheme  
of things even if you couldn't say it or know it on the surface of  
your thinking.

All our talk of motoring south at season's end  
well  
it's just the way we fill the silence between arguments and love  
making.

It's a fiction we create and it'll be finished  
I suspect  
before we are ready to make it fact.

And so we drank. And she talked and she spoke softly and  
smiled and winked and laughed told jokes on herself. And  
Robichaud watched her lips move and her teeth go up and down  
and her eyes flit and her hands fly. He ate it all up. Consumed her  
like oysters cooked in wine slowly not knowing it was merely food  
not knowing it was just another hunger.

And then he rose and said he had to piss.

And she laughed.

And he laughed.

And I laughed too.

Then he was gone and I looked at her and she looked at me  
and I said that she reminded me of you that it amazed me but her  
hair was the same colour and I could smell it even across the table  
it reminded me of the odour of blackberries and it had flecks of red  
in it that she had a soft voice that it was beautiful because it  
floated and I went on and on and on and on and I was really  
talking to you but she took my hand and smiled

and I stopped talking

and she leaned

and so did I

and we kissed each other

and

naturally

Robichaud saw it all.

But he didn't say anything. He came back to us quietly and she turned to him and took his hand and made a bathroom joke but she was the only one to smile. Robichaud looked down and I went red

not because I'd tried to outflank him

not because I was humiliated

but because I'd said to her

what I'd never be able to say to you

and she knew it

and you didn't.

We were pretty quiet then it was time to go and we rose together but she made me know that she wanted some time with Robichaud so I went ahead and looked back from the CN overpass. They were locked together against a tree and I had to smile and I had to laugh because she looked just like you

and he didn't look anything like me

and I laughed again because I realized that

I'm the appetite

that eats me.

We barely made the ship. Robichaud was running and yelling and I was trying to keep up and we stumbled up the plank and the sun was warm and some passengers applauded our arrival and we went to my room and Robichaud was still yelling

Only 9 more

Only 9 more

Only 9 more

til the wops pounded on the bulkhead and told us to shut the fuck up. So I stretched out on my narrow bed and Robichaud stretched out below me on the newboy's and we felt the ship slip away from its berth and then there was nothing to laugh about and I wanted to say something to Robichaud

to explain you to him

or to me?

but he took out his compact and tapped it on the frame of my bunk and I leaned over to take it and I leaned over to look at him but his arm was draped over his face and I think he was crying.

I felt suddenly far far away from everything. I wanted to touch him but I couldn't and I wanted to touch you but I couldn't do that either so instead I sniffed a few. He looked up. His tears were like aggies and they rolled and dropped to the white sheet under him and his hand shook as he took the coke

and then his eyes went tight

and I think he finally understood.

His voice was softly lying

already gone used up

when he said

Those fuckers'll never get me.

I fell back on my narrow bed and locked my ankles and waited for the numbness to spread

and listened for you

and listened for me

and listened for Robichaud

but heard only the soft cool

soft cool soft cool

soft pull of water all around me.



## Judith Van Gieson / EL ALICANTE

When Estrellita, Ignacio's oldest child, was ten she already had five brothers and sisters. She ran faster and laughed louder than all the children who played in the dust of the ranch. She ate beans and tortillas and drank from the cows' tits. She wasn't afraid of the Alicantes, the snakes that put the cows in a trance when nobody was looking and sucked their milk, or the rats that ate the hay or the black widow spiders that dropped from the ceiling. The ranch was as familiar to her as the palm of her own dirty hand. During the day she worked in the fields. At night under the bright stars and the ever changing moon, she roamed. She knew where the rats hid and where the Alicantes nested. She had stood outside the door of every dusty hut and she knew where the next baby would be born and why, Concepcion, Jose's wife, embroidered with a sad face while her husband drank pulque in the barn.

Jose was the foreman of Rancho Escondite, a tiny, thin man, hard as a whip. He wore high heeled boots, his hat had a tall crown and the brim curled up. He worked his men harder than any other foreman in the Valley. After he married Concepcion, the daughter of the boss of the neighboring ranch, he was easier for a time. Concepcion was as small as a child. She had a sweet brown face and she embroidered beautiful dresses for the babies born on the ranch. As the years passed and she had no baby of her own, meanness sweated from Jose and things went bad. Crops shrivelled in the hot sun, milk thinner than water ran from the cows' tits, chickens hid their eggs, Alicantes sunned themselves in the afternoons, rats ate the hay. Jose drank more pulque, his men drank more pulque. They came home very late and beat their women and all day the children fought in the dust.

The men found their solution in pulque, but the women knew that something had to be done to save the ranch and on the night of the full moon they called in Remedios, the old bruja from the pueblo. The women captured the boldest rooster, the one who crowed when the sun was just beginning to light the next Valley to the East and they took him to Jose and Concepcion's house. With Jose's machete, the bruja killed the rooster on the bedroom floor. Concepcion lay in the flickering light of the bruja's candles while she sprinkled the blood around the bed and chanted in a language that the women did not understand. She cradled the rooster's bloody head in her hands and was holding it over Concepcion's womb when the hard, drunken footsteps of Jose sounded in the doorway. The women turned and were blinded by the glare of the light he carried.

"Chinga su madre," he screamed picking up his machete. "Get out of my house before I kill you, you old witch."

The woman fled, but the bruja, stooped and bent over her stick so that she was shorter even than Jose, looked up at him and spoke the words that none of them understood, but all of them knew were a curse. With her stick she made a line that curled in the dust like a serpent and then she left the house. There was no one left behind to watch Jose fling the rooster head from the window, no one to watch the shadows that flapped across the wall as he beat Concepcion, no one to watch him fall upon her and stab her with the hard, indifferent pecks of a bantam cock, no one but the child, Estrellita, who stood watching in the darkness beyond the open window.

Estrellita left the window and ran across the ranch stirring up clouds of dirt around her feet. She found her father, Ignacio, smoking in the doorway of the barn.

"Que pasa, hija?" he said.

Estrellita told him what she had seen; the chanting of the bruja and the strange pecks and flutters of Jose. Ignacio listened under the light of the moon. He was a big, smooth skinned man who had milked a thousand cows and knew the causes of things. He didn't believe that a bruja could cast any spell to compare with the magic in his own brown body. Ignacio knew what needed to be done. He patted the head of his oldest daughter and ground his cigarette out in the dust.

A smile softened Concepcion's almond hard little face, a roundness showed in her belly. Jose strutted through the barns and across the fields as if it were he who had performed the miracle. Ignacio squeezed milk, not water, from the cows' tits. The hens clucked and showed off the perfect brown ovalness of their eggs. The children played and the women sang as they beat their clothes in the muddy river. When the child, a boy, was born, there was a celebration on the ranch. The men drank pulque until they fell down in the dust and then they slept there under a thousand bright stars.

A fat, smooth-skinned baby was conceived, but he did not want to be born. He clung to his place in Concepcion's tight womb. The midwife could not push him out; she had to reach up and pull him, ripping Concepcion open like a star when she did. All the women on the ranch came to Jose's house to see the baby named Manuel. "Manolo," they said, "what a beautiful boy," but as the months passed the baby grew long, but thinner and thinner, and the women began to call him Flaccito, little skinny one.

Flaccito nursed and sucked and pulled at Concepcion's breasts but he didn't find enough nourishment there and he screamed his hunger out the window and across the ranch. Everybody heard him screaming in the middle of the night and early in the morning, everybody but Jose who slept soundly in the same room dreaming dreams about his son. The only time Flaccito kept silent was during siesta when the ranch had a strange calm and everybody stopped wherever they were and went to sleep. Jose refused to call in a wet nurse. He preened and strode across the ranch proud of the skinny baby boy but the women had never heard such screaming. They weren't sure who had caused the baby to be, but they knew it had been cursed. Ignacio understood that things were going bad again when he saw the cows' milk slipping through his fingers like water.

Manolo's sucking and crying tired Concepcion. Her little brown face tightened like an old nut. In the evening Estrellita looked in the open window and watched Concepcion nurse Flaccito. She saw the bruise around the mother's nipples spread to the baby's mouth. She saw the ugly stain swelling and darkening every day.

One day when nobody had been able to find any chickens' eggs, Estrellita left the fields during siesta. It was very quiet, everything that could move was sleeping; the cows slept standing in the fields, the men slept in the hay in the barn, Jose slept with his head down on the desk in his office, the women and the children slept on mats on the floor of their huts.

Estrellita walked silently through the dust of the ranch. She tiptoed up to the window of Jose's house and she looked in. The mother and the baby lay sleeping on the bed without a sound. Estrellita looked closely and then she saw the snake, the Alicante, fatter than her own leg, coiled and curled up on the bed between them. It had stuck its tail in Manolo's mouth and the poor dry baby was sucking in his sleep trying to draw some nourishment from the snake's scaly tail. The mouth of the Alicante, big enough to swallow an egg or a rodent whole, was wrapped around the breast of Concepcion, sucking at her nipple, stealing her milk, the life of the baby.

Estrellita tiptoed away from the window and then she ran to the barn where she found her father, Ignacio, sleeping in the hay. She shook his arm. "Papa, Papa," she said. "Wake up. Get the gun. There's an Alicante in bed with Concepcion. Wake up, Papa. Get the gun."

Ignacio shook the sleep from his eyes. He went into Jose's office, grabbed the gun from the wall and ran with his daughter across the ranch to the house of Jose. The Alicante felt the thumping of their feet and let go of Concepcion's breast. As they reached the window they saw it, a full two metres long, uncoiling and winding down the side of the bed reaching for the floor. It was bloated but it slithered across the floor, its head darting, feeling for the danger that lay in front of it. As soon as the Alicante was off the bed and Ignacio had a clear shot, he fired. There was a fractured instant of silence, then the sleeping ranch awoke; Concepcion screamed, Manolo cried, Jose's boots sounded in the dirt. The Alicante curled together, then snapped straight and burst open squirting milk up into the air. Jose stepped into the doorway in time to see the milk raining down like beginnings on the dusty floor.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

COLIN BROWNE recently completed a new film for the National Film Board: *A Visit from Captain Cook*. He co-authored two performance pieces for the dance group Bax By Popular Demand: *Coming Soon*, and *XC4-2643*. These were performed in Vancouver in October 1980. Colin has edited the B.C. Issue of *CV/II*, which will be appearing soon (see ad page 124).

PAUL DE BARROS co-edited *Periodics* until recently with Daphne Marlatt. He is now living in Washington State.

JOHN MARSHALL lives on Vancouver Island and is the editor of *Island*. These poems are from a collection entitled *Saltspring* (Oolichan). His earlier *West Coast Trail* is also worth reading.

DIANA HARTOG moved to New Denver, B.C., in 1971 and built a house on the side of Goat Mountain, where she lives with her daughter. She writes poetry, rebuilds houses, and chops wood like hell in the winter.

ROBIN BLASER's "The Truth is Laughter" is the latest series in a longer work to be titled *The Forest*. He recently edited Mary Butts' *Imaginary Letters* (Talonbooks), and is currently on leave from SFU, and working on a book on J. S. Bach.

RICHARD PRINCE was born in 1949 in Comox, B.C. In 1967 he commenced Fine Arts studies at UBC and in 1970 he travelled to Emma Lake to participate in a studio-oriented program, returning to UBC in 1971 to complete his B.A. in Art History. Further studies in Art History followed at UBC from 1972 to 1973. Prince now teaches in the UBC Fine Arts Department and, in his recent works, is investigating a more narrative sculpture. He is also interested now in "depicting the figure doing simple things. Simple but grand things . . . like putting your hands up and creating a constellation between your hands . . . there you go, there's a constellation."



ROBERT G. SHERRIN's short stories have appeared in *The Capilano Review* #8/9 and #13. He has written two novels, *The Black Box* (November House) and "Actual Size," and is currently working on a third. He lives and works in Vancouver.

MARK SLADE has worked for many years for the National Film Board in eastern Canada, and continues his work in Vancouver. He is currently on leave to complete his writing projects. The quotations in Mark's review are from Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, English translation by C. F. MacIntyre, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1968, p. 27.

JUDITH VAN GIESON lived for several years in Vermont, and then in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. She says: "The story of the Alicante crops up frequently in Mexican folk lore. I first heard it from my Spanish teacher in San Miguel, who claims she actually saw one stealing milk from a nursing mother." Recently, Judith has been in New York City, working on a novel.

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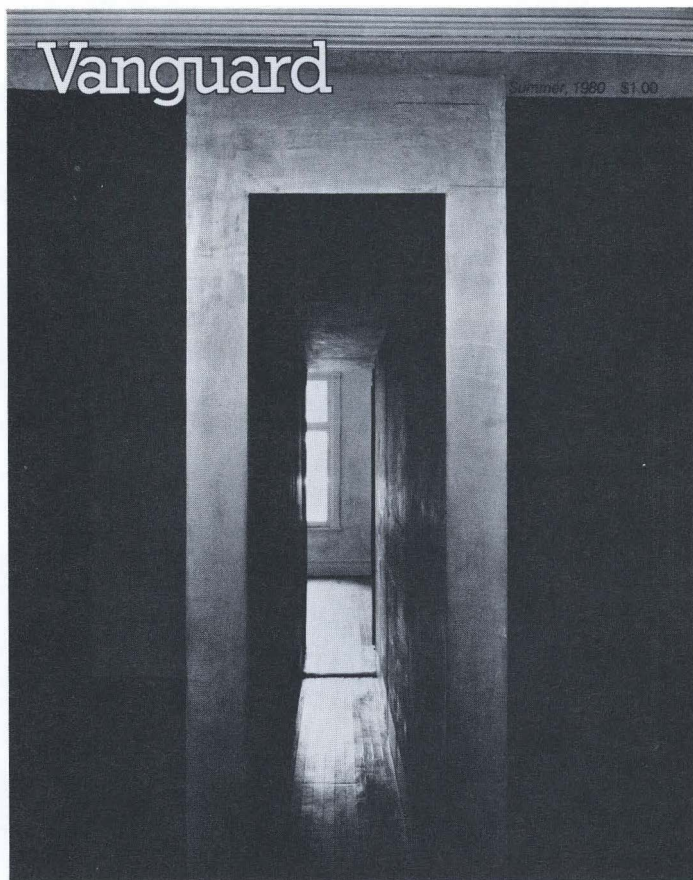
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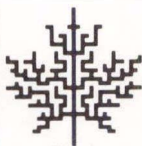
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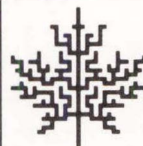
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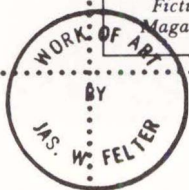
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