

THE CAPILANO REVIEW



It doesn't matter where you are.
There is only one landscape. One moving part.
One paradise.

— MCKINNON/PHILLIPS

EDITOR	ANN ROSENBERG
ASSISTANT EDITOR	DOROTHY JANTZEN
POETRY EDITOR	SHARON THESEN
STUDENT ASSOCIATE	MICHAEL SHEA
FICTION EDITOR	ROBERT G. SHERRIN
STUDENT ASSOCIATE	CLAIRE GUFFEY
DRAMA EDITOR	REID GILBERT
VISUAL MEDIA EDITOR	ANN ROSENBERG
STUDENT ASSOCIATE	LESLIE HENDERSON
BUSINESS MANAGER	DIAN RELKE
SECRETARY (ACTING)	EILLEEN STEELE

The authors gratefully acknowledge
the assistance of the Canada Council

*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.*

*We are always pleased to receive good material, especially from artists we
haven't published before, but we cannot take responsibility for unsolicited
manuscripts. Manuscripts should be submitted to the Editor, and must be
accompanied by a self-addressed envelope and Canadian postage
to ensure return.*

*Printed in Victoria, British Columbia, by Morriss Printing Company Ltd.
Second Class Registration Number 4593*

ISSN 0315-3754

THE CAPITANO REVIEW

Number 32

1984

CONTENTS

Reflection/Extension 4 Judy Williams

19 *Photography*: Penny Connell

BARRY MCKINNON

INTERVIEW 20 Barry McKinnon &
Sharon Thesen

The Centre 30
(*an improvisation for Marian*)

Thoughts/Sketches 40

58 *Photography*: Penny Connell

DAVID PHILLIPS

INTERVIEW 59 David Phillips &
Sharon Thesen

The Muse 68

Other Poems 76

Detail *Reflection/*
Extension

COVER
Robert Keziere

Judy Williams / REFLECTION/EXTENSION

Three years ago, an octagenarian died. She'd lived at Refuge Cove for forty years.¹ Her existence and environment (real and imagined) became the bases for a multi-panelled mural created by her friend and neighbour that reflects/extends the value of Dorothy's being beyond the particular.²

Williams supplemented the information she'd learned from the living person by assembling a further store of facts and fantasies by investigating the remains of a civilization she called "the 'Dorothy' culture."³ To that site the artist rowed again and again to collect fragments of pottery and glass. With an anthropological curiosity and an aesthetic eye, Williams divided blue glass shards into three piles — "dark ultramarine, medium cobalt and blue-violet."⁴ These hues accorded with the jars of Noxzema, Vicks Vaporub and Milk of Magnesia that were still present in the vacant house, alongside Dorothy's kitchen utensils.

In the house, on the beach and in the sheds, Williams also observed evidence of Ed who was the last of Dorothy's three husbands. Given certain clues, she could reconstruct his roles as house-builder, tackle-maker. She could deduce that he, not Dorothy, owned the knife whose blade was sharpened to a sliver. She imagined him as the obsessive driller of holes in everything and as the maker of the boat that gave his widow access to the community and pleasure.⁵ It is Ed that Williams conjures forth in the cover image as the last of a set of husbands, the archetype of the fisherman/fixer. But it is Dorothy who is the muse of the piece. Her artifacts — fragmented or whole; underwater or tangled in grass — are the chief documented facts of a life lived in dozens of the watercolours. Her Eden-like environment alive with flowers; her ocean teeming with fish; her rustic gates; her dead man's lures and tools are recorded in many others. Parts of Dorothy's body are presented as though each was a shard, a piece of an elusive whole: gentle hand on an oar; graceful arm outstretched; willing knees spread. But she is also shown once as a greedy, middle-aged consumer of fruit. She is presented near the conclusion of the 232 panel cycle as a blond, beautiful swimmer floating on her back, her yellow hair electric with the prescience of impending death.⁶



The old woman in her boat reproduced here is a study that pre-dates the mural. It is as close as Williams came to a portrait as she pursued her vision of the import of Dorothy's life. And even here the artist's intention to make something far beyond any obvious statement about a woman's existence is clear. Dorothy is adrift in her boat, adrift in her artifacts, drifting towards death. Her thoughts rise like sheets of paper over her head to disperse in the wind. This preliminary painting previews a major insight and certain visual ideas that are contained in the completed mosaic of images. It betrays no hint of the symbolic format used in the majority of the watercolours nor of the numbering system that contributes immeasurably to the mural's poetry.

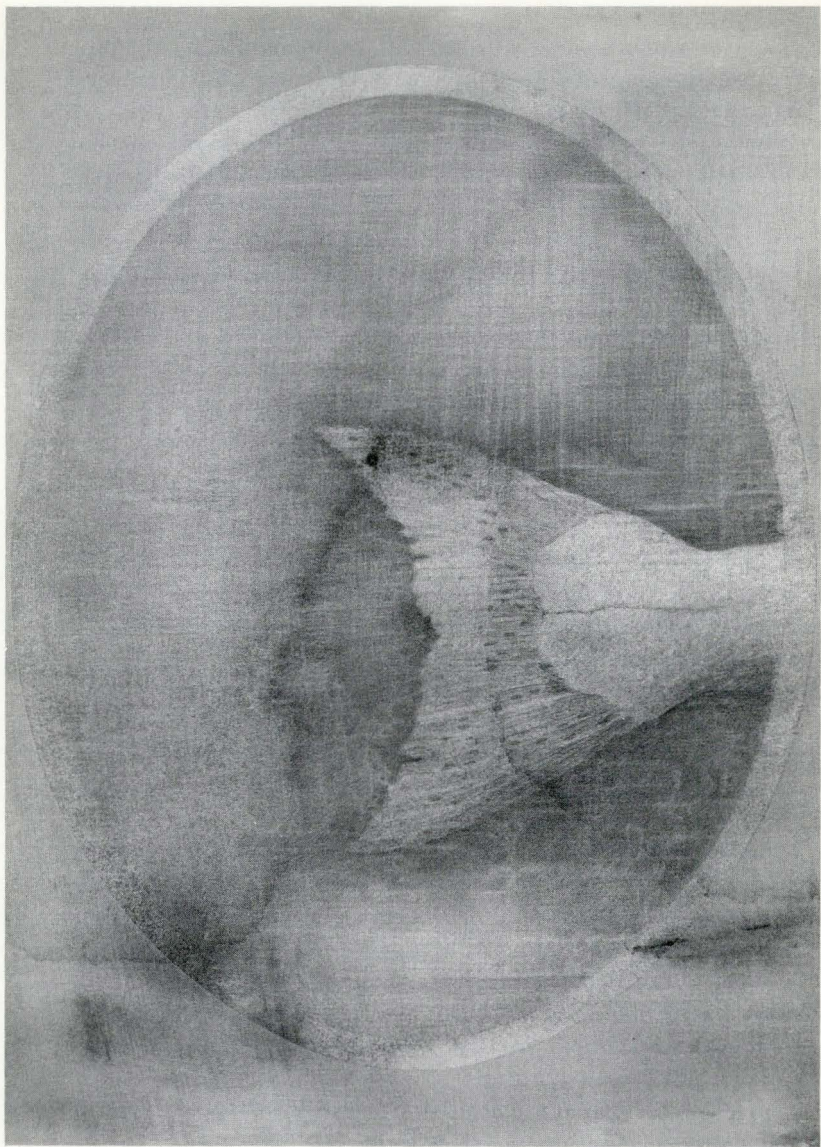


As installed at the Charles H. Scott Gallery, the first of the hundreds of sixteen inches by twenty inches paintings was an image of an ivory-handled, bevelled-glass, oval mirror tipped through a mirrored ellipse.⁷ The elegant mirror crops up time and time again as a clue to Dorothy's possible vanity, an equivalent to the Noxzema jar motif. More importantly, the mirror is established immediately as the material source of the oval shape which frames almost every vignette. The mirror with a rainbow-producing edge is a reflector and suggests the artist's reflections upon the subjects she has recorded. As the reproductions imply, the ovoid is also, through context, the porthole past which fish glide, or it is a window. Or it is the corneal or camera lens to inner or outer vision.⁸

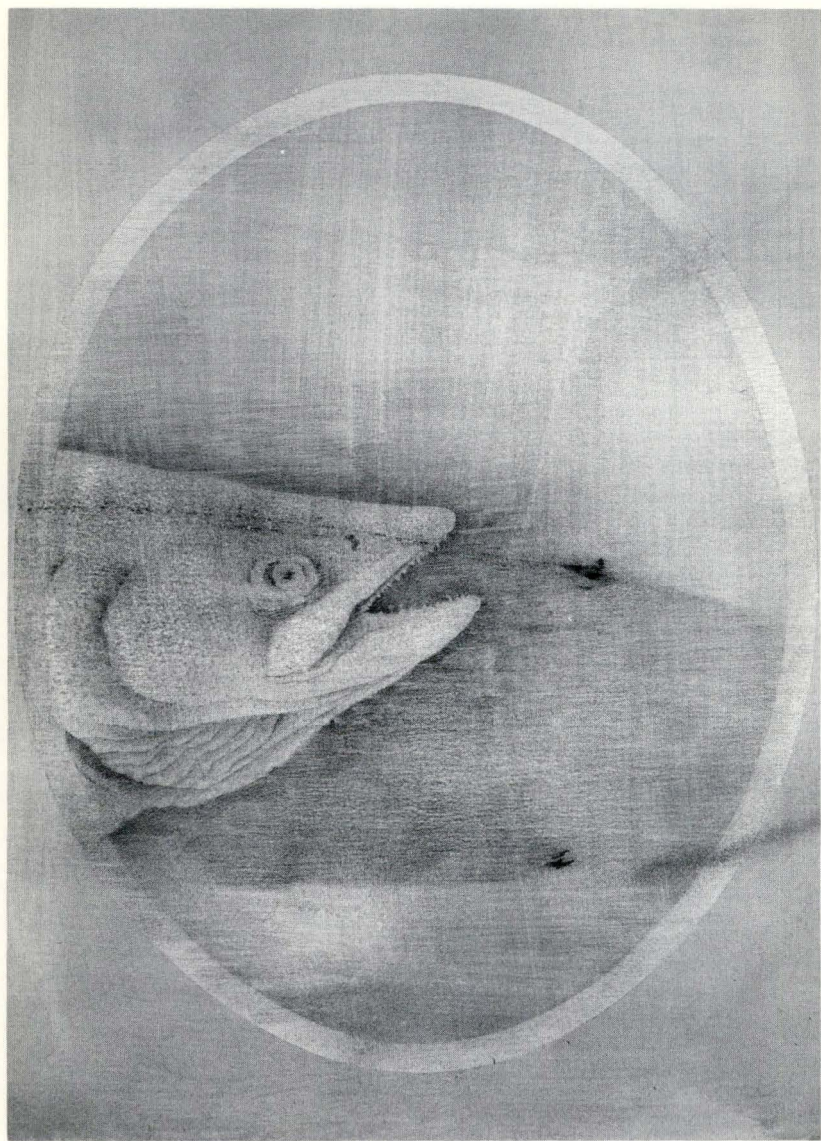
To the left and right of the first image of the mural, two metal number 1s were nailed. Close to them, near an undersea view of a

plaque on which a curve is drawn with mathematical accuracy, one discovered a number 2. The three-part fish painting was number 3.⁹ As preface to the next cluster of images positioned to the right, there was a number 5. The sequence "1, 1, 2, 3, 5 . . ." and the spiralling curve tell the viewer that Williams is employing a number system invented in the seventeenth century by Fibonacci in which the route to the next number is by addition of the two previous numbers. By this means Williams sets up the anticipation of the sequential figures "8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89 . . ." which number the items grouped beside each. Williams chose to use Fibonacci's system because it is exponential, expansive and because it is the basis upon which curves like those in shells can be computed. The difference between step by step reading of single images and cluster effect comprehension of groups is implied through the numbers presented. And just as the mirror, by implication, is the route to *reflection*, the magnifying numbers allude to *extension*. And because Fibonacci's system concerns the curve, it encompasses the ellipse and all other curves suggested in the imagery — the twist of a leaf, the curl of a petal, the circuit of an oar, the spiral of the eddy, the circle of the seasons, the cycle of growth and decay.

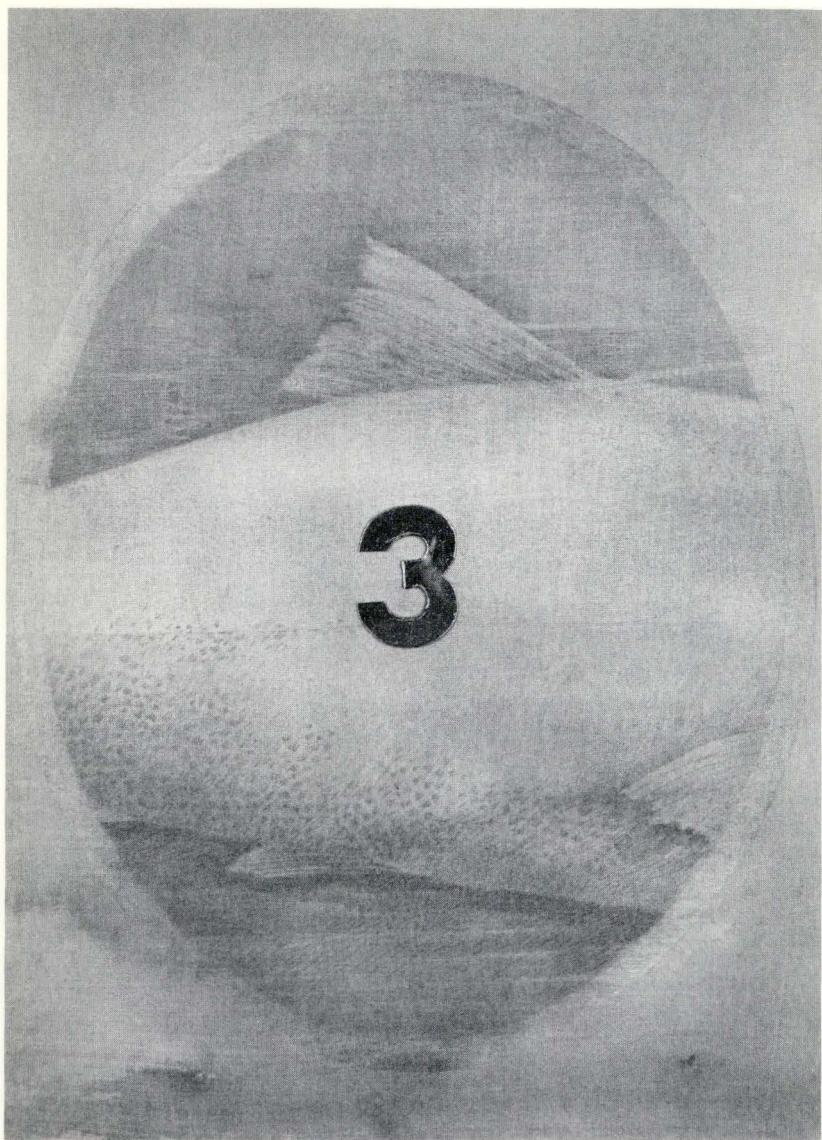
Some other elements that pushed the implication of the mural towards allegory should be explained as they cannot be shown here with clarity.¹⁰ As the viewer moved around the exhibition, he was witness to the accumulating evidence of a life lived; he was made familiar with the tonalities that mark our seasons — grey, grey Winters; green and lilac Springs; golden, blue-skied Summers; russet, orange Falls; the plants, the activities appropriate to them. As he moved he noticed, perhaps, that there was an increase in the number of purely abstract images as he approached the mural's end; an increase, especially, of skies presented on the mirror ellipses. He was aware too, perhaps, that as the mosaic built, the more frequently Williams covered an image with a sheet of translucent plastic, the more frequently she substituted a blank sheet for an image. The factualness that was at the beginning was slowly dematerialized and that transformation completed in section 89 which has as its central image the vision of the swimmer. To her right are over two dozen panels of lucid skies and white plastic sheets. Through one sheet glint the eyes of death. It is as though the swimmer will succumb to an eerie vaporization that will occur in the netherworld between sky and land. All imagery will vanish with her.

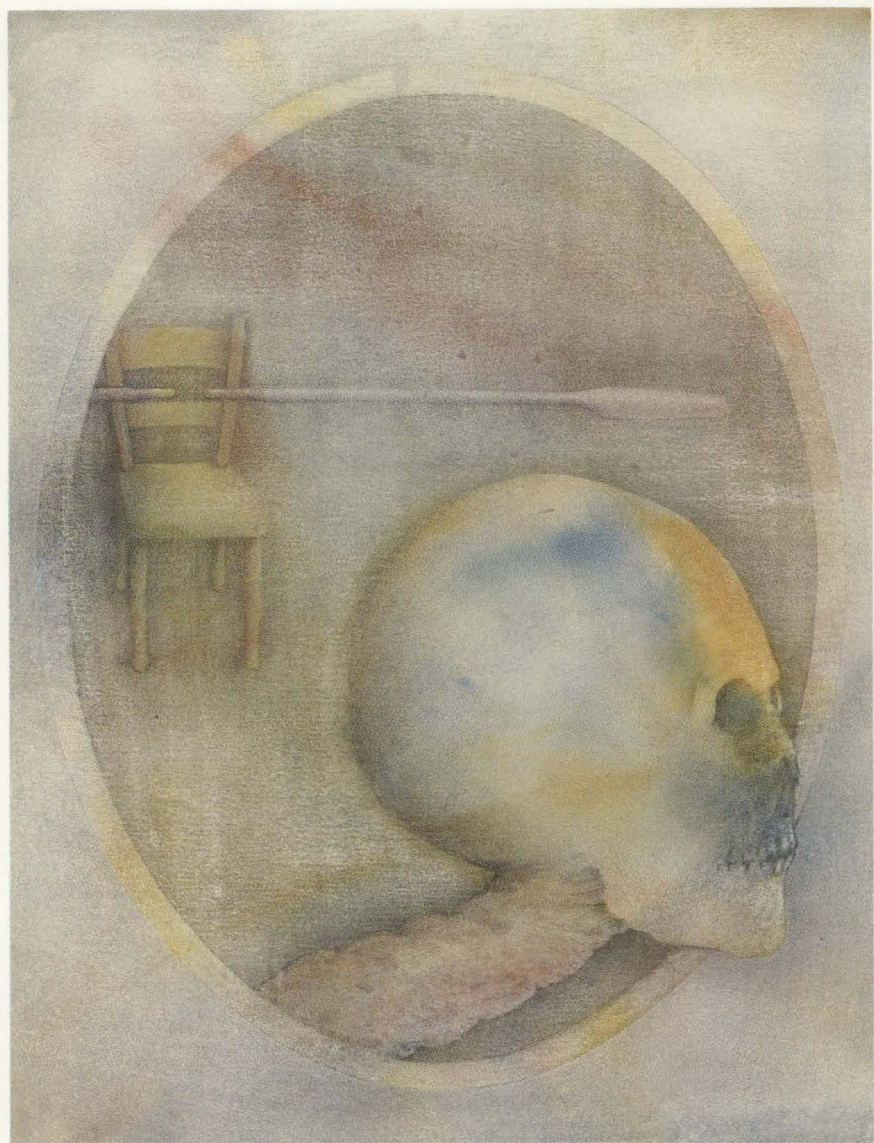


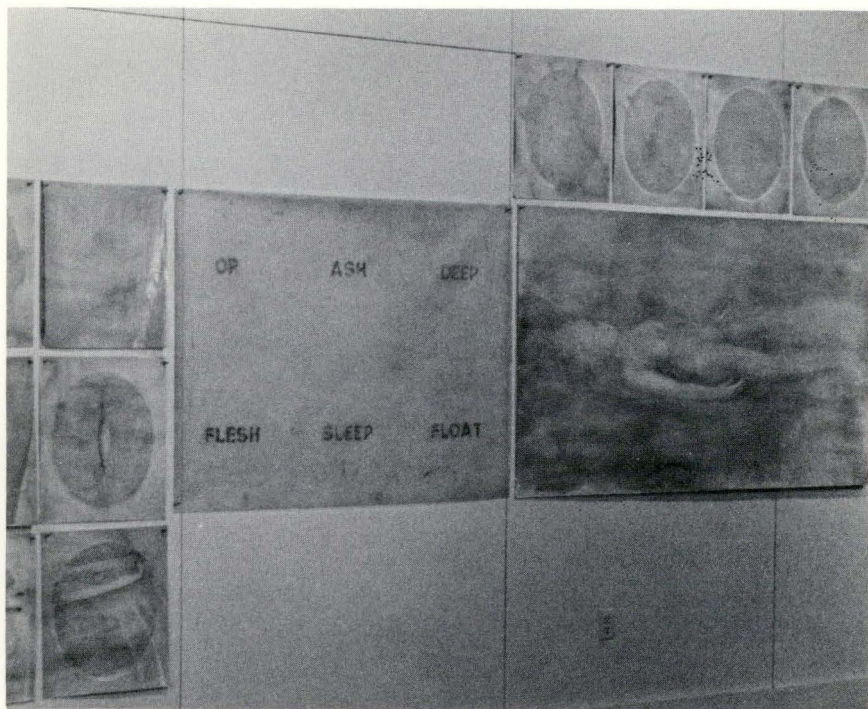
The first of the three figures is a large, dark, winged creature with a long, pointed beak or snout. It is surrounded by dark, feathered or winged structures. The second figure is a smaller, lighter-colored creature with a long, pointed beak or snout. The third figure is a small, dark, winged creature with a long, pointed beak or snout.











The plastic sheets curled up from the bottom as though ruffled by the wind of this transfiguration. At the end of a life, as the early study of Dorothy suggested, the *tabula rasa* slowly empties its contents of memory and learning. At the moment of death this mural suggests, it is filled again with purity and light.

In the final passages of REFLECTION/EXTENSION where the imagery began to disappear, it filled with words. In section 89 one discovered the words "DEEP" and "OR" among the preserved fruits and rustic doors. In a large panel to the left of the swimmer was a poem, set out in this fashion:

OR	ASH	DEEP
FLESH	SLEEP	FLOAT.

Scattered among the blank pages and elliptical skies to the swimmer's right the words "FLESH" and "SLEEP," "ASH" and "FLOAT" were scattered like random thoughts, floating there like debris on the sea's surface, like cremated remains.







The words are both literal and symbolic, like the numbers and images of the mural. They pun in a mystic fashion: "OR" — gold or oar; "ASH" — death or grey colour, the end of the swimmer's fiery sensuality; "OR/FLESH" — golden bodies turning in the yellow light; "ASH/SLEEP" — perhaps to dream; "DEEP/FLOAT" — a sinker, death by drowning, or, as likely, new life by dreaming.

In the mural many of the panels are linked together as logically as is the tri-part representation of the fish. In the best sequences, mystery is deepened through odd conjunctions, through omissions of the expected. Single images like the deer who grasps an apple not within her easy reach may serve as a memorable cypher for this exquisitely difficult hymn that celebrates life and death.

— ANN ROSENBERG

NOTES

- ¹ For the past twelve years Williams has lived full- or part-time in Refuge Cove, B.C. This isolated community on West Redonda Island can be reached only by boat or bush plane. Its beautiful vegetation, the submarine life, the myths told by residents, the myths Williams creates in contemplating the land, the persons who reside there — all have been the subjects of her art almost unbrokenly. Two major cycles called *The Search for the True Cedar* and *Sea Door/Reward* are published in *TCR*, Issues Nos. 8/9 & 11.
- ² While Dorothy's site and certain aspects of her nature, her habits are alluded to in the mural, Williams has indicated that Dorothy is actually an amalgam of three female personalities, chief of which is the artist's own.
- ³ For further information about the archaeological process, please consult Ted Lindberg's catalogue to the Charles H. Scott Gallery exhibition of *Reflection/Extension*, staged at the Emily Carr College of Art & Design, April/May, 1984.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Reflection/Extension* has been shown twice: first at the Surrey Art Gallery in Winter 1983/84, then at the Charles H. Scott Gallery. Although the same number of items was included in each manifestation, although certain sequences were identical in both, there were also differences. Williams has more than 232 panels and objects that pertain to the piece and hence she has the option of creating variables each time it is shown.

At the Charles H. Scott Gallery, the rowboat was included as item 232, a piece of sculpture that went well with the gallery's pier-like pillars. In this manifestation the plastic sheets mentioned in the article were included for the first time. The swimmer reproduced here was made as a substitution for an earlier, more benign image.

⁷ The watercolour referred to was not, in fact, the first item in the mosaic, but rather one at the very beginning that was of obvious iconographic significance.

⁸ Those who know Williams' art well could connect the mirror to *La Specola* (Florence) which is an anatomical museum whose name means *double mirror*. The artist has photographed and thought about the significance of the museum's contents which seem to her a beautiful and reverent celebration of the mysteries of the body as understood in the late Renaissance period. She brought to her study of Dorothy's *fragmenti* a similar delicacy and awe.

⁹ This photograph was taken at the Surrey Art Gallery's show of *Reflection/Extension*. At the Charles H. Scott Gallery, the metal 3 was placed to the left of the tri-partite fish.

¹⁰ For a more lengthy description of the mural as installed at the Charles H. Scott Gallery, please see the review in *Vanguard* (Summer 1984), pp. 51-52.

IMAGES

Dorothy in her Boat and the installation at the Charles H. Scott Gallery were photographed by Williams. Robert Keziere photographed Ed's image and that of the fish. The deer and the centrefold vignettes were colour-separated at Cleland-Kent Western Ltd.

BARRY McKINNON



INTERVIEW /

Barry McKinnon, Sharon Thesen

Sharon Thesen interviewed Barry McKinnon in Prince George in October, 1983. The following transcription was prepared by McKinnon as a condensation of the taped materials. The speakers are identified by initials.

ST What sense do you have of yourself as a poet in this particular territory?

BMc Coming to Prince George as a poet was quite strange. In fact I didn't want anybody to know about it — something I hid. I literally got kicked out of an apartment because my hair was "too long," so you can imagine if I told anyone I was a writer or poet, I'd *really* be in trouble. The toughness here in 1969 when I came was pretty obvious if you had some kind of interest like poetry or music that seemed sissyish, or whatever. It was worse here than growing up in Calgary, which was a similar context. I think it's everywhere. There are certain things you just don't show interest in or else you're suspect. So starting at the college was tense because I was to teach literature and poetry and I'd never done that before. I'd never taught creative writing. It was interesting, though, to find that there was an interest in this approach to things. However tough the town was, there were people who did want to write short stories or poetry. So I think over the years a group of us simply went about working as writers and found within the group that we created, that there was no problem at all. There was no problem putting on a poetry reading series because we always had audiences and student support for these events. The support for writing and poetry became almost like a normal thing. Some people go hunting, kill a moose every year, and some people go to poetry readings. Eventually it seemed like we actually had a place. You didn't have to be defensive about being an artist or writer. That's changed somewhat. Now there is a visible effort to get rid of literary activity, at least in its connection with the college.

ST And go back to an image of the city more congenial with its origins? When you go down to the mall you see people walking around, doing their shopping in logging jackets and boots, whereas in Vancouver, people go around in business suits or jogging outfits.

BMc This is one reason I like this town. I lived in Montreal and Vancouver and Calgary. People actually think they're living in these big places [laughter], where there are all kinds of styles and surfaces that people float in and out of; everything is hip and groovy. Here, those social definitions and styles have never been very operative. One punk rocker in this town really stands out, and better watch out, just like a poet better watch out, or anybody else. It seems to me you take on the characteristics of the place itself, and you take your chances simply because you will be visible and you will be confronting those people who don't like you and who will say so.

ST Just to go back and get a bit of history here, because you came when the college [College of New Caledonia] opened. When I was here and when Brian Fawcett was here, there was no college, there was no place. There was Gundy's News. We all left in about '64 or '65 and just thinking back to what you were saying, Brian Fawcett wrote a serial poem in about 1968, called *Book of a North Manual*, in which he has the image of Orpheus getting kicked to death in the can of the Simon Fraser Hotel beer parlour. Then the college opened with its English Department, and you were hired, and as you say, the musicians, the philosophers, the other academics. You may not have wanted to be visible yourself as a poet, but you wanted the poetry out, right?

BMc Originally I didn't plan to do anything. I simply got a job and ended up in a place. I didn't like it at first. The place seemed to embody everything I'd been trying to escape, and there, all of a sudden, I had this job. Charlie Boylan worked here the first year, and he said, you know, we've got to do something here; there is work to be done. He was probably thinking more in terms of political activity, but at the same time he'd graduated with an M.A. in Canadian Literature and wanted to start a poetry reading series. We thought, here's a population of people who have been isolated in every sense culturally. The money was always good in Prince George and that's part of the reason for coming. People could come and live in a trailer for a few years and make lots of money. It was that idea of going to the north and then going back south, a fact which made the city very transient. But the college became a permanent institution. Somebody decided that it was time that this other level of "culture" should take place. That's not to say that there weren't people with the little theatre, and I think Ken Belford read once in a coffee house [laughter], so there had been at least one poetry reading. Somebody decided that the town, and I guess it was a matter of population to some degree, was big enough to sustain a college. But I think the college they wanted was more along a career-vocational kind of situation and what they got were some long hairs who were imported, and who in many ways didn't know their ass from a hole-in-the-ground about the nature of this place. I found that I had to convince these kids in cork boots that there was some value in poetry. And it didn't take very long because what was the alternative? You work in the mill. The social and cultural possibilities are pretty limited. There's the outdoors stuff that happens up here, which is great, but the poverty is on that other level . . .

ST Like Olson's ghosts ducking under the projector beam.

BMc Yes, I think so. Why should people be denied access to their own language and thought and contemplation of their own experience, which I think poetry and this kind of activity is really involved with?

ST And offered a vulgar version of the material in its place. But isn't that what you also love about the place?

BMc What I first loved about this place was that everything was imitated from some even cheaper source. I mean the levels of cheapness, really [laughter]! I've never been in a British pub, but here you walk in one day, the pub is full of absolute drunks, with holes punched in the walls, and the next day it's been turned into an English pub. But the wood isn't real. Reds are big here. You walk into these bars and all of this red flocked wallpaper turns you into an epileptic — until you get a drink.

ST Do you know that lovely poem of George Stanley's called "B.C. for bill bissett?"

the green & grey of the land-
scape

the red & gold of the pub

the black & white of the night

BMc He's got it; those colours.

ST In many of the poems in *The the*, there is a painful consciousness on the part of the poet of a tension between two completely different perceptions of beauty, or the nature of beauty. And that there you are, between them, because really, there is nowhere else to go.

BMc Ken Belford has an interesting early poem called "Carrier Indians," which gets exactly that sense. The last stanza goes,

Ugly people with large eyes.

Having nowhere to go:

I am one of them.

There is another Belford line: "the worse it gets the better." What you want is a certain clarity, at least on one level, that throws you into the confusion about who you are, which is then somehow translated into the poem. Isn't that your job, finally! I don't like it half the time, but I don't know how else to go about it. John Harris and I were talking and he reminded me of something I'd said. I punned on the idea of writing up here as being "Woolcoco." If there is this junk pile that's supposed to be a civilization, or whatever, how do you deal with it? The "style" *isn't* Rococo. It all becomes material, picking up the imitations. But you end up staying in places. The trailer implies that you're going to be moving on, right? Well, the trailers have become an actual building, permanent trailers that will never be moved.

ST I feel that in your work there are two environments or two sensibilities that seem to be operating all the time. One is a bewildered but at the same time very clear sense of the crassness of the city — and not just *this* city, by the way — and the other is institutional, in which you're teaching creative writing to the citizens of this city. Would you talk about your experience as a writer teaching English, and specifically, creative writing?

BMc It seems that in fourteen or fifteen years that the city, whatever the city is, has been more important in my imagination than the institution. The institution is the place where I work. It provides a place to go and do this work. But now the institution, which is maybe more common as a big city phenomenon, has created its own world which I find more horrific than that logger sitting downtown in a bar who's going to hate your guts (or at least your perception might be that that's happening). There is a certain kind of danger in the street, a certain kind of violence which is clearer than this . . .

ST . . . bureaucratic violence.

BMc That's exactly what it is. John Harris in an interesting way has looked at the whole country in terms of . . . he feels that Canadians are . . . I don't know if I can really capsulize it, but it's that you get plopped into the wilderness, and given that, the next thing you do is create *lots* of bureaucracy. How do you locate yourself in a world you find chaotic . . . ?

ST I think you put it well yesterday when you said to me that it's a situation where you have bureaucrats defining what is real and valuable, and I don't know if that's a danger just in Prince George.

BMc Most of my life is spent in somebody else's imagination of what should be done. But what they do is imagine a system and then abandon it themselves and leave you there to deal with the shit. The system I'm working in now, The Developmental Centre, is not like a course you've personally designed, if that's the word. You don't have responsibility for it either, which is one scary thing about giving a course — you're responsible for it. So all of a sudden, you find yourself working through someone else's idea, imagination, or system, and that they don't take responsibility for it really bothers me. Its obvious failures are turned into "successes." Talk about economic restraint. The centre, in terms of offering English courses, is twice as expensive to run as it would be with regular classes and teachers. I have half the students I usually have and because it's all self-paced and modularized, it's also very impersonal. Work is put into a basket and I mark it and put it back into the basket — a very impersonal and alienating situation with questionable results. Which means half the students don't come. There is no reason to. You have to ask some fundamental questions when this sort of thing happens.

ST So what happens to your imagination when so much of it is engaged in filtering this other imagination? If imagination is the right word for this sort of engineering of people and "results." Any real imagination is always moral, finally and fundamentally.

BMc It should be. It's moral if you take responsibility for it. On another level, we've been in this situation of being colonials — other countries taking the wood and the resources and leaving the shit pile. I mean, isn't that what's happened? Fortunately, or unfortunately, some of us have stayed in the shit pile, to say, "Here, kid, read this poem because it has something to do with all of those trees and the shit pile." The classroom is a place, in a sense, like the poem, where you can think and do and exercise your imagination and thought

without censorship on that activity. The system is now trying to isolate kids and make certain kinds of study questionable. Students might not think the classroom is valuable, but wait until they start doing these packaged courses, where they don't have a teacher. You have a few marks on a piece of paper that says your grammar is okay, or it isn't. It's like the old story in the 1950s: that fragmentation of activity that *never* adds up. It seems to me, the act of poetry, particularly writing it, is that you're in the process of trying to make it add up: you *and* this world of experience.

ST I have a sense of your poems as architectural — that they build, add up. That's exactly what your poems do: they *add up* a number of statements and images, which, together and incrementally, add up to a certain state of affairs.

BMc I agree with you. If it isn't adding up in any other way. . . . The people who are devising these systems in education and what have you are not concerning themselves with those questions of what it all adds up to.

ST They don't believe there is an image in those systems.

BMc No, they don't. Though the image is me, and those students wired into computers and head gear and slide shows. There's an anecdote that might have something to do with classrooms and these systems and the fact that we've still got people, humans, bouncing into each other. I was in Hazelton once, actually it was up at Kispiox, where they've got this rodeo. It's a really wild northern rodeo where you have guys really drunk at 8 in the morning, crawling out of tents and campers. I was up there with Ken Belford. We were sitting there one morning and it was just chaotic. Guys were starting to yell and scream already: early morning, lighting fires, revving up their cars. Ken looked out over the vista, the corrals and all of these animals, and he literally meant it. These horses and cows are wandering around together, and he says, "You know, rodeos are great, because it's a good place for the animals to get together." Like, the horses could talk to each other for a while, saying, "Hey, what's happening, man" [laughter]. And Ken meant it. He has this great way of distilling things.

ST That's a lovely image of paradise, the animals conversing and so on.

BMc The humans themselves are rolling in the mud, and they're not very happy. They want to be. But the animals seemed quite happy to be together. It seems to me that classrooms and all of these situations should be like that. I'm not complaining. I think within it you can survive and get the so-called work done, but it's getting harder all of the time.

ST Do you find that teaching creative writing has helped your writing or hindered it or both?

BMc Personally I always felt a lot of pressure in those classes because nobody has come up with a particular formula, or way of going about it. In some regular English classes you can "control" the situation, if that's what's required, and sometimes it is. You can't work 15 hours a week in the classroom jumping around like Big Bird all of the time. It's just too much. I found Creative Writing difficult because there never really was a way of getting

at it, and really never a way of, on one level, of criticizing or showing how it should be done. I didn't feel it was my right to tell some student to quit writing, or go away because he'd written a hymn, or something. So I always found great tension. I always wanted the students to say, "This is what should be done." They didn't know what to do either [laughter]. I found it embarrassing a lot of the time. But the class did provide a place people could wander in and out of. Eventually I collected thousands of pages; I managed to get a couple of anthologies out of it, of solid writing. John Harris just published a book by Meryl Duprey this summer. Meryl was ready for a book and so the Creative Writing class was a place for him, someone who *was* writing poetry. I took a Creative Writing class from Irving Layton in the mid-60s. At that time in Canada, who was visible? In Calgary there would have been George Bowering, but I was too afraid to approach him or to take his Creative Writing class. Well, actually I didn't *want* to take a Creative Writing class then anyway. But later I saw Layton and Leonard Cohen talking and laughing on TV and I thought, he looks like he's having fun, maybe I should take the guy's course. So, in a way, if you're visible as a writer, and if somebody is interested, they'll look you up, they'll find you.

ST You write poems that deal with the tension of work, or your sense of your value as a poet. For instance, in a couple of lines in *thoughts/sketches*, you say you are "kept from your work by work." You talk about your own "absence from what you know," which I gather is part of the condition of work. There's a lot of press about work poetry lately.

BMc I guess what you do is make your job experience part of the subject matter because it's a major part of your experience.

ST How come you don't just sit down and write a narrative poem about when you arrive at work and all the bullshit that goes on all day?

BMc I suppose if I wrote prose, all of those narrative details, if I could find the form for them, could turn into a great tragi-comedy. But for me, the poetry is a quick take and the quickest take. All of a sudden all of these forces come together and I find myself scribbling a line, or a thought, trying to make some sense out of the sources of my tension. I want to nail something down. I really want to nail it down and if I'm stupid enough, I might be able to do it.

ST Exactly.

BMc But instead of filling the experience out with narrative detail, I find myself leaving out specific and literal and contextual references, particularly in my recent work. I don't want people to know where it's coming from. I don't even want to know where it's coming from [laughter]. Lately, I've been thinking about how poems generate. I've almost started to think it's a result of some kind of chemical thing, because all of a sudden, I just feel like I can write a poem.

ST I know that feeling too. I feel it in my stomach and my adrenal glands start acting up. Maybe all art is pathological symptoms.

BMc I've sort of turned it around to non-projective verse. It started really as a little poem in *The the*. I thought quite consciously, "I will write a poem tonight." Maybe once in your life you have that privilege of saying, *tonight!* [laughter] and I thought, I would drink while I did it.

...

The word "tempo" came out of a poem that George Stanley had written. Somebody told him about this word "tempi" and he really liked it. So he wrote a poem with the word "tempi" in it. And so I thought, well, it was one of those situations where Joy had gone and the kids were gone and I was sitting in the cabin and I didn't have anything to do. There's no TV and the radio doesn't come in clearly after 10 p.m. or so. And so I poured a drink and thought, I'm going to write this poem. All I had were the words "tempi" and "tempo." So I wrote the word "tempo" down. I suppose a projective verse writer would say, tempo, blah blah blah — cook through the poem quickly. But with this one . . . I just stared at that word for quite a while, and then something was said on the radio: "the world's 20 biggest songs. . . ." That was the next line, or close to it, so I wrote that down.

ST "All night long, get the job done . . ."

BMc That line was out of a song, or it was something again, said on the radio. I'm not sure of the actual rime sequence between these poems but . . . I'd write another line down and then wait for something else to happen and enter the poem. So in the period of two or three hours I'd written this thing with very little revision. More and more I find myself doing that. Pat Lane was saying, a couple of years ago, referring to John Newlove: if you stay with poetry, it's going to do some strange things to you [laughter]. When I was 16, I was writing 20 pages a day, because I thought I was in love. I probably was. But as Pat was saying about Newlove, Newlove would sit down and write down, say, the words "the rock" and just stare at that for a while. And Pat was, in his own humorous way, saying, "man, that's far-out enough, just to get the words 'the rock' down."

ST Is it ever!

BMc One word is enough to — is a devastating experience. And I've been thinking even just the word *the* is a strange. . . . Once again you're in this experience of actually putting a word on a piece of paper, which is pretty far out.

ST Sitting there looking at or through or with that word, you wait, literally, for the whole world to come in, and you think, what a strange occupation.

BMc Yeah, it is. But then again, to sort of tie it together, why not do this? You're not doing it all the time, but in a way it's your life. I mean I don't jump out of bed and put some leotards on and go to work as a poet. Robert Creeley is beautiful for this because he makes writing seem like normal human

activity, which it is. What better thing to do, in one sense. I'm not thinking of that Williams line where you scream out, "I am a poet, I am a poet," which I think is a great privilege when it happens, but most of the time we're not. But I'm constantly looking for the poem. And that's what separates us from the moose hunter. He's looking for a moose; we're looking for a poem [laughter]. And other people are looking for something, too. I was reading through Joy's women's magazines with all of these articles and ads for courses and approaches to help you find what you're looking for. For some people it might be just to lose weight or get a different job and then they'll be happy. Poetry doesn't always give that privilege, but what it seems to do for me — it's like making anything. If you get a line, a perception or an actual poem, what better thing to happen to you? Some of the poems that I've carried around, that have been important to me, are sometimes just goofy little discoveries in language that seem very quickly to capture those large states and you think, "that's what poetry is." It reveals that thing. And you feel this poem or line is necessary. This had to be said, and somebody said it. God bless them [laughter]!

ST I wanted to bring up, in relation to David Phillips' writing, the blossoms, the flowers, the garden. You find this in John Pass' poems as well, even in Norm Sibum's — that especially in Vancouver, one is living among all this beauty, right? And in Prince George, you say something about the heartless wasteland. The heartless wasteland is in Vancouver too and so you get all this irony vis-a-vis the physical beauty of the place. Not that you need beautiful surroundings in order to write, and in fact it can be totally distracting and intimidating, but in a way, in Prince George, there isn't that easily discerned degeneration from garden to wasteland.

BMc I think there *is* the garden here. All geography has incredible subtleties. What looks dead to somebody else is actually alive. A biologist will go and find a bug crawling around, a beetle or something. In winter here, you put some skis on and you go out into the snow. You might just experience hypothermia, visions of yourself dying. There is a great opening paragraph in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Lawrence's notion that civilization itself was the rubble. We are living in the rubble. It's kind of an industrial rubble that we've created. We're not even talking about pollution anymore. We've accepted it as part of the rubble. Within the rubble you form habitats, so this little community of writers, or the press and publishing work we've done, is like forming a habitat in a larger sense of decay.

ST Robin Blaser says we're entering a new monastic age.

BMc I think the worse things get, the more you find people devising ways of handling it. Some of them are pretty corny. Now everybody is joining health and exercise clubs. The air still stinks, the environment hasn't really been cleaned up, as they say, but everybody is jogging. They're breathing more of that shit in now than they ever did. But people want to feel healthier. They do form habitats and their activities take on some pretty strange and maybe

aberrant qualities. People are involved in different kinds of therapy, again, to sort it out. I've always stuck to poetry. And it is therapeutic so some degree [laughter].

ST Sure it is. What do you hope?

BMc There is a strange kind of hope. I used to be more pessimistic than I am now. I think that some of the signs are very interesting. Whatever this search is, through the health club, so to speak, people are turning in on themselves and trying to find, literally, what can be beautiful about themselves, their own lives. That might be a monastic kind of activity. And in a sense, giving up is part of that process. You just give up. That's the extent of my pessimism. I don't believe that you can march and change anything large at this point. That kind of idealism is gone.

ST That's what I wanted to add to this business about the garden, paradise, and so on. You can describe this landscape, that way, and another landscape, that way, or you can go to Greece and write your poem. It doesn't matter where you are.

BMc There is only one landscape. One moving part.

ST One paradise. That sense that Phillips has, that conversation with your friends is paradise.

BMc Yes. There is a kind of singleness and maybe the poetry tries to get at that. What is it that connects us all? I mean thousands of years of poetry and so forth that make all of these conditions.

ST Because when you're writing the poem, whether you're conscious of it or not, you're having a conversation with that poetry of the last two thousand years, with your friends in poetry. Sometimes I'll think to myself, oh, this is a McKinnon line, or a Phyllis line, or a Wallace Stevens line.

BMc I've stolen a tremendous amount from everybody and sometimes I acknowledge it [laughter]. I've learned from David Phillips, Ken Belford, Pierre Coupey, Brian Fawcett and many people. It's all out there anyway. George Stanley has taught me something about weird inner cadence. Occasionally I've taken his cadence, and then my own will take over, if it's possible, at some other point. But I'll almost start a sing-song just to get me into the poem. So, there is a community and there always will be, I hope. Writing is solitary, but in another way it's not.

ST Can you articulate, at all, what happens when you end a line and then move to a new one? Why does it go there, instead of there?

BMc I think it's totally arbitrary in the sense that I'm not consciously thinking about where to break it. It happens quickly.

ST Not that you have this preconceived, triumphant little intention, but I don't think it's arbitrary. Something happens.

BMc Right. If a thought occurs in your head, does it break at a certain point, to go on to another thought? If we think of a stream of images, the implication is that there is no break. But I don't think it works that way. There is a break. Now, wherever those lines break, hopefully, or maybe technically, it's to avoid confusion — that you're not running two thoughts together and to keep a momentum or rhythm going.

ST I can distinguish between your line breaks, line lengths, and so forth, and those of somebody who just doesn't know where to break a line. You do know where to break it. But you break it all over the page. I was just wondering if you have a certain feeling of space or sense of rhythm at that moment that makes you put those two words way over there as opposed to against the left margin.

BMc The sections themselves can be variable. I can get short sections or longer sections. A lot of the time when I'm writing I just run out of something to say at that point. If you're lucky, another little chunk will fall in. It might be something, again, just to get you on to the next section. It might not be the most important part of the poem, in your own mind. Ultimately, it might *become* the most important part — what you let drop in at a certain point. Poetry to me is all a mistake of sorts. What you discover is the result of a mistake. So a lot of the time in the poem, I'm trying to out-trick myself. Do you know what I mean? When you write for this many years, you learn a lot of tricks and this is why it keeps you pretty straight. The people who don't go on with poetry usually discover a form and they'll stick with it. No, that's not quite it. It's that they don't make enough mistakes anymore. Even with a tight poem, you've got to make a little mistake somewhere to allow the poetry to happen, it seems to me. I haven't worked out a scheme or schemata. The poem starts and it seems like I have, for myself, found a way, or a certain form. I don't know what it will end up as. But you have constantly to be involved with technique. I'm as capable as anyone else of writing an awful poem. When I say, make a "mistake" in the poem, I'm saying, allow the poem itself to happen. I'm working on a thing now called *The Centre*. It's taking so long because I'm trying to incorporate grammatical errors that work. There is no grammar. There is, but in poetry it's not the Standard English grammar we have to teach.

ST As we were saying yesterday, the whole process in poetry is to misplace the modifiers . . .

BMc To make instinctive moves. In terms of the poetic, it's by the seat of my pants. Everything I do is. You want to do something [laughter] — play those drums, play that piano, and if you're going to do it, and *say* you're doing it, you've got to learn how to make it look like you're doing it [laughter]. You don't want anyone to say, this isn't a poem, or this guy is terrible; they *might* say that, but inside, within yourself, you've got to know that with all of your lack of technique, with all of your hangups and bad syntax, that you actually pulled the thing off.

THE CENTRE (An Improvisation for Marian)

*all around the poorly loved
their lives follow life back
into stone and they dream
a sweeter consonance at the centre*

— ROBIN BLASER

in the centre,

I work the files, records, scores find
the rules a gift, could you be sure
the value of the rule

★

the sun is human, lights the rock
pile outside, breeze moves

the dying plant

★

it is horrible, what happens: history, and to think

★

bits of paper: a pile, a basket — paper
a paragraph where she sees a farm, a river — the awkward
sentence I mark, find fault with — this trouble with my own
(the task:

to make visible the farm, the heart, the centre

★

sun out. the shadow line across the rocks.
still a tension — the voices light gasping

(yet,

the centre makes us

human

— a laughter, a boredom, a joke to know
who we are — what we do

★

I watch from the centre desk —
the disk whirs, a beep,

— *his* machine, he slouches toward,

Cat Hat

low to his ears

★

time, as place made flesh; less faith and you
require these wires: overhead the message flashed, a constant
are your lights on. outside, a fog. you can't see
movement, gone too quick, a brief passage of the silk-like
dress — her lovely mouth and manner

★

neither privilege, nor care. but how we want a surety, when all
seems ending — or has ended (to find yourself here — sent to the
centre:

it could be an obscure paradise — no experience
necessary — and what

we want, found:

human talk — sex and grammar, a happy lovely
world, an invention, a psycho/pathology — someone's been
and been dreaming

and when you wake, the centre is there

★

in the centre, know. they think this a last or beginning
chance — and what you learn: the labyrinth of the dream — work,
as in the old days — never seeming ending. the dutiful will miss
it. those who don't, take a chance, make themselves an edge:

the grammar machine unto itself. only humans
in trouble: it is all human — (what we cover up
when the centre falls apart

★

moments you invent and dread — when you think you want a long
stretched and clear landscape of trees and rocks — and a sense
of *you* as singular and empty. some wind blows against you, you,
in this grayness feel thin, alive, (fear disappears. here
again — anticipations, the psycho logical where they look
for you (and what appears to steal you away, is *you*, the thing
itself

★

no system for chaos. they take your life away with pleasure

★

abandon the scraps, the words. I haven't checked my plant
for days, the changing mutability of the rock pile (blasted
chunks.

early, I saw the bird crack the seed, the ingenious
bird. rose bush scrapes
the window. I've come to love
the wind

(and in the blurred eye catch
the funeral the bearers wait for in laughter

★

some stayed out, in the hall, to smoke.
the test will place them — a diagnosis, a hopelessness — the
defeat they already know. why write or speak

★

staple. include, submit, use: commands to make me, *they*.

be quiet

(I'd like to be of
some large silence of a shadow, of a place — this
anxious self, dulled, wants it out, wants to tell the
accordion player, go away in your leather shorts

★

gray sky. gray wind. what state of weather, or self be
described, found and signified. the centre is fluid — a flux
closes, opens — *is* a state — fluorescent, fluid — the soft and
hard.

when you're sick you see it, sick —

★

no complaints, amidst the deep babble . . . barely a move
against the cruelty of the mind with its single moving parts,
as cruel as that which yields and bends
for false belief. take us out to the rocks. stake us in the
cold — clear and unnamed.

look up from your scraps

★

no music without silence . . . the fall leaves on the willow appear
as fish in a stream (strong, south wind — silver bellies, or
last night, from the porch — an old moon lights the cherry leaves,
stars, I thought . . . these slight occupations, as experts poke
at phones, recommend the proper tests, tape their clapper bells

★

a centre to hold to when the
mind goes out of the heart, heart out of the mind

★

today, the centre smells — an old school: paper, ink, eraser bits —
pencil wood, when you expect electric smoke, nylon
gas. there is a point where authority must cheat its rules, get
you through. I've seen meadows, space, and the point
between the comma and the word, as a point, an entrance,
a meadow

★

sense my own failure, when I see in others some success. John
at the desk, can talk — intelligent to admit
confusions, the arbitrary — smile, glint and send them on.
real lessons are elsewhere of your own finding. a rock
a tree — the way the light just went to gray again
yet we want the words, what is taught

★

turn around
half face
the centre, the axis — a kind of reversal
where the centre moves fast, as a circumference spun,
yet doesn't move at all

image: the poor fat guy, days
on the spelling arcade
and those who sit around
useless without him

★

the sentence beginning, "The Hindu faithful . . .

(that which begs me give it
meaning and clarity — the pencil scrawl correction
they cannot read, nor rightly care to: here,
you want out of the sentence — the long sentence — be
of the Hindu faithful who bathe along the river

★

it is not a matter. what is sense, but a connection
where self disappears or becomes the instrument and
the head is large with what it discovers — as a line that
drifts on, out to the yard long and continuous, past
the rocks, parking lots, malls and centres . . .

★

they let you go — far enough, you don't know

there will be a time and location of the natural. no
computer beeps in the deep forest —

(too many hours, unmarked, to get there

★

— want in a dark hour, a rosy spirit —
to appear, and that when we laugh, it is of
laughter itself

★

laugh anyway — that that taken as serious is just a scratch.
the real centre, is intact — is of
a beauty . . . a strength of unwavering, of a solid
solitude — and of the horror, — its release

★

I'm years back — and feel driven to let the
swirl . . . what shape, give it?

some stay calm with higher faith, some are drunk —
on knees confess their misery

★

drive to go on. shifts and changes as today on
the porch felt a sense of spring (rain smell,
released dirt —

November
wet
grass and leaves

★

no centre to teach, but becomes excuse that unbelievably
yields a value: the soft, human — the voices, a
result of that which contains them — a mask, a body, the centre —
a centre of the arbitrary unknown

★

I'm lost in the centre, as the plant (dormant with no expression
for its own condition, but that what we see and say it to be.
I'm outside to see — walk past my own office — look close to the
rocks I describe and want the air, sense of my own body
moving up through the lot to the truck. grin the loss of
time I don't think

★

the days we stink in this work

★

it's a trick to stay quiet, not to show lack of interest. slight
marvel at my system — to make time go, avoid work: a walk, the
glance at texts — the chat, the conscious joke, note
the unknowns with faked concern —
note these clouds (never before

— sun on the portables

★

no criticism or praise — barely, what is given, a
condition in this moving state: circuits of mind
and skin's divisions — the tough girl smiles. muscled
boys held in thought, equations, yield to parse
and paraphrase

★

higher up, baboons

★

the more the centre is lauded — the more we sleep. and old talk
about the spirit, gone in a lie. and that to come awake — when
you want this sleep, means no epic, for the centre, nor cure.
if it were only a matter of grammar

a list of numbers

a measure for the

emptiness

★

the drill's lesson — drill

★

snow

— the light ground

the white rocks

★

it begins to seem normal like talk of death for the dying —
the paraplegic curse's energy gone to acceptance of
the twisted limbs —

(in this hobble across the centre floor,

we learn

—good humour in these assigned tasks

sort the

twisted math and grammar

could we shove it/were it ours

★

I do nothing. slight
chuckle at the girl's
rat's nest hair

get

beyond the rule for

“more better”

★

were it in my heart to know, no other road
possible

★

what is missing, that drives me. not circles,
or schemes but a happy dream as a thin wisp
out of the angst. the ones who know, cheer me on
as if in this stupidity I could cheer them.

we are of the rocks, the tree, the speaking
animals —

to wait

/

to measure

our lives

against the infinite

(so be it

our senseless laughter

without desire

but this view of the centre's

edge

gasping

air

★

to be unwavering,

I go askew — the top's wobble when
the centre disappears

★

a thin sleep: drunk beyond sense. tests of disembodiment/
or how we cling to the foolish chance of a kiss. no formula
for the path when the needle pin centre warps

★

to want the freezing bird's view of the seed/
to know the extent of the gift — a letter to . . . some
words, time, to ask forgiveness — I'm the fool to make
measures of the empty love —

★

one love. many hairy creatures
in big boots. I blew up and used the test to punish,
became the centre,
myself

★

almost
wept at the thought, and in my talk, of all that's inhuman
here

★

out on a flat sea, a centre-
each pleasure and happiness as if cheated. so
over the sea/centre edge. (just another surface — a long oblong
circle.
the universe you return to,
a journey
without calculation

★

no force to find or do. but who I am or was I
yet . . .

★

some so behind you wonder
why they're here.

(warmth, to talk, to be
the centre,
when most have left

★

the hapless dream shadows into stone, peripheries and paradise

★

I return to the scrawls
files,
scores,
and bits of speech —

THOUGHTS / SKETCHES

JOURNAL: after Pierre's paintings

kept thinking how at 36

— more aware
of the moment — heavier,
in the calm fear of death, less abandoned in sex — can drink
more, yet am careful. both: out there
& in here.

I'll be the last to go, but I'm travelling (this, is the difference —
in wanting to see more, or go so deep into sleep I need
less: eat lots of food. I've craved a smoke for years,
but quit to see what it was. this is a slow note to David Phillips
in gumboots & our jokes: this wish for the clear moment, nameless
and which guides, as speech & shifting gears, drinking beers into
the hamburger stands — a good life —

★

South America is upon us. we drive up the coast. it seems
the days are numbered —

★

heavy air, gray — winter Sechelt, dark Sunshine Coast, how
now thru trees, the lots are filled with tipped over cars, Euclids
in front yards. junk. home at last. the garbage everywhere:

yet not one human being in sight.

think of limbo again. the wages of sin, pretty high. we'll
die all right — stretched out & conscious, will wish to speak to no one
sad & miserable. this occurs in a dream. what the poets knew,
as preparation for the last image of a tree.

★

you will not know this, having your own world. standing
on some ferry slip, cold & whipped by wind — waiting as we
do, the human mind poking here & there for possibilities. to
get a coffee is an act, toss quarters against the wall. what
is this but a constant . . . most everything is taken
away. cheap versions of the old. lined up for video
games

tanks & guns, quarters & fun. I think ahead
to the afternoon. I think behind — *the paintings*, another
thing to fall into — movements of colour & something
other.



OOGA BOOGA (for John Harris & Bill Little)

— Ooga booga, is yr answer
in the dark,

in dim light beneath
the wooden chainsawed heads of beaver, moose. Ooga booga, the
rug is torn —

a man with lumps of mud on his boots
stands a-top the table, pokes at the light,
and takes advice from a crowd. how to fix the light.
with a jackknife, with some tape. put the mind
to work but keep the feet in mud. Ooga booga

Ooga booga

there must be an answer. what war, or what has devastated us who now
sit in the Croft. these drunk ones play beautiful pool. those drunker
cannot move. Speak! Speak! Ooga booga.

— move the medicine to yr lips.

the world is mad, yet we started out, thinking otherwise and lose
ourselves in talks of politics, problems with the *rational* mind

Ooga booga

keep it dark or darker. do not
fix the light.

A FEW THOUGHTS

marking the students' scrawl — lists of
books they've compiled

I'm at a desk — want
to write a poem, afraid I feel nothing — or have felt
nothing for days.

 this burden not to care — not
the clarity of the war where they rout you out — up
against a wall to be shot . . . for this thinking
that goes nowhere (as it should

★

this is to forget, some part of the mind where the
bibliography is
 — better an image than a list of books

★

(somewhere Ken Belford swats a blackfly and looks out
over the mountains and sees his heart turn to stone and
come alive again

 — this could be a horrible life but for
our unjustified faith, all the worse to know
even the tricks of that.

 tree and rock and the woman
breathing,
 these long years, the blessing to have
a wife

★

I'm not afraid of the depression — these hearts have had
practice and thus
to know the world is vast.

— a campfire teaches, the sweet apple —
our senses alive:
so what do we do for days, in the daze
and this world of suspicion,
where the pencil is of no use

★

computer screens make me dizzy — a bit sick
to my stomach,
the lists of books out
of order
is my punishment
& for each cheque I get, they seem to say *you should*
be afraid

★

John Harris looks out over his life with a major
faith,
two clear acres in his mind; his is a large
mind
& they fear him

★

treat this as a journey,
a mistake to think
of winning anything — the hope of the lottery
treat this like an opening & a blessing
that the language seems free/
may show us where
to go

THOUGHTS IN FALL

how we wish
sense,

as to cut the beautiful tree for wood, and to take
a break for hot tea after hard work. the fire
is on

& I see trees smelled them
all day

— the wind whip chill around Connaught hill —

no pulp in the air

★

memory sweet & short: yet we
agonize

some task, demand, that leaves us
un-prepared,

thus a fear & disbelief

though it is a source, itself of beauty
or what makes us so:

★

in the imagined
landscape,

I see a world. we are gathered
and almost as in this world, tethered
(which is not to exclude pain & death

we believe the sounds in our heads — the songs &
momentarily these emotions, real — that draw
us off.

& each day, a multiplicity — small
city of thought

★

we have reached here happy & alive (forces, ones
we have lent ourselves to, diminished — or
we make them,
shape them into another more reasonable
thing.

this is a human trust, to give each
a frontier — a landscape of body &
language,
(sweetness of our offering

—

of the flowers dumped over the hill — many are left
& alive

I've wandered, not always
lost
in this temptation to exist.

in one sense, have gone nowhere, over
a hill in the imagination:

but it is to love & bear it
as in a child's absence, your
own absence from what you know. the knowledge
of the father's inevitable
death

(mother's wheezing cough
from cigarettes —

★

the natural elements will be seen
as new

★

— my age a necessary accumulation:
Dickenson's slant of light —
Blake's beams
of love.



LISTEN

listen to music everyday, today
feel depressed, closed in (a weight
the music won't lift

the world, not Tarn's
beautiful contradictions,
but *contradictions*: all that which goes against
human sense — the old sensitive clichés
of trees crushed & ground out, this air
to take 10 years off a useful life, nerves
wracked,

that you are kept from your work
by work

long / day wind: Nov 20/80
someday the willow out front
will snap

& come to ground

brittle & old

THIS MORNING

this morning, happy — but I'm
older, almost calmer
to see the orange air
light the hall.

it is not always this way, our old senses
say otherwise
yet yield to the inexplicable

★

image: (a man walks out of
the bush
holding a purple flower

★

my daughter with her brother
on the way to a sitter

— imagine

how we've tried to call love & recognize
its moment — pushed to it,
held to it when all else is a
heartless wasteland

is it not some human spirit at work
for me to see the orange light, to know this
as clear purpose —

CABIN

June 81

not miserable

but a sense of the end of things

— the baby wakes

singing —



THOUGHTS DRIVING

onward up the road, it is you again driving some 10
year path — looking past the hospital for
signs of life, but never think of investing in say, Tacos —

it is the elusive sought. you know the truck handles well
& you are high up.

of this friend, you think, I love him — & a happiness
that work is done — that the air,
the light,

meets & enters the eye



I REALLY REALLY THINK SO for Sid Marty

birds eat the seeds
the snow recedes. in the shade, it may never
leave,

or the boat is there forever.

but I thought, I must get back to chopping wood,
the trees & some sense of the sea — (the rural prairie —

here it's the depression. no pretense of good clothes
& hairdos. boots scrape the dust & do a drunken
dance in the cabaret — hell is typical: yet
you barely believe the story over a screwdriver — her two
boys dead 1 month (now she's back at work

you cared, carry yourself around for days. there is
good company, yet one or two will hate you, see
you as their idea.

spring/sing check out the tire
deals,

a moment of connection with less synaptical
activity, or see the living vision of the bum along the
ditch his bucket full of bottles, while the managers think they're
safe — how else give orders drive proud those rabbits.

(a sick life with many pleasures — a right life

yet there is the point you must pretend versus meaninglessness —
that there is correct human activity — the comma splice
unequal to El Salvador: question, what do we know. the
boys & girls are fresh in their flesh. you love their smiles — it
seems they are what you want them to be. untaught, they seem
to know,

the ones in accidents — in your
midst.

THOUGHT TO JOY

I almost
know how to live. your breasts I've loved, never
lost in politics or hate or spite — that you've
been yourself when I am no one.
time for a love poem. old fashioned, how I'll goddamned
well hold you & love those aspects you'll never
know.

A LETTER for Steve Stack

ease of light/
or how the whole world
would seem to be
yours. to look at
it
askance
with a faith the boat will never sink
AHOY
— I could see you swimming & making it —
as it is here, to have a good heart — to see
yourself
always
within & of the swirl.



POETRY EMBARKS US ON A SEA after George Stanley

on land, we change oil
take attendance & forget to dance

institutions, a stormy sea. the managers meet early to
decide your fate. we sleep in the poem — act with acts
of faith. girls & boys in the hall make sense. our laughter
a consequence of

those out to get us. days on the computer
terminal is no way to live. give us pencils & clear heart
loss, an aversion to versions.

poetry embarks us, as a friend will test you, to make sure
your love is worth it, adds up . . . is a sea, of crossed correct
wires.

clear north. first snow — the
mind is clear

November 16 — notice the wood go
(the fire — cedar snap/birch

thought earlier of England — France, places
I've never been. here,

the first snow

elsewhere — the job I won't go to —
better to watch my son carry wood & wield the wheel
barrow he gets more wood with

chop away, make
a big fire.



SELF STUDY for Peter Byl

— over these coffees — the darkness
(as the 50s fat kid in the postcard — holding
out 2 dead fish

— a long time
ago, fire would warm your heart. now, a
version of the penitentiary

jobs

for a 30¢ stamp they'll turn you in — or know some
inner point of your own honesty, truth — & throw
beauty away for

cognitive complexities



COMPOSING

composing in the dark
till light & connections with the bird
outside —

fiorinal dulls a pain, pushes
the mind a little
out of itself — not this constant
din of *the decision*.

the bird sings & I love the
gray air he sings in, thru the paper
curtain —

later there will be meetings with humans, each
with a version, a story: the advice, *legal*

(does the air trap the bird. is it a cry I
hear, a warning — or simply joy at dawn.

has this become me? this naked flesh awake
in a bed, the throbbing gum, the double dose
of fiorinal, aspergum

my own fear begins
to defeat me & from this, I must lift
myself up

be the clear invisible
bird.

DAVID PHILLIPS



INTERVIEW /

David Phillips, Sharon Thesen

Sharon Thesen interviewed David Phillips in Vancouver in February, 1984. The transcription was prepared by Phillips. The speakers are identified by initials.

ST What do you think when you write, or how do you write?

DP I don't have any programme really. I scribble things down with a felt pen. Often I'm in the livingroom with the TV on or the stereo. I call it taking notes. These scribbles pile up over a few weeks or months and then I get to the typing part. I collate the notes; the technique resembles collage.

ST What sense do you have of the poem as completed; when does a particular poem begin or end?

DP I imagine there probably is a whole poem, or that some do appear that way — like whole articulations — but I'd rather think they're pieces of a larger work. The process is a bit like found poetry. I can't see the outer extremity of a "whole" work or something like that, but I don't care. I am, now, neither at the beginning nor the end of a poem but somewhere in it. I jokingly call it getting out of the way long enough. It's a pleasure beyond compare when it's happening — the scribbling is the beginning of the process but if I don't leave it too long, I can figure out what stuff belongs near other stuff.

ST ... this continuous, as you say, scribbling down ...

DP I see it as a compositional thing in terms of the typewriter or something — the actual laying down of lines and all the things line breaks do, for emphasis, shifts of attention — I do work to put the pieces together, but I'm never sure what the whole thing will look like. Then I get to the point where I don't think I have enough there and that's where things are trouble.

ST You don't have enough for one poem?

DP It's another kind of attention that I bring to bear on it. What's the term: "the intentional imagination." Some kind of word about how you can stare at it, really focus on it, try to locate the things that are missing. It's not all there yet, or there's not enough and often I won't get it, so I just sort of leave it alone and say it's part of the work — I just didn't — I wasn't lucky enough to get the rest of it. This is a kind of strategy of writing, I think.

ST I wanted to know who you write your poems for, who you have in mind, what community of writers, what audience; whom are you speaking to. Or who is going to read these poems in a way that you trust.

DP If I'm addressing someone in a poem, I think of them reading it. Or when I'm responding to something I've heard in a conversation and I quote someone, acknowledge the source. I like to weave things I've actually heard into the poems. I sometimes have this sense when I'm reading that the audience is making the poem, some sort of communal attention. But in terms of who I'm speaking to when I'm writing, the feeling is much like being in a conversation.

ST Yes, I notice that. I ask this question because your poems, more than anybody's, seem to me conversations with friends and they're not, in the original sense of the lyrical poem as the poet speaking to him/her self or speaking aloud, simply talking aloud; that in fact you address people, by name, frequently. George Stanley is the only other one I know who does this to that extent.

DP This goes back to when I met a group of poets and artists in the mid to late 60s. The friendships and the writing intermingled, and the conversation about writing. The conversations were somehow seamless with our lives; our lives and the writing were not to be separate entities. That's where I come from; that's where that thing started — out of these intense sorts of relationships — so that the talk in and around writing entered it. I began to see that what I was doing was occurring among the works of others. I felt I had the right to weave things I was hearing into the poems.

ST I like that notion: the life and the work, the friends, the conversation not being compartmentalized.

DP I didn't think I was involved in Literature. Right from the start, I sort of don't know, really, what to call it. I remember George Stanley saying there is no hierarchy. What we're saying could be placed beside anyone. It's that we're all trying to make sense of things and we're all equal in a way, all have the right to speak. I have this term for it: the democracy of the imagination.

ST Barry and I were talking about that too: the point at which a conversation with our contemporaries, but also any poem, is almost by definition a conversation with poets who preceded us. I sometimes feel oppressed by Shelley and Keats sitting there on my bookshelf while I'm trying to write.

DP . . . babbling away beside you.

ST What do I have to add to this. It's not that I really have anything to add in the sense of upping the ante. It's just my voice joining those other voices, or, as you said, trying to make sense of things.

DP All these books of voices. I remember we talked a lot about imported culture, and we didn't want to go around restaging someone else's ideas, or that we had to acquire a taste for them; that they would take the place of something that might be made by us. Remember this is the mid 60s and the generation just ahead of me had just won the battle to teach Canadian

literature in our universities. Then the Americans came waltzing in with their good news and correct views of things. I stuck with and by my contemporaries.

ST Did you want to be a poet, or did you just start writing poetry at some point?

DP I started writing in high school, down in the basement room, privately. I seem to have thought it was comforting to say things I could say nowhere else. I didn't know anyone writing until I met Barrie Nichol, who was going to the same school and had become a friend of my brother. This might be fiction, but I seem to remember Barrie was the first person to read my stuff and take it seriously. There's something about the beginning I still refer to, when I first started writing. I seem to have felt I was being told — don't say anything — somewhere in that system someone was saying, "Shut up." Like in that Muse poem, that really evil voice, that horrible thing that says, "Keep quiet; don't say it." And so, privately I could say things, whatever I was feeling. I remember writing social criticism, 1982 ban-the-bomb poems. I was reading the other day in Williams' *Spring and All* that he says when you write you're not alone.

ST I think that's tied. In terms of what you were talking about there, there's that "don't say anything" and there's also the notion of the essential loneliness of the writer. But the writer's experience is that when he/she is writing, he is not alone as you quoted Williams saying. So that you become part of the democracy of the imagination, or whatever you call it, in which you don't have that silencing. It's simply not going on.

DP I can trace almost all my present ideas about writing back to that condition, that place: that it is things being said; that one is in a sense equal among others in terms of the weights and measures of what one says; that any individual can be expected to say things or be given equal consideration. Something keeps jumping out at me when I'm writing: the others, the others; it's in that Muse poem: look to the others.

ST Not so much the *Other* with the capital O; the small *others*.

DP That's the community being proposed, and I'm a semi-idealist when it comes to this stuff. The imaginations of others. The beginning of the conversation — when I thought I could take part in it — that and my sense of writing became intertwined. What's the word — mixed and mingled. I was probably writing a lyric poem, writing about how I felt and then as I kept writing, it began to turn more outside, became less I-referential, though it's retained a confessional tone which I like, conversational, personal. I'm thinking back 17 years or so, when I first met Barry McKinnon. I met Pierre then, and John Pass — many of my present friends. They were all coming to their writing, each in his own way.

ST So these are writers whose work you could learn from, respect?

DP It began to have a context. It didn't have to be private any more. But the process is still going on, going from the private to the public. There's been a lot of turmoil. I'm not describing one big happy family here. The arguments about what writing is and does are amazingly complex.

ST The designation "West Coast writer" certainly could be applied to you. Does that term make any sense to you? What do you think of when they say "West Coast poetry?" Is it that presence of landscape?

DP Yes, the landscape. That's usually thought of as anything outside the city, but here the landscape includes the city. When I was a kid, there wasn't much city to live in. Hiking, swimming, being outside were important. You don't have to go very far to get lost in the woods or dive into the ocean. I spent a lot of time looking at it, the coast line, the trees, the light on the water. These original elements quite naturally became terms in my writing, terms for a belief that everything is sentient, animate. I could lie there forever watching the sunlight on the water.

ST But, you can't help but notice it, this incredible beauty. Whereas if you live in Toronto or somewhere — I mean I don't think it's accidental that Toronto writers move more into the language kind of writing, and the West Coast poets always have that imagery, that lyricism.

DP Nature enters the writing here in drastically different ways. The relationship to it is so different. This is a place where the primary economic resource base is the landscape, pure commodity. And some poets and artists use it in a similar way, exploiting it for one reason or another. There's a lot of writing that poses the beauty of the landscape against the ways in which it's exploited where you can hear the sounds of human beings caught in the machinery. Around this fact a lot of West Coast poetry has political implications, is written toward a possible community. I'm thinking of Barry McKinnon's *Songs and Speeches*: the directness of speech, though in the form of a poem. It parallels a lot of writing done here in that it registers a protest, identifies certain oppressions, and responds with a variety of spells and incantations. Billy Little's poetry does this. Bill bissett's does too, but his poems lean more to the paradisaical. This is a part of the world where your whole body can hum in the embrace of primal elements. Malcolm Lowry located his paradise here. Anyway, nature is us. We don't do anything to it we don't do to ourselves.

ST I know I talked Barry about this. I wanted to know what you think of as work poetry. How does your work as a carpenter or what you do with your hands, your body, in a sense . . .

DP . . . fashioning stuff . . .

ST . . . fashioning stuff, building stuff. . . . One of the things I talked to Barry about — a distinction I don't know if I actually made in the interview between your work and his — Barry's poems seem to be somehow architectural.

DP Yes.

ST You know what I mean, like they're built . . .

DP . . . assembled.

ST Yours are also built.

DP I think that they're architectural. There's something similar in the way one can make poems and make things, a house or something. There's an exact place for each piece. I like the idea of the words falling into place. Also, I remember Robert Duncan, whose father was an architect, saying his poems have floor plans. And all those words that lend themselves to poetics like *structure*, *ground*.

ST *Structure*, *ground*. I can see sometimes when you're writing — we were talking about that earlier — when you will sometimes take an image and you'll put that there, and you're kind of building this poem.

DP The idea of making — in the sense of making a poem — and the idea of making the structure are similar. It's the activity more than the end products; it's the process more than the thing, the object. Barry assembles poems you can wander through, enter, look out of. They offer a variety of views, points of view. This is the opposite to the singular "I" closed-verse type writing. I always feel, as a reader, that I can't take part in that kind of poem.

ST Do you trouble yourself very much with this business that poetry has got to somehow speak to the ordinary guy?

DP It would be nice.

ST Poets, as ordinary guys, have jobs and go to work in the morning.

DP I'm an ordinary guy.

ST Yes, but you don't make a kind of messianic . . .

DP Sure would be great if it could be read by everybody.

ST But there's not interest.

DP They just don't think they can. I know a lot of people, friends even, some I've worked with, who won't even for a moment think they can read poetry.

ST They think it's beyond them somehow. The couldn't possibly understand it.

DP They think it's beyond them.

ST And even worse, they think you're feeble-minded. There's that other side of poetry, that it's the worst . . .

DP . . . stupid stuff. I just think they haven't had the chance to. If it could sneak up on them somehow; there must be some way it could be shown to them. It's an important point, an important thing to dwell upon. I know times I felt like giving up on the whole thing.

ST Oh, me too.

DP Because, who cares?

ST Oh, exactly.

DP The other part of it is like walking around feeling like you're a Martian, of some kind, an odd person who really does this strange thing.

ST That's right. I'll never again. . . . Having to go to Toronto or somewhere, I'm on the plane and the guy next to me starts talking. I'll never say again I'm going to give a reading. "Oh, what do you write?" Poetry. Well, immediately you're classed as wierd, as you say, a Martian.

DP Or they ask you to recite some.

ST They say, "Isn't that interesting. What kind of poetry do you write — that sort of modern stuff?" You just wish you hadn't said anything.

DP I once told an RCMP officer who had stopped me outside Calgary that I was a writer.

ST So, at least you didn't say you were a poet.

DP He asked what I was writing.

ST You couldn't say poetry? That's what I'll do from now on; I'll say I'm working on a novel.

DP I told him I was writing a travel book.

ST A travel book, that's great. Well, that's legitimate. Just about every form of writing is considered legitimate except poetry.

DP Kind of, yes.

ST Really the realm of the dimwitted.

DP It's not true.

ST I know, but where does it get its awful reputation? It's not an occupation you would . . .

DP It's not a job that people think one can possibly have in this world. How could your job possibly be to write poems? You can't make any money at it.

ST Maybe with novels people think you could at least write a best seller or something, but everyone knows no one reads poetry, so why bother writing it, why this stubbornness?

DP You have to persist. I think it's really important poetry is around, being written. In my case I think I recognized this gift and that it was awakening my imagination even as I was doing it, reading it, and I thought I can't refuse this. I would almost be a kind of criminal to refuse it.

ST Exactly.

DP That's kind of, maybe too simplistic, but it's something like that, and I'm just going to proceed, and I think that's best. The consciousness poetry works in, almost anyone's poetry — I think it's best these things are written and said and published, and there somewhere, because there's a kind of weird osmosis, it leaks out into the larger societal thing . . .

ST . . . or body . . .

DP And we don't know what effect these things are having. Kevin Davies said the other day, talking about bp Nichol's writing, that the poet gives his heart to the world, that Barrie was doing that. And I thought, yes when it's completely been given over, handed over, then you get to live forever. Or you don't die alone. But poetry is only one of many ways this is done, one of the ways in which we make the world.

ST Well, that sense of art, and poetry in particular, literature in general — I hold strongly that it's the only place where the truth is, that any other form of discourse is bullshit and lies and can be twisted around and the exact opposite can be argued. I have no use for argumentation.

DP True things can be said.

ST I think that the truth of one's experience, human experience, is in literature.

DP There was some kind of intelligence I began to recognize in poetry that I recognized in myself but I couldn't find anywhere else.

ST Exactly my experience, too, even in novels or . . .

DP . . . novels I liked . . .

ST . . . which you like anyway . . .

DP . . . the big stories.

ST I read a lot of philosophy and then came to poetry and stopped reading philosophy.

DP There's something about poetry in that it seems to be an integrating kind of activity. It's so much not — it's non-specialized in a way. I read philosophy sometimes and I think this sounds a bit like how poets have addressed ways of thinking or how meaning is meant, but they're all missing another part. Poetry just seems to bring all those different — now that things seem so specialized — all these things have been splintered and splintered . . .

ST . . . but poetry has a handle on all of them.

DP Somehow, and they're all language, language oriented. They all use words. They're texts or something. They're all written; they're all read. Poetry seems to have some capacity to glue it all together.

ST I wonder what that is. Certainly poetry doesn't look like any other kind of writing or read like other kinds of writing. So what is it: the music, the tension, the line?

DP Something to do with the form. Something about the body. If we take it that the whole body is intelligent or the brain isn't broken into different functions like the speech centre, motion centre, etc., which could be true in some scientific way, but that the whole body is intelligent. . . . My most recent line about this stuff is that poetry occurs when the whole body moves through language, and that somehow the body is the main clue or key, and the brain isn't this isolated thing that sits on top, but is continuous all through the body because the nervous system is connected right through into it, and there's no break in it where suddenly there's a juncture box and "now we have the brain." We do have the brain, but it's absolutely, positively located everywhere and all at once, in the body.

ST We've all been corrupted by that mechanistic notion. I remember movies I saw in HPD: the brain is a kind of control centre, the war room . . .

DP . . . all those lights flashing . . .

ST . . . computer . . .

DP . . . now we feel heat; now we feel . . .

ST . . . the little pain guy goes running up to the brain, presents himself, rings a bell.

DP My sense of language and the body is that the body is language in a sense, immersed in it, floating in it. Why I sometimes get overwhelmed with water imagery, the ocean and all that. We swim in it, buoyant. Use those words and there's something about that — poetry is somehow. . . .

ST Poetry recognizing that particular truth or being an embodiment.

DP Something wholistic — what's that word — rather than simply breaking down into functions or whatever kinds of thought, species of thought . . .

ST Were you in on the naming of that anthology, *The Body*?

DP Hope Anderson walked into Pierre's house one day and said it's called *The Body*.

ST Great title.

DP There was a lot of talk around the time we were making that book about companionship, community. The idea of the body being both a large and an intimate context out of which each speaks or gets a chance to. I saw it celebrating variousness, and proposing a community though we don't really have one.

ST You don't think who has a community, writers or . . .

DP I don't think it's all that great simply to have a community of artists. I don't think it's good enough. It's proposed as a strategy in place of a real community which we really go out into and work and take our lives out of — all our relationships, desire and so on. No single one of us is going to do all that much but that we work in company. This companionship I've been thinking about and to some extent living, trying to imagine, is not some salon or club. The terms *friends* and *conversation* are the largest I can think of. There is this company that I recognize. I dare myself to imagine what poetry written out of it would sound like.

THE MUSE

*

house on Tatlow Ave.,
a mile away the harbour
& Lions Gate Bridge,

would hold a place i can think of
my life ring true
in a few words

immediately outside
old cut-bank carved by Capilano River,
big rotted stumps, now
a green belt park, mostly ferns
& Vine Maple, a few Cedars
on the hill

the fence, the grass, the garden
under it, 3 feet down
brown sand, round field stone
river bed the house sits on
good drainage

this portrait includes
plants on the window ledge, the chair
an arm, elbow bent, hand
with a pen in it

white paper in a clip board, coffee

something written a moment before,
a fragment, a puzzle

“where water is ground
solid
as any act of transformation
(inside) the silence is crossed, a bridge
the crossing is called
transcendence”

*

suburban street zoned light industrial
4 storey maximum apartment &
the wrecking crews 20 years away or tomorrow

lives come & go
in the houses on Tatlow
temporary wood frame, Coast Fir & Hemlock
appears settled, permanent

lives coincide, 3 feet down
field stone, old river bed

water flowing under all the houses
into the harbour

salt air blowing through the mesh of wires
of Lions Gate suspension bridge

it sways with the traffic it carries
moves beneath the wheels & feet

water below & water falling
through the dense weave of branches
in the woods, deep texture

shade within shade of green, grey
January Coast woods colours, brown sand
& red brown

birds call, crows yell, i found one dead
the trees above thick with them
screaming while i buried it

when i looked up they'd flown away

* the suicide (Lions Gate Bridge)

i think you should not kill yourself
but you did

the waves swelling
make the contact concrete

120 feet under the bridge
usual traffic, who would notice
at that speed, another
anonymous twilight

how many times the sun sets
on the way down

17 years old in one account

its anger i feel, knowing
it comes over me in certain mornings
smirking, cowardly

what a release
to not be here

i feel despair i'm not allowed
or tell anyone

indulgence is it

you were useless, go throw yourself
off a bridge, the world's
not worth the effort

i'm a mile away
when you walk over the edge,
probably medicated or it's wearing off
long enough

i would have held you back
or help,

i mean

*

the house is a structure
of continuous tension

relaxed in balance
it celebrates, in its field of stress
& counterstress, a whole form

in this climate all leak
eventually

or soon

★

i had learned the poem a field
of action (the poem is an event
in language)

its structure rhyme, soundings
in a weave, the deep present

& fragments, a collage, a jumble, disorder

through it
another voice, almost a face forms

patient, almost smiling, not
a god but figured forth
in the act

the imagination making
of itself,

thought outside
oneself, penetrant

★

love is a house

*

muse

i woke up
with language under my finger tips

i went all the way back
in sounds words are

i woke up
with the light flashing or
glancing off the waves
in Howe Sound

it's not human but includes the human
your form, your eyes, I
will give you speech, the others,

look to the others

look at me, i'm no god you've imagined
no single sound,
I'll assume no form

but make of me what you will, here
splash this on your face

it will give you courage

*

whispering the death of poetry
like a madman

& all art useless, whispering
the death of poetry

all the news is terrible, a death of
meaning, a suicide of
meaning in the crush & noise

the poisoned hand
on the poisoned cup, drink it down —
shut up

you are nothing, you
have nothing to say
the meanness, the intolerable meanness
the voice whispering
the death of poetry like a madman
drink the poison, take
the poison cup, drink it down, shut up

*

watery one, this is no prayer
slip your eloquence into
my mouth
& i be equal
in the voicing
your gift
the human seems hardly worth it
unless it's said
use me, i wait
beyond forgiveness in an art as old
as the act of wave on rock *

let this be a drinking song
a drinking down of
that liquid your life lifts
to my lips
& you sing along
the Coast Line
lives, some human
all taken,
out of your mouth

*

muse

i looked everywhere, maybe
that was the problem

do you want to be a poet

sit down somewhere
like a human being

someone is just behind you
holding the writing up to the light

it's that transparent

a real ghost story

don't write a word or read,
what happens next
is already text

the real world is useless,
the imaginary world
is a chair at a table
& you

will never get away with this
even if you manage to leave it
alone long enough

but the attempt, that's different
that's different

*

the taking took me away,
feels like a body
riding mine

under or over, the order its
motion makes
commanding neither lead
too far into the future

exotic like otters & fir trees

leans over the struggling form
about to merge
or enter
an immense meadow

★

one hand holds you, the other
under my head
lifting it
for a glimpse of the ocean
in your eyes
it's not the same as an image
both have
the outer reaches of the body
borne by what they bear
come out of the future so fast
it's visible

OTHER POEMS

FOR DIANE TURNING 36

in sight of really the simplest things,

all matter folding into

& out of

spirit? where the imagination roams
never finding an outer edge

how language expands & expands till it lands
on the branch of a winter tree,

i know it's a bird.

i am troubled, always & forever, so what.

i am, for the moment, a man

with a glass of wine

& you to think of, beautifully

your age

& the page is filling with
something like fragrance,

your

emanation or

i call it goodness

(i have to say it this way)

my sister,

one who sees birds

calls me out to look

A VIEW FROM BARRY MCKINNON'S DECK, SECHELT

i was just working & thought
the world's in a awful state

what can any of us do about it

i just read: "to save your soul
& lose the world"

pointless

private grace states

out there grey twilight
October fog

light behind growing dark, the trees
standing black

a violet blue

i light the kerosene lamp

the charcoal is glowing red
in a moment i put on the chicken

this is my last beer
& i don't care

i've been here six weeks
i'm not afraid of the dark
& being alone, how
to be alone

no poems, not that, i think about you,
i thought of everyone, those

i've been close enough, souls

why go on living except
for the promise

i'd forgotten how it's quiet, ate too fast

the simplicity of the mind, the mind

music from 1694

all the way here

YOUR GUESS IS AS GOOD AS MINE

lay the cloth on the turntable with a weight
gets the speed right, somewhere between
45 & 33 rpms, it's only a guess.

rain falling, sort of waiting,
it's a habit i can't break nor keep
perfectly.

the songs so loud i hear other sounds
long enough, make of them
preparations, like schemes.

don't mistake what is said
with what i say.

if i hear the rain
you'll never know
or this music, in the attempt.

it's light on a clear page absorbing
the blue liquid line
leaving the rest erased

you could start anywhere & end up with nothing

there's a name for this state,
my intention from the beginning
not to intrude
feeling anything,

the pleasure i want
a record of made known, a human face form.

a hand with a pen in it.
nothing else

THE OUTSIDE

we were outside, hiking,
it wasn't recreation

this was years ago & the world
was natural
to the poems of Gary Snyder, Lew Welch

who else hiked
the Coast mountains

many made the trail we were on
but they knew
that wasn't the point

the weight of the pack, legs
stronger, this state of mind

is not easily described by elevation

height was important &
to a certain extent
pace

we had left places
but it wasn't escape

there was no summit, i remember
eating snow, crisp
sunlight

i remember being outside

FOR THE BIRDS (season this with changes)

enough money for a bottle of J&B
upon returning i pour
a large glass, some ice,
& read poems, just a few inky scribblings,
add a word here & there,
cross out a line, or see

it goes somewhere else, follow it
out the window, looks
like a bird, eyes full of twilight

i cross 7 years in a twinkling,
there is the harbour
& the word arbour
or was it
ardour, it is now

the announcement of Spring

or an exercise in attention, a flight
for its own sake, let it
go, let it all go.

soon i'm overtaken, what luck, it's dusk

Spring comes on
like a cup slowly tipped, the last
light spills across the page

the pen swims in a kind of shadowy
wave, i can hardly see
& don't care

through the open window
the odour of the new
earth, a new moon, returning

a kind of renewal anyway
for the mind
contemplating another J&B, heavenly daze

"intense pleasure
of having been there, seen . . ."

& reading the intro to *Sunflower Splendour*
i get this about poetry:

"to restore to man's mind
the ideals of justice, of hope, of truth,
of mercy, which else
(left to the support of daily life
& its realities) would languish"

languor, "for want of
what is found there"

i would, at least, attempt
an extravagant memory
every now & then, a state of mind
equally with what i feel, even
if you never "know
what i know"

i only ask for the chance
to be completely accidental, appearing
in your life, not presumed

it says so right here,
though i can't see anymore

i'll type it up tomorrow
in the midst of . . .

i forget what comes next
as if i ever knew.

what kind of bird was that
anyway

THE LAST STRIP SHOW

there isn't any elsewhere
now we're here, ashamed, watching
this woman bend over
showing the huge scar high
on the back of her thigh

not dancing, her body
lunges across the stage, staggers
down drunk or drugged

perhaps acting, pulling off
the blouse without pretending
mystery or nakedness

the music breaks
against our heads like fists
mad & stupid, it's clear

the part she plays is slave
but these contortions speak
a different mastery

look, i'll spread open
until there's nothing to see

the scar is yours for free

what is your pleasure
worth, 8 bucks an hour
i'll writhe here
in the bad air & red lights

flashing on the faces of
the other men, dumb eyes
staring like struck

& after there's howling

barry is fired Pierre tells us
Joy just phoned,
now 4 cold beer
from the Avalon, at 12:00
the insurance runs out, the RCMP
in the parking lot, 11:54
the lights flash
off & on down Marine Drive, there's
money somewhere & now
like a curfew it's
all meanwhile, i can fall
into a world of my own with
dream edges & alcohol
but why do this alone?
it's real to come back here
& drink with you, tomorrow
no money. no tomorrow
enough now for 4 beer,
while i count the change
the time's
running out
now it's 12:00
& the RCMP turn right while i
take the short cut
home, the beer in the bag
how could they cost \$4.60
by the time i get home
no insurance
& Joy phones with the details

ENGLISH BAY a draft

behind us orange lights, traffic
intersection of Davie & Denman

& there, 50 yards away, night falling

the moonlight flecks the calm
of english bay

others stroll, we stroll
into the fading light (not knowing each other)
but aware of certain distinctions

an etiquette, almost perfect, civil

an ideal i would write, a transparency
overlaid on the actual scene,
many transparencies

then i'd lift them carefully away, whole
something like an object
whose outer edge continually, measurably
slips & changes
as the lights shift, reforming the present
each word slipping through the others

the whole held in mind

i would read into it, looking for something
i hadn't noticed.

in this version surfaces, one is a dream, others
walk the beach at moonrise
separately or groups
nothing larger, what
would that be, not a crowd

clouds over Bowen Island glow,
a community?

at some point between
this real world or one proposed

i'm walking with you, ice cream cone
in one hand, talking

not analysis exactly
but where are we.

a man playing bagpipes
walks back & forth

it had been so quiet,
like in certain movies when the sound
is turned off
then, for dramatic effect, something crashes or screams
& the scene, the drama, its world
resolves.

bagpipes in the gloaming.
i wanted to stand around, listen

the atmosphere in this zone
between city & the water traps sound, we can't hear
that traffic

the bagpipes fade as if slowly turned off

we walk on
an asphalt path between grass & sand
some young men yelling, drunk
nearer the water, by some rocks, no words
some kind of anger? muffled

next to us a woman, around fifty,
shopping cart, the bottle in brown paper
in her hand and another
in the cart, i can't tell, this is
something like memory

everything is as it should be

i'm not duplicating events, the syntax
rippling in the waves, not read
so much as looked into
depending on whose eyes
reflected

it would see them, but deep, time
would stand for stillness,
it does not move

we move onto the sand, walk toward the water
it's ocean, high tide calm

we watch the heron's performance

linger in the twilight,
a lovely touch of silence
high on our list of things
to look at & take

to heart
who else sees it, parallel
to the water & landing, long wings

these moments accumulate with attention

and exist as quickly

i know we look for them,
almost a task
as if someone is asking
don't leave it out

what will they make of us

now, we're beside the water, i reach down
stick in my hand
for the taste, salt & something more
i've done this before.

we walk along the beach
moonlight on the water follows
all the way to the moon
as real as anything we'd make of it.

 behind us orange lights & traffic, towers
of the West End

if we'd come here to commonly celebrate
this sight,

but we're good at the dis-continuous
present

i've been taught it, how to make a way through
a path to the ocean
with you

the others among us, not known, but that first
we think well of them

 expect the moonlight
in their eyes
 & a whole world.

the ocean, no path through stays long, a boat's wake
gone as we watch

the place in the water
where my hand went in

i was drowning here 35 years ago
(my mother pulled me out)
scars on my left hand where the point
of a sharp log went through,

i hear them calling me out of the water—
same trees on Pacific Avenue.

the water, the lights, the moonlight
shapes in the soft air, people moving
exactly into place

as i look up
were you waiting for me, your arm
is around me as i stand

sounds in the street
we walk toward
word for word

THE CAPILANO REVIEW

2055 Purcell Way, North Vancouver, B.C. V7J 3H5. Tel. 986-1911

ERRATA for the Barry McKinnon section of The Capilano Review #32:

p.30: "for Marian" is a dedication and not part of the title. It should be in smaller type i.e. same size as text and come after the title.

p.31: the line, "time, as place made flesh" should read, "time, is place made flesh".

p.40: poem should close with dates: September-December, 1983.

p.47: The poem "Thoughts in Fall" ends with the line "of the flowers dumped over the hill -- many are left/ & alive."

The line, "I've wandered, not always" is the beginning of a separate poem.

The post-card on p.48 should be with "Thoughts in Fall."

p.54: The poem "Poetry Embarks Us On a Sea" ends with the word "wires"

"clear north. first snow--the
mind is clear"

Is the beginning of the poem on p.55.

Because these errors affect the reading of this section, "Thoughts/Sketches" will be republished in Issue #34.

Correction to Contributor's note: Barry was not a founding editor of repository press; John Harris was.

ERRATA for the David Phillips section:

p.61: "I remember writing social criticism, 1982" should read "1962."

p.77: second line of poem should read "the world's in an awful state."

p.88: "Paciflic" should read "Pacific."

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

JUDY WILLIAMS divides her time between Vancouver where she teaches in the University of British Columbia's Bachelor and Master of Fine Arts programmes and West Redonda Island where she typically discovers ideas and images for her paintings.

BARRY McKINNON lives in Prince George and teaches at College of New Caledonia. As a founding editor of Repository Press and Caledonia Writing Series, McKinnon has published many books, chapbooks, and broadsides. McKinnon organized the "loves, words" writing conference held in Prince George in 1980. His book of poems, *The the* (Coach House Press, 1980) was nominated for the Governor General's Award.

DAVID PHILLIPS was born and raised in Vancouver. His books and chapbooks include *The Dream Outside* (1967), *Wave* (1968), *The Coherence* (1970), *The Snow Poem* (1973), *Wild Roses* (1975), and, most recently, *The Kiss* (Coach House Press, 1979). In 1979 he co-edited *The Body* (Tatlow House), an anthology of Vancouver poets. Phillips lives in North Vancouver, where he works as a part-time carpenter.

If you wish to subscribe to this magazine, please forward your name, address and postal code number to *The Capilano Review*, 2055 Purcell Way, North Vancouver, B.C. V7J 3H5. Tell us the issue number with which you would like to begin.

Rates for individuals are: \$9.00 for 4 issues (1 year); \$17.50 for 8 issues.

Libraries: \$10.00 for 4 issues.

THE CAPILANO REVIEW