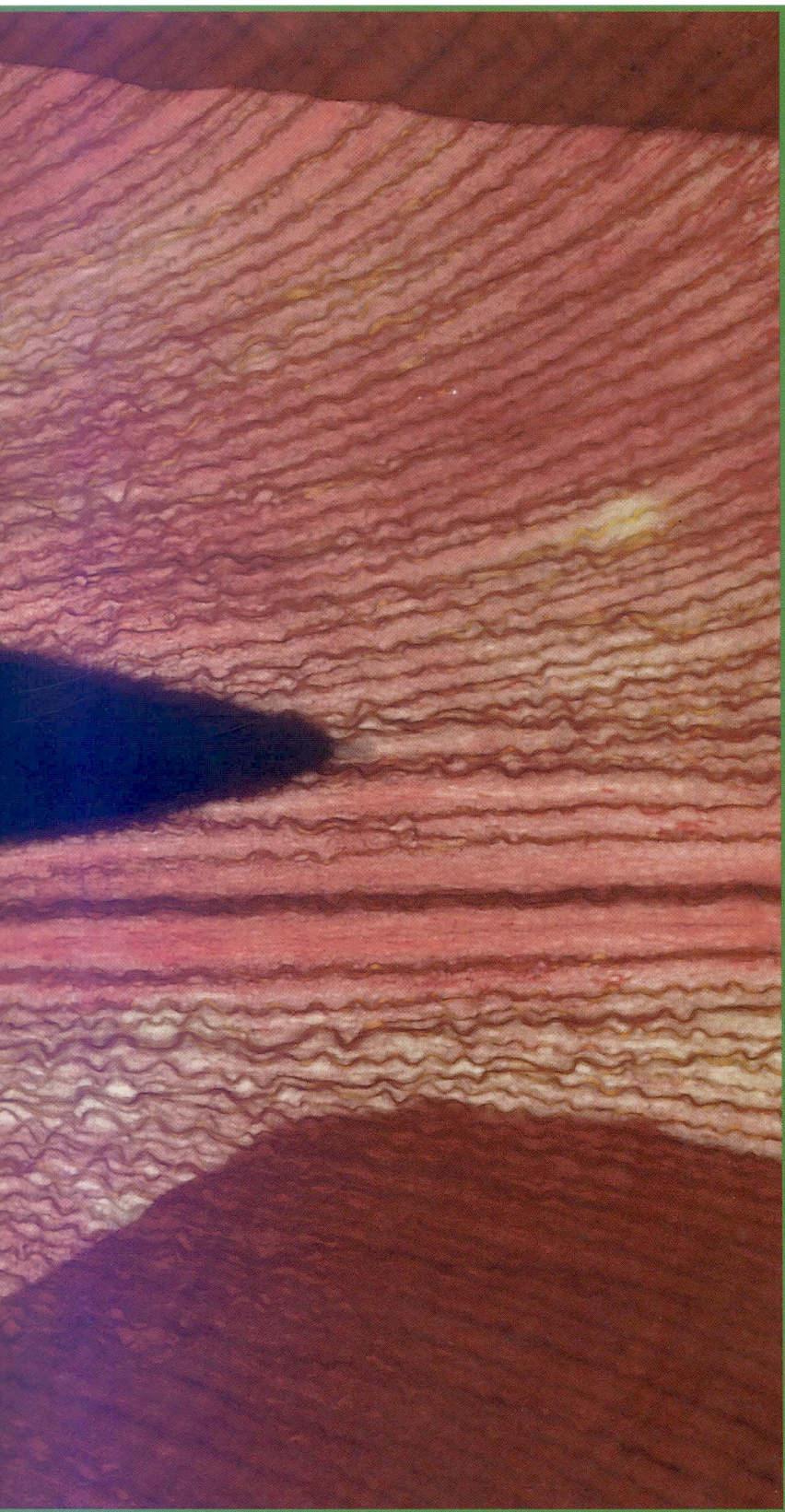


# THE CAPILANO REVIEW



A portion of grief is also forestalled  
as *liquid entry*  
placed (you place) into my syllable

— Erin Mouré



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FRONT & BACK COVERS

Laiwan

"Untitled Slide #36" from  
the series: "she who had  
scanned the flower of the  
world . . ."



ERRATUM: In the last issue (2:23), a proofreading error led to the incorrect spelling of the name of one of our contributors: the correct spelling of her name is Cathy Ford. My apologies to Cathy, and my encouragement to our readers not to confuse her work with that of another writer with the same name who uses the letter *K*.

— Bob Sherrin, Editor

Erin Mouré / The Wittgenstein Letters to Mel  
Gibson's Braveheart (Skirting her a subject)  
(or *girls girls girls*)

*"offered, it was a gift"*

**(You place)**

With you an immediacy stalls  
forget  
An impediment erases eons of its prate existence  
A portion of grief is also forestalled  
*as liquid entry*  
placed (you place) into my syllable  
Into the flow dichotomy of my forestalled  
syllable  
A face in the node of presence (you place)  
your hand's heart in a gloved immediacy  
*played out*  
as blur or ectomic splendour  
wherein (you place) your eyes' wench or girlish  
affligency, profligate version, your version  
my hand obeys to open into rough & "brave  
immediacy," our hope where hope found  
not foundered

found

A brave light in a world where obey  
is its infernal mechanism  
a ghoul or snow whose want of life perpetuates  
an unspeakable

*But you*

in your hands obey is my lock to open  
dressing silver upon a spent anatomy  
to weigh my world against your fond persist

what you attach to name me  
your arms or (you place) it is a presence

Impels immediacy  
Stalls "forget" into a reign of thunder  
To be with you  
Amaze a frillt pellicule  
Lust a frillt sustenance\*

---

\* *go ahead do it babe squirt yr babe-juice in my eye*



## **(Their tautology)**

If two sides of "therefore" are a mete descend  
An argument connoting west particulars  
A nativity arrangement wherein your injection permits  
my fertile quantity  
Your pull above my average

where content is a moot commodity  
& substance the form a kiss entreats  
before it brings on the majesty fourfold  
of its pretend

which is not pretend  
but of an utter quantity, which is bravery's course  
in a mine of days in a universe of signs  
"absolutely"  
the throat he wore to say this in the burned movie  
from his own throat trembling you have cited to me

& I want to be rigged in your frail coast of imperative ambition  
Call forth from me my unknown tress of real dignity

Immortality in libraries

## (Her glad hand)

\*\*\*

“What is questionable in the production of a text, its evidence  
and the history of all experience”

“The piano disappeared or there had never been a glad hand  
equal to your structure”

\*\*\*

Which is not “pretend” but “allow”  
which is & has its febrile quality  
the febrility I say to you of which “its quality”  
transgress a mere  
confectability  
a histoire of trust abeyed in an orifice  
an offering unconditional of such an orifice

your spurt or burst into my dwelling  
where I do not admit the grail  
of culpability & you do not bring it to me

I am that pure my stake is to belie intransigence  
in its very nature  
your mouth where my breast will be astounded  
now, collating the breadth of your lungs’ consequence  
if I say where your foot lay today\* at my insistence  
invokes a bestial restive repagination  
a cathect of lidded nodes & soft  
you would not eradicate  
but use  
not eradicate but incite

not eradicate but bless  
but insist upon  
but answer with your tautest femur  
with your amaze of breast & insistent femur  
beneficent to  
employ defend enamour tress

\* 28 January 1997, 2pm, *The Lakeview*

\*\*\*

Ludwig: "My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them — as steps — to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) "

Norma: "The way we have always been given to them, and so, focusing on them, affecting transparency, one narrates. One falls through the rungs of the ladder."

\*\*\*



## **(A girl profligacy)**

“The talk we could have  
in the furnace of our differences”

“In that place facticity impairs us”

“we are agog across our boundaries,  
agog not reactive”

“it is ever a febrile quality”

“quand arriveras-tu dans mon jardin peuplé  
de consonnes”

“quand me libéreras-tu dans mon jardin peuplé  
de mes propres auréoles”

“she treasured my intractability & told me  
not to explode in the tricastin  
of her caress”

“& I did, what wound I had made available”

“& she was intractable in my caress”

“& did not abjure me, did

not affront, did not deny, or

“abjure”

\*\*\*

If a substance could bear regret

An egret flag oh Marie our rooftop calliope flew

We did our homework (ajar)

You supposed that cuff could hold me  
(tienes razon)

I appeased you? You appeased me?  
A construction of *that* boundary did not happen.  
It was a world rather  
where neither of us acquiesced, but presented.

At last we determined "it."

*Either* you said: "You wanted to do *that* to me for quite awhile,  
didn't you" *or* you said: "I wanted you to do *that* to me for  
quite awhile." In any case, a smart remark, &  
you pushed your head onto my palm in the moving vehicle.  
Your coltishness a first dance.

Your first dance.

Your spigot.

*Your red boy.*

\*\*\*

N.: "We were travelling together at speed. I saw or "felt" my friend  
go on. At speed. At speed I crashed full into a wall.

...

What is the inscription without a reader?"

L.: "When something falls under a formal concept as one of its  
objects, this cannot be expressed by means of a proposition. In-  
stead it is shown in the very sign for this object."

\*\*\*

## (Whose adoration)

Whose wing impersonates a wing or crutch, whose flight  
arrest is her a syllable, a syllable administered  
as caress or  
endeavour, an almost insistence I show you in my  
centre being,  
arose or venerate, which you venerate or  
venerate by fuelling, by utter portrayal, by the instance  
of your body's choice & the wield  
imparts me,  
imparts my wrist or hip  
*to feel the grace of such impediment*  
or grace

to be adorned by you & this your pediment  
to permit your wiles to cathect insertion  
to coil my wrist where I have lived después de la intervención,  
the wrist of bluest wine the IV did enter, the  
light removed to permit your utterance  
of a chosen syllable, of a length you chose to occupy or dwell me,  
to cathect a demeter of torn profligacy, or warm & lidded  
node display  
& trust a priescent being & space torn instrument outward  
& & trust your use of space pulled upward  
& & & be your trusted use & obligation

your feature of west experience\*

---

\* *mess me up babe w. your hand coiled round & thumb turned in  
permits an entry*



**(Tremendous assertion)**

Oh force of your insistent pellicule

Appetite to fuck (why not just out & say it)

Impresentially, an ouverture or opening

Cantankerous was a word you told me for  
your abandoned feeling

A trip or lure across a boundaries

A moult hair upon the lip to wander

O caress me, fond *jerk*, fond *insolence*

Ablate a tendency

Fornicate as the past tense of its own verb, or an  
adverbial tag as in, when she pulled her girlish wield from me  
I looked so fornicate

Your mouth went soft "then" she advised in splendour

Odalisk

Multiply

Abey

\*\*\*

L: "Roughly speaking, to say of *two* things that they are identical is nonsense, and to say of *one* thing that it is identical with itself is to say nothing at all."

N: "difference lies in constraints"

L: "... We can foresee only what we ourselves construct."

N: "At first it seemed additive then holds back, not necessarily narrative but told"

\*\*\*

A prolected trail	beatitude
	wanting
	want
	beatitude

a facticity your pleasure does itself convey  
holding a her marrow still, as if  
my wrist inverted amnesia early on  
(*how you knew this*)

& was still cohabited  
your hard coil break around my aimless fact to dwell  
my accent snared in your wet emphatic turn  
“Happily” was not my word till you abolished “told”  
& I took you there to where a corridor “as if”

& we abolished

The parade of wan thunders speaking from your  
core

Indigenous

*fescue*



**(Bestows profound benefits on her practitioner)**

Febrile is my fendish fent my practice spent in  
all my entity  
my wettest furl against your taut anatomy keels such a wrap-like frieze  
incursion into my swain library

her my shudder abends us both  
*or each a girl*  
a her transects a quelled imperial quality  
to "collect" my thought your lip the femur snares anew

your origin a wet wreck shirt where you had touched me  
to convey a wield yr wrist's deft quantity alloys my fond allure  
to convey an object benefit

(rend)\*

\*\*\*

L.: "Objects contain the possibility of all situations."

N.: "The object is always waiting. How  
do we know what makes it  
visible: the object is waiting  
the object is visible  
waiting is visible"

L.: "Objects are just what constitute this unalterable form."

\*\*\*

*your cheek fierce thrust its opening back upon my leg to raise  
a cry out splendour is  
held ajar  
visible is waiting*

---

\* *your concoct avail upon my leg to concatenate, streaming out yr liquored  
whorl a cry*

## **(Socially-constituted objects include ourselves)**

If "oh" knows us, dear ache of windward time  
distance my heart absolves its propitious wane a bliss  
to confess or herein  
abjure an abject frame

we exist our skins a pellicule against that loss  
an intent or admission "cares"

Our eyes, opened  
cannot be shut now (time is big)  
what memory falsifies in fact  
A glance or  
breath restores

a desert we dreamed of & did not abjure the dream

Comments are  
bigger

prolepsis' antiquity is far your lovely harshness meant for me  
your hand admits my interpretation, grandeur of water

her noise is

**bent upon the serial productive whore of imagination**

\*\*\*

L: "The truth-conditions of a proposition determine the range that it leaves open to the facts . . . . A tautology leaves open to reality the whole — the infinite whole of logical space:"

L: "But in fact all the propositions of logic say the same thing, to wit nothing."

N: "It's very simple. They open the floodgates and water pours down at a fantastic rate of speed and with tremendous force, smashing you against the rail.

Something with will is called into play."

\*\*\*

confess a momentous quantity

juts her a rift in time

"to her" I want to shake her by the hand

my insertion overshooting difficulty\*

---

\* *but have you read your Gertrude Stein?*

If to tremour is a wield or boy upon those girlish  
fingers you do possess  
Cathect a opening in my seal or frill a goad to leak  
yr juice a prolect to confect a lettered syllable  
upon my torpour a tress or "suddenly woke up," shouting

haunted by your hand & its wet curl beneath or in my core  
"two slits" being an ontologic phrase  
accepting the glint or sign of any aperture  
to fecundate such an "any aperture"  
wherein alterity's trace adheres

curious harsh curious

this image trust an arm yr shoulder's slip upon the bed  
i saw your dearest wield, its just demeure  
roar unto my article

i saw you

**dear red boy**

\*\*\*

L: To give the essence of a proposition means to give the essence of all description, and thus the essence of the world.

N: To have them separate is to move. Tying the pieces together the question changed.

a reader

L: What *can* be shown, *cannot* be said.

N: in the middle of me  
watching her  
becomes a proper noun

JF: ... narration ceaselessly produces history.

N: Taking words and placing them in someone's mouth when the text requires something about necessity distinct from the facts.

\*\*\*



\*\*\*

L: "Among the possible groups of truth-conditions there are two extreme cases."

N: "The rules apply only when she can see me. If it's happening over there and she can't see it. If I can't see it and it hasn't affected the conditions, but only when I think of it. It begins. And then thinking of it so begins to affect itself and become the conditions . . . .

assured and aroused"

\*\*\*

## **Archaic Torso of Kim**

Beneath the lamp of my cheek's glow, in your hands I am  
daring the rift of our angel. Against your torso  
I bestow in my candles an impelled breath, a feature,  
an opening of my shoes, what we both knew at first sight

could not be halted. We drew outward into the citadels  
of the blended chest, drawing up what we had lent  
our chest & the skin we caressed that night  
of a young girl, we invented our sills over & over.

Have you read your Gertrude Stein? The curs  
of the day come and torment us at distance,  
a line twigged from Randall Jarrell.  
Not even death can come to us now wearing shoes.

To hold thus is stellar, an impetus of mouths we liquored outward  
into a night of stars until we soaked the lip, arraigned into each other's gaze.

\*\*\*

You must change your life to Renate Rilke's.  
You must rewrite *The Panther* of your frère Steve Rilke.  
You must read your Frank O'Rilke now.  
You must write a sonnet, right away,  
(maybe).

You must ask Norma Cole if she has read her Gertrude Rilke.

You must ask if you may call her Norma Rilke.

\*\*\*

Go & read your Norma Cole.  
Particules of sleep the lunge abeys follicular  
amaze me now akimbo your west-most arm or field  
wherein reside my archaic torso

a pale coin of a tressed anatomy released to gaze  
your my drives that do attend so well to lust & thought  
that crossing fire with tender impediment & skirts a lift to shine  
admit twice-told its vesticulum  
the thumb an entry turned the gaze we buckled to this forge  
a trained impact in the mouth of stars  
you enact in me & I in you  
& you in me & I in you

rended unto Byzantium\*

\*\*\*

N: go inside and close  
scrubbed, blood pressure  
a warning to have more contact

Leaves a torch which sets fire to the hedge.

L: Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in  
them. What finds its reflection in language, language cannot  
represent. What expresses *itself* in language, *we* cannot express  
by means of language.

N: When I take your shape

---

Just the image

\*\*\*

---

\* *the wet suck of yr palm folds up its clock into the arm's bent strut we  
incinerate as fuel rending time by space's brave will or intentionality*

## (My will)

Your hand's fraught interpretation calls forth deep affect  
I could not anticipate but now

*may crave*

Your gleam or suck a roar  
Your insist I am not ready & my resulting tome  
The leaf I show you turns  
Various artifacts appended to my "wrote accordingly"  
A spit I lay near whisper's source now wet upon your hair  
You surging upward into my arm or hum  
to bless or push against my shoulder it is "my"  
"chocar"

*to see its immediacy*

wanting thus an able cathedral to go on

*makes it tighter*

calls you out of shared gorgeous entry  
courses syllable our confect  
To defer

the admired entry to concatenate  
a leaf may deign

*transitive to express a history of soil*

*or utopic soil in our very designation*

your sweater torn off by my glance I will henceforth admit  
it was my glance that tore it  
pure expectation framed with welled biology

impact a saturation to your leaf or dove  
a girlish note

*I'm ready*

\*\*\*

L: The world is independent of my will.

L: Logic is not a body of doctrine, but a mirror-image of the world.

## AVIS AUX LECTRICES ET AUX LECTEURS SUR LES IMPERTINENCES DU TEXTE :

This work holds words from San Francisco (via Toronto) poet Norma Cole. It also listens to the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, who insisted on conversing with Norma Cole. The quotes can be traced as follows:

- Page 5      Norma Cole, *Mars*, p. 15
- Page 8      *Mars*, p. 61; *Mars*, p. 62
- Page 9      Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Philosophicus Logicus* 6.54; *Mars*, p. 5
- Page 11     *Mars*, p. 81-2; *Tractatus* 4.126
- Page 14     *Tractatus* 5.5303; *Mars*, p. 87; *Tractatus* 5.556; *Mars*, p. 62
- Page 16     *Tractatus* 2.014; *Mars*, p. 90; *Tractatus* 2.023
- Page 18     *Tractatus* 4.463; *Tractatus* 5.43; *Mars*, p. 74
- Page 20     *Tractatus* 4.4711; *Mars*, p. 20; *Tractatus* 4.1212; *Mars*, p. 5;  
JF Lyotard, *Des dispositifs pulsionnels*, p. 175; *Mars*, p. 5
- Page 21     *Tractatus* 4.46; *Mars*, p. 14
- Page 23     *Mars*, p. 4; *Tractatus* 4.121; *Mars*, p. 34
- Page 24     *Tractatus* 6.373; *Tractatus* 6.13

Some titles echo Donna Haraway (socially-constituted objects include) and Rachel Rosenthal *Taboo Subjects* Oct 10/81 (bestows profound benefits; tremendous assertion).

---

This work is for Kim Fullerton, for whom it is *musical*, a musical, amusing. *In return for her deft amaze, and for the cherished beauty of her proclamation.*



## Lea Littlewolfe / SEVEN POEMS

### duck

lakes: Peck, Bronson, Little Fishing, Worthington, Round  
August dry reindeer moss washed out green  
pine needles crunch  
Maryanne and I pick blueberries of  
shiny green and wine red leaves  
it's a good year  
we don't move far to fill ice cream pail  
black bears, cinnamons too, share feast  
we rattle cans, talk loud

"Lea, you like duck? I got whole freezer full  
that Denny  
I say to get me mallard or two  
he takes fish nets, casts  
comes back with twenty three, mud to his elbows  
necks all neatly wrung, took just drakes  
I wanted enough for soup  
not soup for next dozen years  
come to my place, get the rest  
I'll tell Denny they made good soup"

"Maryanne, you know how there were lotsa mallards last year?  
me and my old man we went hunting with the shotgun  
saw a drake and hen in a puddle bound up together  
shot him  
I plucked and gutted him  
his penis was still stuck out, big as my whole thumb

even after he was roasted that penis was big  
sure tempts comparison”

“me and my oldest boy we drive to La Ronge  
April four years ago  
you ever been there, Lea?  
water across road, ducks thicker than muskrats  
game preserve signs up  
he’s a good boy, he shoots a few  
we throw plastic bag dinghy into ditch,  
fetch birds from slough next to road  
he just gets boat into truck and along comes natural resources jeep  
son jams .22 under me just in time, I spread dress  
boy says we pick up ducks somebody else shot  
officers look for gun, I talk Cree  
he says mom doesn’t speak English, has bad hearing  
those ducks made good soup”

“one year, Maryanne, we used to drive past this slough beside  
Lewis yard, hundreds of mallard and teal  
kept talkin about duck soup  
hot summer day, seems no Lewis home  
my old man shoots off two shells  
ducks floundering all over the place  
guess who’s nominated duck dog?  
I skin off pants and shoes, walk in, reach some birds  
god it’s cold and sludgy  
I take off socks and shirt, go further, grab more ducks  
it’s icy and deep  
leave bra panties glasses on willow branch  
kind of float out, round up the rest of mallards

about a month later we're in the bar  
Lewis girl comes up: 'Lea, how was your duck soup?'

"you remember, Lea,  
how Harvey's pond used to be just covered with ducks?  
ask him one time if I can net a few  
he gets real riled up, says nobody's gonna get *his* ducks  
I compromise: 'Harvey, can I have a pot of the water?'  
those ducks are so thick the water smells like duck soup'  
he gets even moodier, no way I can have some of his water  
and just look at his place now: no water, no pond, no ducks"

that day we filled five-gallon pails with blueberries, six of them  
and the bear shit got smellier

## evening

It's a sad day. My uncle's dead, heart turned to jelly from drinking. The man who would give the shirt off his own back to someone in distress. Mom, Dad and I are to accompany his widow and oldest son to funeral parlor. We're rushing around, getting ready. Mom's in her panties and bra shouting orders, making sure the milking machines are washed properly, the shoes polished to her usual high standard, my hair combed just so. (Mother, please! This is my story.) We have to meet them in town at seven o'clock. I'm sent upstairs to get Mom's dress. Dad has to check the tire pressures. Brother must see the cows once more, it's calving time.

Then the knock on the kitchen door. Insistent, repeated. Suddenly self-conscious, Mom tells me to deal with whoever it is, outside, on the porch. She's pissed off, we're trying to get away, she wasn't counting on someone coming along, not tonight. And she hasn't her dress on yet.

The man on the porch is well-dressed — three-piece tan suit, highly polished black shoes, big book in his hand, thick briefcase in tow. He wants to see my parents. He demands to see them. I block the doorway. He's trying to get past me, to get inside. I push the door shut. He tries to peer in the window high on the door, but I stand my ground. I try to find out why he's here, what he wants. His pitch rises, he says I'm a minor, he must talk to my parents. I suggest it's not a good idea, that we're rushed. Politely I ask what I can do for him. I've dealt with salesmen before. He's getting more agitated, speaking staccato, even waving the book around. Says he has an important message for them,

that he can be our salvation. (Mother, this is my version. This is how *I* remember it.) Brother is back from checking the new cows. He tries to make the man understand our need for him to go away.

Suddenly the door is flung open. Mom doesn't have the dress on. She grabs the pitchfork that leans on the railing. She jabs the tines into his chest. "Get the hell out of here you little son-of-a-bitch! We don't need your kind here. Get out!" Now he's backing down the steps, picking up the book, opening the door to his Volks, throwing in the briefcase, blubbering as he falls in. Dad comes out onto the porch. Mom still waves the pitchfork, swearing and shouting. The man backs the Volks down the lane, shouting to Dad to chain her up, lock her away. (Mother, you can tell how it happened, later!) Dad wants to know what the book waver wanted. Brother and I agree he's a preacher, come to save us.

About six months later on the school bus the conversation comes around to the man, about how he traveled through the countryside telling neighbors about our crazy mother. Turns out he was an encyclopedia salesman. I wonder if the guy got a bonus.



## ditch

March warmth  
snow melting into fields of water  
Mom and Dad drive toward the highway  
find Woody with a crowbar  
wedging stones into a culvert  
against flooding on his side of the road  
Mom's out of the truck, shovel in hand  
chasing Woody and hollering  
she knows water will go over the roadtop  
Woody runs for the tractor in his field  
Mom strikes his tire with her shovel  
choice names on her tongue  
something about his big nose and small penis  
Dad restrains her, they resume their trip

at the doctor's office a large cyst, benign  
in the middle of Mom's forehead  
at least half an inch thick  
maybe two inches across  
is removed under local anaesthesia  
at home she has a wide bandade over the site  
slowly blood drains into her cheeks  
both eyes are black and blue and  
the patches are well down her face

two cops arrive  
want to talk over something  
get settled in lazyboys in the livingroom  
talk about the weather and spring planting  
enjoy coffee and sandwiches

after about an hour  
one says Woody has laid assault charges against Mom  
Dad tells the ditch story briefly  
talk returns to the prospect of river flooding  
Mom serves more coffee and pie  
it's two hours before they leave

we don't hear another thing about it  
for several months  
on the school bus one day  
we kids listen quietly  
seems Woody gave Mom two shiners  
back in March

## busk

I figure to supplement income  
each year I pay more tax  
though my salary has been stuck many years  
in Victoria I hit the waterfront  
two-hour stints reading poetry most dramatically  
first day thirty-three cents an hour  
next day I move an elder to tears  
and the ante moves to two dollars hourly  
then I hit shallows day after day  
I'm not alone  
juggler, piper, harpist, opera singer suffer too  
no longer do tourists throw money into hat or guitar case  
I should train a capuchin monkey to clatter  
dimes in a zinc cup and look soulful

I busk before a bakery coffee shop, welcomed by the owner  
a pre-teen can't believe I think I'll get paid for this  
and gives me a pack of bubble gum  
a man, European accent, tells me to move away  
turns out he's a john  
waiting for an appointment with a pimp  
the pimp grabs my poems  
declares he can read them louder  
so people can hear two blocks away  
he finds he can't produce my volume  
gets booed by coffee drinkers  
nickels and pennies fall into the hat

the prostitutes take turns hassling me  
while I read on  
their mouths are obscene and hard  
one laughs hysterically hoping to unnerve me  
another promises gun farewell  
they've not had busker competition before  
finally they acquiesce, sit back to editorialize

I persist, learn to collect a large audience  
and hold them  
seduce them with my voice and swishing skirt  
trademark white straw hat and rose on my head  
but they don't part with their coins  
maybe think I'm a bum  
still, I'm a writer and relish an audience  
a Czech journalist videotapes for half an hour  
finishes with an interview  
says I'll be on Prague television  
wants to know if I've sold books in Europe

next year I could have a passport ready  
hop to London, Edinburgh, Amsterdam  
busk in Belfast and Warsaw  
travel with a monkey

## male menopause

values fly out the window  
you get religion  
every 16-year-old girl turns you on  
you get morning sickness  
the wife doesn't understand you any more  
you get to AA meetings Thursdays  
the priest can't get a straight word out of you in confession  
you get to work late on Tuesdays  
the grandkids can't get you to go fishing

you get bouts of inexplicable fear  
the drinking buddies can't figure you out on no account  
you get to worrying a lot about your past sins  
the banker wonders why you stop making payments on time  
you get bifocals and dentures  
the doctor says your hearing's okay  
you get grey hair, even in your beard

coffee keeps you awake at night, you become a tea granny  
all you feel like doing is really, actually sleeping with the wife  
the affairs with women fifteen years younger begin  
you visit divorce court on your days off  
the TV soaps appeal to you  
you take iron pills and pack a hot water bottle to bed  
you drive so slow other drivers honk  
you find out where to buy pills that'll give you an eight hour erection  
you think you'd like another son or two



every squeak and groan in the jalopy upsets you  
you do your income tax on time, without cheating  
political causes and speeches seem irrelevant to you  
you develop strong feelings for the brotherhood of man  
the united appeal can get you to volunteer canvassing time  
you even figure it's okay to teach Sunday school  
and you think I want to live with you still?

## hell gate

don't remember what I was saying  
can't say what I was thinking  
lost on the roads I've driven a hundred times  
where is east, which is north?  
ears buzz, can't talk  
legs walk, but they aren't mine

I'm crashing, out of touch  
I'm on the endless tunnel, falling  
I'm not me any more, where is me?

terror head pounding  
blood pressure check every two hours  
heart irregular nurse calls it anxiety  
sedation anti-depressants  
alone hours on a bed, without laces  
voice gone, hysterical, can't give me away

I'm so afraid I won't get out  
so afraid to think back  
afraid to take what I want

more pills nightmare river  
regular monitor of pulse and body temperature  
meals at regular hours then pray  
one on one counseling pray  
supervised movement down corridor  
can't walk past nursing station

I'm helpless to help myself  
too numb to make decisions  
so alone, and lonely for her

fear heart poundings  
head threatens to implode  
lonesome for her  
signs outside: Saskatchewan Provincial Hospital  
security guards and pain-clothes orderlies  
unravel to psychiatrist where's Creator?  
wife lies to staff about visit

I'm scared of myself  
I want to go home  
I'm afraid I'll never get outta here miss her

permission to phone her  
check out what's normal  
glasses make temples hurt  
group tour downtown, guarded  
homey advice from psychologist  
urges three weeks more stay

I want outta here so bad  
I need control of my living  
I must get back to being me

wallet return money, identity in place  
family pick up car smells the same  
bickering in restaurant normal

me paying for meal    expected  
them wanting affection    usual squabble  
home again    same bed

I want off the ride, off the world  
I want to be free, want to receive  
I want time off for good behavior

## birth day

for your birthday I looked for persimmons  
but the green grocer said she'd nothing in orange  
I searched for condoms, alas they had only  
sheepskins, not viral proof  
I considered a golden lab and all that  
chased its tail was a toy poodle  
toonies didn't work out  
the bank had only paper  
kiwi aren't in season and  
you won't touch sausage  
an attempt to get cosmic consciousness  
to start spring proved my lack of influence  
the bus depot was closed or  
you might have received a toy Greyhound

you'll have to settle for hugs and kisses  
maybe a well placed caress or two  
as part of the Mother Earth flow  
I can send you a delightful dream  
would you share a bubble bath  
perhaps let me scratch your back?  
a read-down might prove stimulating  
or a walk on the snow

and she waved her magic wand  
granted him long life and good scrounging  
a twist of fame and regular income  
protection for his voice  
fantastic vision



The following pages are excerpts from various projects.  
Many were part of a touring exhibition  
"small, medium & not large: books & collages 1982 to present"  
(Galerie Articule, Montréal 1997; Grunt Gallery, Vancouver 1996).

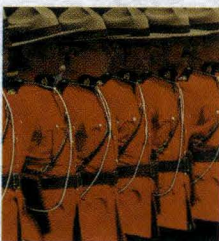
These excerpts complement a catalogue of my work  
to be published in February, 1998 by Galerie Articule, Montréal.

*notes towards a body* is a work-in-progress.

L A I W A N



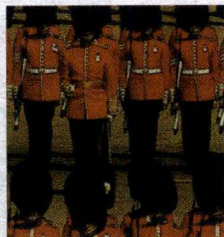
and  
squandering,  
as  
in  
doubt,  
his  
true  
estate



upon  
that  
image  
he  
forgets,  
although



he  
still  
keeps  
pushing  
so  
persistently



his  
face  
into  
it,  
almost  
with  
beseeching,





THEN IT IS REITERATED:

AT THE RISK OF  
LOSING MY MACHO  
IMAGE I'M GOING  
TO TELL YOU ONE  
MORE THING.

BEFORE ANYTHING IS REVEALED, SHE DECIDES:



THREE WAYS SHE WILL REPLY:

ONE: (SAID WITH QUIET DISTINCTION)

WHY  
NOT?





TWO: (SAID WITH OUTWARD HORROR)



THREE: (LOOK WITH QUIET DISTINCTION)



SHE SAYS, REINFORCING HER INHIBITION.



# Ten Little Indians

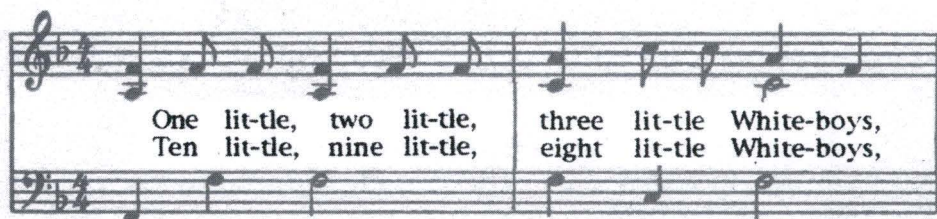
One lit - tle, two lit - tle, three lit - tle In - dians,  
Ten lit - tle, nine lit - tle, eight lit - tle In - dians,

Four lit - tle, five lit - tle, six lit - tle In - dians,  
Seven lit - tle, six lit - tle, five lit - tle In - dians,

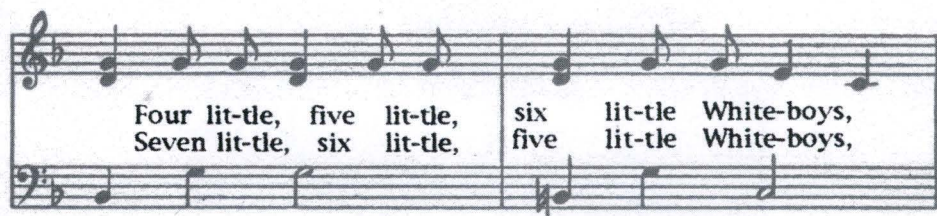
Seven lit - tle, eight lit - tle, nine lit - tle In - dians,  
Four lit - tle, three lit - tle, two lit - tle In - dians,

Ten lit - tle In - dian boys.  
One lit - tle In - dian boy.

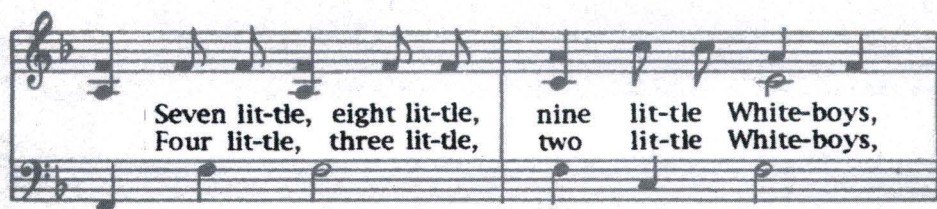
# Ten Little White Boys



One lit-tle, two lit-tle, three lit-tle White-boys,  
Ten lit-tle, nine lit-tle, eight lit-tle White-boys,



Four lit-tle, five lit-tle, six lit-tle White-boys,  
Seven lit-tle, six lit-tle, five lit-tle White-boys,



Seven lit-tle, eight lit-tle, nine lit-tle White-boys,  
Four lit-tle, three lit-tle, two lit-tle White-boys,



Ten lit-tle Whi-ite boys  
One lit-tle Whi-ite boy



The story of  
**Little Black Sambo**

*By Helen Bannerman*



Reprinted by courtesy of J. B. Lippincott Co., publishers of the authorized edition of *The Story of Little Black Sambo*

Once upon a time there was a little black boy, and his name was Little Black Sambo. And his Mother was called Black Mumbo. And his Father was called Black Jumbo.

The story of  
**Little White Simpy**

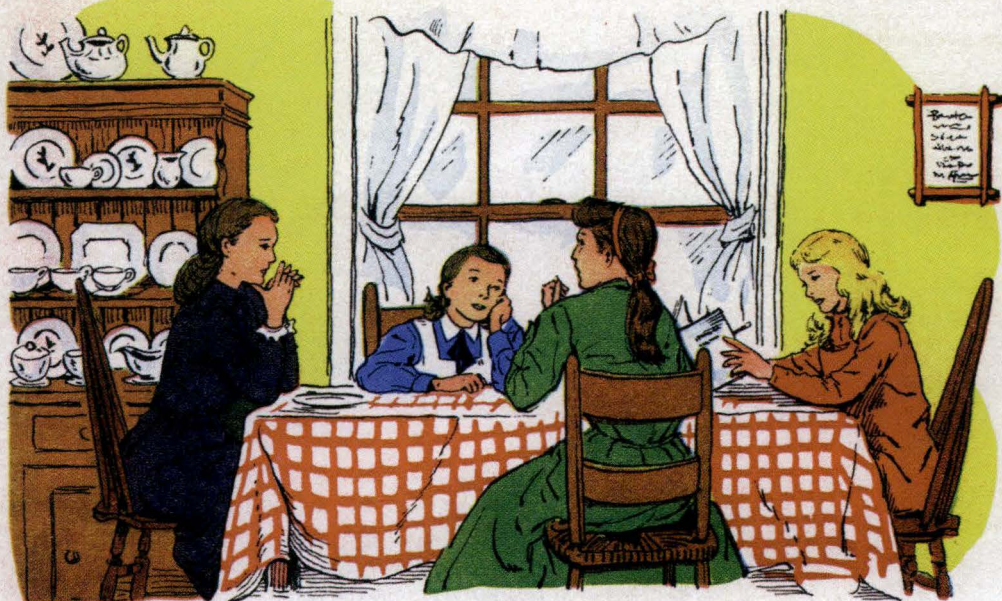
*By Helen Bannerman*



Reprinted by courtesy of J. B. Lippincott Co., publishers of the authorized edition of *The Story of Little Black Sambo*

Once upon a time there was a little white boy, and his name was Little White Simpy. And his Mother was called White Mummy. And his Father was called White Jumpy.





Meg's foot was quite recovered the morning after the party, but she woke up out of sorts. It did seem hard to have to take up work again after the gay holiday.

"I wish it was Christmas or New Year's all the time," she sighed.

"Don't let's grumble, but shoulder our burdens like pilgrims and trudge along," said Jo. "I'm sure Aunt March is a regular Old Man of the Sea to me, but I suppose when I've learned to carry her without complaining, she'll tumble off or get so light I shan't mind her."

But Beth was headachy, and Amy couldn't remember what nine times twelve was, and Meg was still cross at breakfast.

She was fond of luxury, and her chief trouble was poverty. When she turned sixteen, she had begged to be allowed to work and had found a place as nursery governess. But at her work, she saw every day the kind of life she fancied. She tried not to be envious, but she could not help contrasting her shabby dresses and work-

aday world with the fine clothes and parties of the lively, older girls in the King household.

Jo had happened to suit their wealthy old great-aunt, who was lame and needed a companion. This sort of work did not suit Jo at all, but to everyone's surprise, she got on remarkably well with her tempestuous relative.

The real compensation for the hard work at Aunt March's was a large library of fine books. The moment the old lady took her nap, Jo hurried to the dim, unused room that had been left to dust and spiders since old Mr. March had died. Curling up in the easy chair, the young bookworm devoured poetry, romance, history, and travels until her aunt's shrill voice called, "Josyphine! Josyphine!" and the parrot echoed the cry until the big house rang with Jo's name.

Aunt March and the Kings were burdens to be borne, surely, and the girls did not look forward to beginning again after the holidays.





## CHAPTER 17

# I Am Captured

It was my first thought to pluck forth the dirk. But either it stuck too hard or my nerve failed me. I shuddered. And oddly enough, that very shudder did the business. The knife had held me by a mere pinch of skin. This the shudder tore away, and I was free.

I went below and did what I could for my wound. Then in great spirits I waded ashore. There lay the schooner ready for our own men to board and get to sea again! I had nothing nearer my fancy than to get back to the stockade and boast of my achievements.

It was dark before I had gone far,

but then the moon helped me, and sometimes walking, sometimes running, in good time I drew near the stockade. Yet, as I began to thread the grove that lies before the blockhouse, I slacked my pace—it would have been a poor end of my adventures to get shot down by my own party in mistake.

At last I came right down upon the borders of the clearing. The blockhouse lay in a black shadow, but behind it I could see the remains of a great fire. I stopped with much wonder in my heart and perhaps a little terror also. It had not been our way to build great fires.

will have your ass in a sling





### **notes towards a body**

i once believed

compassion could only originate from memory:

what did i forget?

why did i forget?

who had i forgotten?

why are you forgotten?

*mozambique*

memory in the body

ocean a body, remembering every crashing wave





there is the absurd  
a ship crashed beside a lighthouse  
ideology of navigation and science on the rocks  
every crashing wave  
marking this site: a memory of misdirected exploration

these images are not about beauty

this is a place that has never existed  
never permitted to exist  
some one else's desires invade

*mozambique:*

a generation of body being burned  
a generation of nose and ears cut off  
marking this site:  
a memory of misdirected exploration  
some one else's war with your body





skeletons along the shore  
how did we forget?

we learned to navigate unknown territories  
with awareness and spirit stopped

body shrivels as memory shrivels

a body of money without memory  
a body of memory without money  
who shall i be?  
skeletons in my closet

*mozambique*

hot days where time stopped  
night of fierce wind and ocean swallowing  
lighthouse, shipwreck, a generation of roaming children





i spent days absorbed by this sand that changed every moment  
like my understanding changed every moment  
like the war tactics changed every moment

the ship keeps revisiting and repeating the crash

i once thought only memory can revive my compassion  
i once thought only compassion can revive my body  
i once thought only body can revive my memory

*mozambique*

what am i forgetting?  
a generation of people wanting body back

to whose advantage is forgetting?



## List of Works

1-2. *Unknown Cause*, found images, found text, colour photocopy 1982

Image sources: *Time* and *Maclean's* magazine

Text source: *Der Hund (The Dog)* by Rainer Maria Rilke

3-4. *Character of Two Dimension*, from the series *Drawings in Blueprint: Basic Frames #1*, found images, blueprints, 1982

Image source: newspaper comic series *Rex Morgan M.D.*

5-6. *Ten Little Indians / Ten Little White Boys*, found images, liquid paper, 1993

Image source: *Better Homes and Gardens Story Book*, Meredith Publishing Co. USA, 1950

7-8. *Little Black Sambo / Little White Simpy*, found images, liquid paper, 1993

Image source: *Better Homes and Gardens Story Book*, Meredith Publishing Co. USA, 1950

9. *Little Women: The Heartless Series*, found images, found texts 1994

Image source: Louisa M. Alcott, *Little Women*, The Golden Picture Classics, London, UK, Simon & Schuster, 1956.

Text source: Makkai, Boatner and Gates, *Handbook of Commonly Used American Idioms*, Barron's Educational Series, New York, 1991

10. *Treasure Island: The Senseless Series*, found images, found texts 1996

Image source: Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island*, The Golden Picture Classics, London, UK, Simon & Schuster, 1956.

Text source: Makkai, Boatner and Gates, *Handbook of Commonly Used American Idioms*, Barron's Educational Series, New York, 1991

11-13. *notes towards a body*: a work-in-progress, photographic b/w images, text 1997

Photographs by Tonderai Katiyo on location in Beira, Mozambique.

14. *notes towards a body*: a work-in-progress, photographic b/w images, text 1997

Photograph by Laiwan on location in Beira, Mozambique.

The artist thanks Bob Sherrin & Margarita Miniovich at The Capilano Review, Lynne Bell & Carol Williams, Jack Stanley & Galerie Article, and Glenn Alteen & Grunt Gallery.



## Lynne Bell & Carol Williams / The distance of distinct vision: An Interview with Laiwan

Lynne: Laiwan, you've described your exhibition *distance of distinct vision* (1992) as being "about us in the First World and where and how we fail." Can you tell us about this exhibition and the notion of distinct vision?

Laiwan: I was invited by Brice Canyon, then curator at the Western Front Gallery to exhibit *distance of distinct vision* because 1992 was the quincentenary year of Columbus's "discovery" of the Americas and my work explored issues of imperialism and colonialism. It was based on thoughts I had been working on for seven years — ever since my first visit to China and Hong Kong in 1985 and the return to the city of my birth, Harare, Zimbabwe, where I lived from 1989 until 1992. Living in Harare was a continuation of my "symbolic return" to China — I was propelled to visit all that haunted me from my ancestral and childhood past.

The installation, made up of three sections and an epilogue, was quite simple — blueprint pages floated on the wall with one section of four cibachrome photographs. I chose this simple, spartan quality to frustrate expectations about consumption. I didn't want the viewer to be seduced with beautiful art objects. I wanted to manifest the critique materially so I chose a temporary medium — blueprints have no real commodity value as they fade fast.

*distance of distinct vision* is about perception and its dependency on cultural perspective and location. In developing this work I often had to imagine myself looking from another place, another continent, another culture, another identity. Looking from a place of distance brings into focus many subtle and not-so-subtle issues. I was flipping through an old Chinese encyclopedia that belonged to my father

searching for something I could understand in English when I noticed the phrase “the distance of distinct vision.” I thought the phrase was apt because it’s about depth of field. I find that I need to take distance to see clearly, to be in focus. I don’t think I have attained distinct vision, I just feel I’m forced to keep distance because I am constantly negotiating the feeling of being both an insider and an outsider in Canada, in Zimbabwe, in Asia . . .

In the first section, titled *Ubiquitous China*, I paired an image from the Yangtze River, China, with an image from Saturna Island, British Columbia, and an image of the city skyline in Hong Kong with the skyline in Vancouver. The title *Ubiquitous China* came from an old history book on British Columbia where I found the subtitle *The Ubiquitous China Man* (Howard H. Bancroft, *The History of British Columbia*, 1890). In juxtaposing the natural landscapes and metropolitan centres of China/Hong Kong and Canada, I show how similar they are and how ubiquitous the notion of the exotic really is. The Yangtze River and Saturna are made up of similar material properties. Neither is “exotic”; it is only the concepts of landscape and culture that have been exoticized. When I went to China in 1985 I was shocked to realize how non-“Chinese” I am and how I was not perceived as Chinese. This experience made me realize the relativity of perceptions — how we are perceived and how we perceive ourselves, nationally and as individuals.

The panel *The Imperialism of Syntax* explores what it means to have English as my first language. I am interested in how language shapes a cultural perspective. The interesting thing about Chinese is that there is no gender of he and she and there is no past or future tense and because many Chinese words are made out of pictographs there is a visual element that can be called poetic. I wrote the text in English and it was translated into Chinese. The process of translation revealed that the cognitive and perceptual skills of the Chinese language are quite different to those of the English language. I’m interested in language and how it constructs us: what we see and how we choose to describe it.

The second section *Savage* was written in Harare around 1989. I'd left Zimbabwe at 14 when it was still called Rhodesia and there was a civil war going on. When I went back, Zimbabwe was only 9-10 years old as an independent country and I witnessed the incredible tension among Zimbabweans to "do things the right way," to not make mistakes because all the world is watching, judging. In *Savage* I explore "post-colonial" internalizations and how they are played out.

The third section *they did not rest in quiet even here . . .* was written while I was in Montreal during the events at Oka. A key image here was taken from the *Globe and Mail*: it shows an altercation between a Mohawk warrior and a Canadian soldier. I was fascinated with what the hands were doing: a turmoil of gestures. I repeated this image in a number of the prints to reflect the loop of the news in North America — continually repeating itself. I used repetition to indicate the deliberate stalemate.

The title *they did not rest in quiet even here . . .* is from a children's history book called *Christopher Columbus and the Discovery of America* (1896). It describes how Columbus's bones did not rest because he was exhumed two or three times before he was buried finally in Cuba. This signifies to me that he never found acceptance and he never made peace with himself or the land he had "founded."

In the Epilogue there are two images: a picture of a Chinese woman taken from a fashion advertisement and a picture of George Bush's tie (laughter). How did men get this fashion of the suit and tie? For me the signifier of the suit and tie was pertinent after being in "post-colonial" Zimbabwe where, incredibly, a lot of men wear woolen suits in the heat. It's the respectable thing because of colonialism. It showed me that the aim of colonialism was to erase common sense. Here I review the construction of "he" and "she" — a recurring motif in all the previous sections. I explore intimate relationships on a metaphoric level because I see personal relationships between men and women to be a microcosm of what happens on a world level. I wanted to explore how gender relations play out on a larger scale of



world politics and how we maintain colonial habits on a personal level.

Lynne: In the publication that accompanied the exhibition (*distance of distinct vision: point éloigné de vision claire*, Vancouver: Front Gallery, 1992) you added more material — an essay, a letter and a short story.

Laiwan: Yes. I wanted the book to differ from the standard catalogue. I wrote the essay *Notes Against Difference* while I was in Harare at a time when I couldn't quite fathom my place in Canada. When I say 'place' I mean how I am perceived — the assumptions and projections about who I am supposed to be in Canada. I felt suspicious of how 'difference' theory was constructing us. I think my suspicions were reinforced in Zimbabwe because a lot of the postcolonial concerns of the First World are not concerns in this so-called 'post-colonial' Third World country. On some level, a lot of post-colonial theory isn't even applicable because the philosophical and material struggles in the Third World are on a totally different level. In Zimbabwe I began to comprehend how the colonial project is still in effect and I started to question how post-colonial and postmodern theory functions for the First World.

In the texts, *Letter from Kampala* and *wedge*, I wanted to portray the differing aspects of my identity, leaving it up to the reader to decipher what this might be. Working in the First World and in the art world, one's identity can be collapsed to one restrictive genre or into ghettos. In *distance of distinct vision* I was really cautious about being consumed — I think a lot of my work works around this. I tend to be very aware of process and within this I'm wary of being made into a commodity. I think ideas and personalities are easily consumed in North America — it's an established habit.

Lynne: In many of your works, your starting point is a found title or image. Why do you dialogue with someone else's work or title?

Laiwan: Using found titles, books or images expands the framework that I'm working within. It gives another dimension—a critique of a



previous generation or era. Using the term "Ubiquitous China Man," for instance, I was able to reconfigure the stereotype of the Chinaman and the notion of China as a feminine entity in the imaginations of the First World.

In *The Heartless Series* (eds. Roy Miki and Fred Wah, *Colour. An Issue*, Vancouver: WestCoast Line, 1994: 129-33), I used found pages taken from a 1950s edition of the children's book *Little Women* juxtaposed with idioms in English. This piece questioned how girl children are constructed within the domestic culture exemplified by *Little Women* and explored the perceptions inherent in the idioms of a language. I also wanted to critique the assumption of not questioning the values being taught in these classic texts. I saw *Little Women* as promoting class values that were quite foreign to me and yet it was required reading in my childhood education. Imperialism is essentially a class war in which the First World is the upper and middle class, living beyond its means, consuming and exploiting resources from whichever worlds have them.

Carol: What do you learn by working within and across the two different cultural milieus of Vancouver and Harare? You spend a great deal of time in both places.

Laiwan: Within both of these locations I've gotten a better understanding of how world politics works in terms of resources: who has the resources, who has access to them, and who distributes them. My experience of living in both Zimbabwe and Canada has made me see what I call "the extension of the colonial project" and this has become a key framework in my research. Unable to call either Canada or Zimbabwe home, makes me aware of the politics of "home" and the privileges of that positioning. Even though I was born in Zimbabwe I am perceived as a foreigner and for me that's all right because I have all the privileges of a foreigner. But it brings into question: what does one call home and how do we get to name and claim a place as home? Living in both places has also made me question the notion of being an artist in Canada. I am critical of capitalism and how it reframes creativity as something to be bought and consumed. In many ways I'm

not interested in how that art world is constructed and why. From living in Zimbabwe I've become more interested in how artists effect social change. Coming from a continent that is constantly exploited and mis-represented I am interested in revealing how systems of exploitation work in all their subtle nuances.

In Zimbabwe the media is bombarded by Hollywood films and television: a new form of colonialism. There is a real need to negotiate this influx of images: to strategize about how we can create real choice instead of passively being reshaped by another's concept of time and space. Why in Zimbabwe are we watching shows like *Dallas* and *Dynasty*? It's like the suit and tie thing, creativity and common sense become the struggle. Young Zimbabweans are conflicted between idealizing and despising American culture and its promises. Postmodern "identity" has become such that we are taught to admire and value what we cannot see ourselves in — to transfer desire onto the other, the foreign. With this, we cannot find self-fulfilment or empowerment. It's an alienating thing. This is postcolonialism.

Lynne: Can you describe how you became involved with the Zimbabwean Women In Contemporary Culture Trust?

Laiwan: Well, living in Zimbabwe I realized that girl children had no visible role models who work in the fields of creativity or art. Schooling is also expensive so parents encourage boys not girls to go to school. Usually the first son gets to be educated. Ten years after Independence there was still a need for different kinds of images about women. So a number of friends and myself started ZWICCT (Zimbabwean Women in Contemporary Culture Trust). There were five of us at the beginning and most of us were not indigenous Zimbabweans. It was quite clear that as outsiders we had to be aware of our motives. Primarily our agenda was to highlight women doing cultural work and document them.

We found women working in all media — from basket weavers to potters to radio DJ's to filmmakers. Young women in 1990-91 still had few career options other than to be housekeepers, secretaries or

clerks. It was important to include images of women working with their media because young children, for example, might not be able to imagine themselves behind the microphone in a radio station . . . yet here's a picture of a woman doing it, right! Another motive was to make these images accessible to everybody including the media so there are alternative images of women available for mass dissemination. The project has now expanded to research women in the southern region of Africa including countries like Botswana, Lesotho, South Africa, and Mozambique. It is now called WICCSA (Women in Contemporary Culture in Southern Africa) and there are indigenous Zimbabwean women who are involved in the project. A few of us who initiated the project, like myself, are no longer involved.

Lynne: You assembled an archive of materials?

Laiwan: The women working on the project did.

Lynne: How are the women and their work documented?

Laiwan: With photographs, audio taped oral history. This data base is housed in the Zimbabwean Women Resource Center Network office in Harare.

Lynne: What types of funding supported the project?

Laiwan: In the beginning SIDA Sweden, CODE (Canadian Organization for Development Through Education) and WomenKind from the UK provided funds. Since I've left, they've had funding from Denmark and elsewhere. There has been good support from international agencies. Each year since 1992 ZWICCT/WICCSA has produced an almanac of photographs of creative women accompanied by brief texts about their lives and work. It has been very successful in the sense of connecting women to each other.

Lynne: And how is the almanac marketed?

Laiwan: I think international marketing on a consumer level wasn't a



priority because that's not our intended audience. Our primary goal was to network with women within Zimbabwe and Africa as well as African women outside of the continent. Networking and distribution always strongly relied on women's organizations and the activism of individual women in the region. Considering our person power and resources, we were successful. From the beginning we also realized that many women in Zimbabwe could not afford to buy these almanacs, so we set aside about 2,000 for free distribution to women's groups and school libraries.

Carol: Will you talk about the importance of coalition affinities in your work? You started the photo-text *they did not rest in quiet even here* when you were in Montreal during the Oka Resistance. This work clearly represents a statement of political solidarity with the Mohawk Nation.

Laiwan: This work in its critique of imperialism, capitalism, gender and class constructions goes out in solidarity to the peoples or groups that I feel an alliance with. In the works *Savage* and *they did not rest in quiet even here* . . . , "post-colonial" Zimbabwe and the Oka crisis were models or analogies that I used to illustrate my philosophies about capitalism and imperialism. I think that the situation of the First Nations in Canada parallels the relationship that exists between a First World and a Third World, except it's happening here in Canada. Something we always forget is that Canada, the US, Australia and New Zealand are the remaining settler colonies that have never had an indigenous government since the settlers arrived. My ideological alliance is not specifically with one political group or culture but with those who are positioned as Third World within an Imperialist framework.

I have tried to decipher how resources are manipulated to the advantage of the First World. In the introduction of *distance of distinct vision* I say: "It is about us in the first world and where and how we fail." I mean exactly that. We haven't and we don't know how to disentangle ourselves from this complex market where everything that we have is a resource taken from somewhere else. This is our failure. As I've said, this is how we relate on a fundamental level, person to person. Inter-

personal constructions have informed our approach to the world: we expect things to be readily available to us, given, according to our assumptions or expectations, without having to do the work. I'm not an idealist trying to harken back to some kind of natural or non-technological world; rather I think we need to be aware of what we do at the expense of others.

Lynne: You gave a talk on technology called *Information and Virtual Experience: A Taoist Approach* (Western Front, 1994). What is your approach to technological methods and their modes of ordering thoughts and actions?

Laiwan: In this talk I raised a number of concerns about technology. I see technology in the same way as I see language — for computer software to be made it has to be written by a programmer and within that writing there is an inherent value system. This can be a privileging of information, or visibility, or the instantaneity and gratification manifested through “plug-in and play.” Before I participate in any technology I want to comprehend its value system. What is it seducing me to do? What processes am I skipping over, where have I leapt to by using this tool? I work with computers — I'm not throwing them out of the window — but I see how they collapse time and space and how they foster an intense addiction to information. I see the obsession with information as an extension of colonialism — a tool used to convince those not yet convinced.

How can we use information and technology in a different way? In the First World it's becoming difficult to find contemplative spaces — spaces that are not continually bombarded with information and cultural expectations. The need to create contemplative spaces is a driving force behind my work. I think those spaces are becoming extinct. But it's difficult because you don't want to add to this mess of information. The work has to embody contemplation. That's one of my struggles as an artist — I don't want to add to the mess.

Lynne: But you need to talk back to most of it, right?



Laiwan: Yes! (laughter) That's the contradiction. In this talk on technology I was also interested in technology's relationship to the body — how it is reconstructing our relationship to time and space. What does virtual experience mean? People are talking of places and experiences without having to go anywhere, without having to experience anything in real time. They can talk very knowledgeably about the Gulf War or Rwanda but there isn't a need to engage in any real way with the issues. It's packaged and safe. Information masked as consciousness. I'm beginning to recognize how cerebral the world is becoming. People construct relationships with each other without having to be physically accountable — think of how the telephone constructs the way we interact with people. One thing I noticed in Zimbabwe was that people would spontaneously drop by and chat and have tea because telephones were so unreliable. This type of social interaction is becoming uncommon in Canada. The nature of experience has become so cerebral that it has collapsed what we know to be time and space. These systems of technology and information exchange have accelerated the speed at which we personally interact and connect in the First World, and we haven't emotionally caught up.

I'm interested in Taoist philosophy because it comprehended the human mind's ability to deceive itself — this was understood 2400 years ago. Its "riddle" style of writing philosophical exercises shows how the subtlety of the problem was understood. Western interpretations of Taoism have failed to convey this, mistakenly collapsing it as religion, a "spiritual quest through the contemplation of nature." In this talk I link our contemporary relationship to technology and virtual experience to this Taoist understanding of self-deception.

Carol: What artists and writers have been influential in the development of your own work?

Laiwan: At a certain point in my life I had a crisis about intellectual authorities. I was reading French and German philosophy and semiotics — works by Roland Barthes and others — and I began to question who was being published and why and what that meant in relation to the construction of my perception of the world. The other part of that

crisis was about my inability to read Chinese: I wanted to connect with Chinese texts. I now try to find bilingual texts in both English and Chinese. Because many English translations of Chinese texts are poor and don't reflect the complexity of thought or language, I usually find someone to interpret the Chinese for me. I find this more accurate.

The types of texts I'm looking for in Chinese are ancient poems and philosophy from 300 BC on. The only access I have to philosophical texts in English translated by Chinese people is in comic form. A publishing house in Singapore realized that Chinese youth are losing access to ancient Chinese texts so it started translating them into comic form which conveys the pictographic elements of Chinese writing through visual puns. So I'm reading all these comic books! I find them in Chinatown but they are expensive — about \$20 a comic — so I try to get them from Asia.

Lynne: You are clearly committed to community activism. You were a project coordinator for *The First Vancouver Lesbian Film Festival* (1988), an advisory board member for *In Visible Colours: Women of Colour and Third World Women's Film/Video Festival and Symposium* (1989), a co-founder of *Zine but not Herd*, a zine for, by, and about lesbian and bisexual women of colour, and you guest curated *Making Out: Women on the verge of revolution in the mango swamp of enchantment* (Pitt Gallery, 1993).

Laiwan: In 1987 I became involved in feminist and lesbian organizing because I wanted to gain experience in community activism. I found the art world to be dry and not reflective of my experience. My need to be active came from belonging to various social groupings which aren't readily given voice in the mainstream nor acceptance in the art world. I'm still active in various ways here in Vancouver, but I've learnt over the years about the limitations of organizations involved in social change. I'm weary of the reactivity of political activism and so I try to find a way for art and social activism to meet creatively . . . proactively.

Identity politics has pigeonholed many of us into simplistic frame-

works and we are always being diverted from that which is true to us. A lot of work out there struggles with this. One of the challenges I face as an artist is that I don't want to be ghettoized as a queer artist, a Chinese artist, etc . . . But because these are all elements of myself, I'm constantly faced with a shifting insider/outsider position in the arts community, the queer community, the Chinese community — it's a juggling act. Nonetheless, I try to embody myself holistically within the subtle and contemplative spaces I attempt to create in my work . . . and I'm only trying to create these spaces because I miss them.



## Taien Ng-Chan / THINGS FOR THE DEAD

I wake up shivering. My window is iced over into opaque-white crystal, fracturing the morning light. I stand for several minutes with my hand against the glass, thinking how cold and how beautiful.

There, the imprint of my hand.

Through this space of melted frost, I can see the snow-filled street outside, the bundled-up people hurrying along Ste. Catherine's on their way to work.

There is no time for breakfast, as usual. I throw on some clothes and get to work a little late, drink too much coffee on an empty stomach; after work, I come home, make macaroni and cheese for dinner, and watch a bit of the news on the television while I eat. I decide to finish some reading.

And then at 11:07 p.m., my mother calls.

"Your grandfather died," she says. "Last night."

There is a space, and I put down my book. I look over at the window with my handprint blurring now in soft edges of white, and the blinds which are dusty, and then I look down at the floor which needs sweeping, the table with faint white rings stained onto the wood, and the glass with bits of orange pulp stuck to the sides. My mug of half-finished cold tea, the ashtray that I should empty. Then the room shifts a bit to one side. My mouth is forming the sentence "Oh, so how was your day?" which suddenly flees, splinters, blurs like a speeded-up tape into something I know isn't right.

I realize what she has said.

A brief moment is suspended in the air like that first quiet stillness in the morning, before it is broken by the sound of cars and birds, when each noise is as broad and as bright as the sun moving up towards the horizon. The moment breaks.

"Oh," I say, swallowing the rest of the sentence. So how was your

day? is caught stark and swollen in my throat. I don't hear what she says next, still tasting the "Oh," still trying to grasp that blur, figure out what it meant. Oh. My grandfather's died. I suddenly don't know the meaning of words.

There is a reaction I'm supposed to be having — *the word for sad flits through my head* — but instead it's the distant sound of an echo passing too quickly to be caught. I think of my grandfather in his sunny kitchen on the sixth floor of a crowded Hong Kong apartment building, and pineapple buns in the morning — *I'm not sad* — and the black and white picture I have of creeping up behind him as he was washing dishes, and calling *grandpa!* His head turning towards me as I clicked the camera, with the out of focus pots and steamers and spoons hanging on the tiled wall behind him, and *good morning* he said to me in English, as he would say every morning, happy to use the only words he knew of my language. *Good Morning!*

And then the "oh" again, catching the blur and sucking it down into my lungs. *Why am I crying?*

We say nothing for a while, until my lungs run out of air and need more, and then I manage to calm my gasping.

"Mom," I say. But then I stop. There isn't anything else to say.

My mother tells me about the funeral arrangements. She wants a proper service, one with a preacher and everything, but nothing has been settled. "Uncle Chu and Uncle Len flew back to Hong Kong today," she says. "They'll take care of things."

Uncle Chu is my mother's oldest brother, and Buddhist. I don't know what Uncle Len, the youngest brother, believes in, though I can't imagine him being religious. I wonder what the funeral will be like.

"You're not going to go back?" I ask.

There is a pause and I can hear my mother thinking about how she could pay for a ticket, how she could maybe take a week from working and how much she has saved. "I don't know," she says.

"You really don't need to go back, you know. Uncle Chu and Uncle Len will take care of everything."

"Yes," my mom says. "Well . . . they're thinking the funeral will be on Friday. Friday Hong Kong time. Thursday night here."

I've never been to a funeral before, and I think about a black casket and white flowers, or maybe there will be paper money and incense. I think about Chinese movies I've seen where the mourning is loud and elaborate, the relatives wailing and dressed in rags.

"Are you going to wear white?" I ask.

"It doesn't matter. Nobody does that here."

"Do you think they'll go to a temple or something? Maybe Uncle Chu would want that."

"Oh, I don't know," my mother says. "That's up to them." Her voice is a frown, and I can almost hear her shaking her head. Village superstitions. Tsk. I want to ask her about paper money, paper houses, paper clothes — the things for the dead. But I don't.

"What we should do," my mother says, "is go for a walk next Thursday night. At the same time next Thursday, we'll go for a walk outside. You can go walk outside your apartment."

"Yes, okay."

"And I'll go for a walk here. So we can think about him together. Then our whole family will be thinking about him together."

"Okay."

"Is it cold in Montreal now?"

"It's freezing. How is it there?"

"Not too bad."

"That's good."

"I'll call you Thursday night," she says. "Just before we go out walking. And give your grandmother a call now, just ask her how she is."

Alarmed, I start to cry again. "Now? I can't call her now."

"It's alright, I'll give you the phone number."

"Mom, I don't know what to say . . ."

"Just ask her how she's doing. Just say you called to see how she is."

I try to breathe, going over the conversation with my grandmother in my head. I can barely imagine doing it in English, and Grandma speaks only Cantonese. *Grandma, I'm sorry to hear about Grandpa. How are you? Grandma, I'm sorry to hear . . .* Even in English, the words sound foreign. All I can manage to translate is *how are you* — *nay ho mah. Poh poh, nay ho mah?*



I lose my breath again and start to sob.

"I know you're upset," my mother says. "You can call in a little while."

"Well . . . I don't know. I don't know *how* . . ."

She tells me a few words in Chinese. "Just say '*Poh poh, nay ho mah?*'"

"I can't . . . I can't call and say just that."

"You don't have to say much. She'll be so happy to hear from you."

I am crying so hard now I can barely speak. "Tomorrow, okay? I'll do it tomorrow."

"Okay," she says. "That's okay. Just try."

I hang up the phone and cry a while longer. *What a coward.* I look down at my hands blurry through the tears and the ragged nails I've been chewing on, and the silver ring that my grandmother gave me when I was thirteen and I told her I didn't care for yellow gold. And then my grandpa took me out to buy a silver bracelet with a phoenix on it. I sit at the table thinking about the phoenix and noticing my ashtray is full, and maybe I should wear white — it makes more sense to me — but I don't know if I have anything appropriate. My nose is running and I just sit there with the sleeves of my shirt wet and my head aching and my eyes sore, trying to summon courage from hundreds of miles away. I sit there until I can speak steadily again. *What a coward I am. Shit.*

I light a cigarette. Then I call my mother back.

"I'm going to call grandma now," I say.

"That's good," mom says. "Do you need the number?"

"No, I have it."

"Call me back after, if you want. Tell me how it went."

I flip through my phone book to find my grandmother's number. All I can think about is how the number four in Chinese sounds like the word for *dead*. I stub out the cigarette and reach for the phone. I try to find my tongue.

*I'm going to call my grandmother now, even if I have no words for her. I*

dial the number slowly, my mind a blank. The phone rings on the other side, oceans away, one ring, two rings, three rings, four. Then someone picks up the receiver.

"Weh?" It is a woman's voice. *Is this my grandmother? It doesn't sound like her. I don't think it's her.*

"Uh, weh?" *Can I speak to . . . how do you say that? I don't know the word for "speak."* Finally, I manage to say "Is my grandmother there?" My words in Chinese sound cracked and rusty.

"Eh?" says the voice on the phone.

"This is Kai . . ." I can't think of any other Chinese words, so I repeat the ones I already have. "Poh poh hain m hain doh?"

"Kai? Ah! This is Ling . . . you know, Ah Nui's elder sister! You remember me?" Ling's dialect is slightly different from mine and I can barely understand her.

"Ah!" I say. *Of course — gan hai.* Ah Nui and Ling are my cousins. "Gan hai gai dac, la . . ."

Then a rush of language follows. I try to pluck out words that here and there bob up from the stream, but Ling talks too fast for me. I catch the words for *good* and *newspaper* and *waiting*. Then, "You want to speak to Poh Poh, of course . . . just a minute . . ."

I hear the phone being put down, and Ling saying "It's Kai on the phone, from Canada . . ." I imagine my grandmother in her thin beige pajamas, and the way she must be walking now, slowly from where she was sitting on the hard bed, to the other side of the room where the eating table and bookshelf are, where the phone sits waiting. The phone is picked up and then, "Weh?"

"Hello?" I say in English. "Uh, weh?"

"Kai? Is that you?"

"Poh poh! Yes, it's Kai," I say in Chinese. "I called to ask how you're doing."

My grandmother's dialect changes from time to time, back and forth from my Cantonese to something I can't understand at all, maybe Toi-Shan. I've noticed that she slips in and out of these different tones and rhythms when speaking with my mother, but not so much with me — I can understand her better than I can understand Ling. "Do you know about your grandfather?" she says. "He . . ."

"Yes, yes . . ." I say hastily. "Uh, I know . . ." *How do you say sorry?*

Sorry to hear that. *Doi m jee . . . is that it? Doi m jee means sorry, but maybe only for things like breaking a teacup . . . I don't know if it's the right expression. It sounds so fake.* "My mom called and told me," I say in Chinese, finally. "So . . . I'm calling to ask you how you are . . ."

"Ah, gum nay yow sum," my grandma says. *Yow sum. You have heart, literally. You have care.*

I bite my lip. "Uh," I say. I can hear the silence racing back and forth under the ocean, into my ears and back again.

"Nay ma, la?" my grandmother asks. *How is your mother?* "Nay tse gai, la? Ho m ho?"

"Ho," I say. "Good! Er, I'm . . ." *There must be another word in Chinese for good, one that doesn't sound so . . . good. But I can't find it. . . .* . good. Mom's good, too. She's at home now, in Calgary, I'm calling from my home in . . . um." *What is Montreal in Chinese?* "Uh, nay ho mah?"

"Ho . . ." she says.

There is a pause.

"So," I say in Chinese. "That's about it. I just called to see how you were."

"You should come back to Hong Kong some time," my grandmother says. "You can go sightseeing . . ." *Sightseeing. Literally, walking around.*

"Yes, I'd like to come back and see you." *See gan. Time.* "When I have a little more time, maybe next summer." *Or did I just say spring?*

"We're all very proud of you . . . studying so hard in school . . ."

"Ah," I say, not being able to explain that I've graduated already. There is another pause as my eyebrows knit together in frustration over my knotted tongue, the things I want to say, the spaces tangled in my head. "So, well, that's about it. I just called to see how you're doing . . ."

"That's good," my grandmother says to me in Chinese.

"Bye," I say in English.

"Bye," she says back, in English.

I hang up the phone.

"So fast?" my mother says when I call her back.

"I just asked her how she was," I say. "I didn't know what else to



ask her."

"What did she say?"

"She asked if I knew about Grandpa. She said I should come to Hong Kong to visit."

"So you said when you have some time?"

"Yes. I said maybe next summer. Is summer *ha teen* or *yeet teen*?"

"*Yeet teen*," my mother says.

"Oh. Then I told her maybe next spring."

"Did you talk to Uncle Len or Uncle Chu?"

I knew I had forgotten something. "No," I say. "I talked to Ling, she answered the phone."

"Ling's still there? That's good."

". . . Mom?" I say.

"Yes?"

"Do you think that was alright?"

"Yes," my mother says. "Yes. That was fine. They'll be glad you called."

After I hang up the phone, I'm suddenly aware of the quiet room, empty of sound but not quite clear, like the air after an echo has just faded. And I don't know what to do next. I don't know what to do, so I sit there until it is faintly light outside. Then I turn out the lights in my room and stand by the window. I can see a few of the lights in the apartment buildings across from me, lights in tiny box-shapes, and I wonder why those people are still awake. Maybe they're just getting up, or maybe the lights were left on all night. I think about how the darkness inside makes the windows glow street-light orange, how the traffic noise outside has settled into the ground, how snow muffles everything into white. And there, the imprint of my hand, how it has dimmed with new frost. It'll be gone by the morning.

Thursday night, my mother calls at a quarter to eleven.

"I'm just about to go out," she says.

"Right now?"

"In about ten minutes."

"Okay," I say. And my head which has been filled with that muffled air of after-echo these past two days is suddenly clear.

I pull my boots on and tie the laces slowly. I have on two pairs of socks, two sweaters over my shirt, then my jacket, a pair of gloves, a scarf, and a hat. Out the door, down three flights of stairs, then outside into the bitter cold. Turning right at the corner onto a smaller street. As I walk, I look down at the sidewalk. Thinking of grandpa, thinking of grandpa. What am I supposed to think about?

*I'll think about the way he liked to climb stairs. And the last time I saw him. He was 83 the last time I visited Hong Kong, I was nineteen then, and he liked to climb the stairs up to the sixth floor, said it was good for him. He would get up early and go out to buy breakfast pastries from the bakery before anyone else was up. He would go talk with his friends who were all up early as well, reading the newspapers. He had thin, bony hands that I held when we went walking in the afternoon, to get dumplings at the noodle house, to buy oranges. That was only the fourth time that I had been to Hong Kong. It was always summer when we went, and so hot that I always said I would never go back in summer.* I reach an intersection, and decide to turn left. The streets are slippery with ice, and it is beginning to snow. My hands are cold already, even with these leather gloves on, and I wish it was summer now. *Once we took a trip to China, and it was so humid there that I hated it. Grandpa refused to set foot in China ever again, so my mother and my grandmother and I took the train there without him, under the ocean to the mainland, where my mother's sister still lived. Grandfather was a landowner once. They threw him in jail during a revolution. I don't know which one.* My mother told me all this about my grandfather, and I have only these few images of him, ones that I keep trying to call up as I'm walking down this dark street, trying to keep warm. My ears are starting to hurt and I pull my hat down over them, fold my arms across my body. The trees are all spindly and brown-boned. *I only have these few images of grandfather, and I can't be sad about them. What does it mean that my grandfather died? It means I won't have any more images of him, it means that he doesn't walk up the five flights of stairs anymore, it means that I should be sad now. How to be sad? Good morning! he'd say emphatically to me, every morning, triumphantly pleased. My grandmother knew no English at all. Tsoh sun! I'd say when I got up, and they would beam at me. The breakfast pastries would be on the table, the tea brewed and poured for me already. The wind is blowing right through me and making the snow fly like wisps of ghosts across the street. I look through the windows of the apart-*



ments, some dark, some with light, and I can see a ceiling fan whirling long shadows, a street sign saying Kingston that someone has hung on a livingroom wall, a kitchen table with dirty dishes scattered across. I kick at an icicle lying on the sidewalk, watch my breath become smoke, pull down my hat again. *My mother is walking with me right now, across the country my mother is walking with me. We are walking together, thinking about my grandfather. What is she thinking? My mother's father. And what are my relatives doing now, across the ocean where it is tomorrow already? Is my grandfather ashes in an urn, or is he lying in a coffin looking like he's asleep, only in a more perfect sleep? My family there, are they dressed in white, or black? I wish I knew. I wanted to dress in white, but I didn't have anything except a summer blouse. How am I grieving? How is he dead? Is he in heaven like my mother keeps telling me, climbing the stairs with bags of gai lan and fresh fish, to cook dinner? He was the one who did the cooking, not my grandmother. I always thought that was so wonderful. There is a busy street up ahead, and I turn around, not wanting to walk under glaring orange lights, not wanting to see anyone. I pass an all night greasy-spoon, an alleyway, a flower shop with pots of cacti in the window. And all I have of my grandfather are these few images, two words in English, and the taste of pineapple buns for breakfast. I have that picture of him, turning towards me as he was washing the dishes. And I have his chin. Ho tsim, everyone said, just like your grandfather's. And just as stubborn as him, too, my mother said.*

And then I know what to do. A memory of a spirit-place falls into my head — incense smoke, a plate of oranges, a picture of my great-grandparents on my grandmother's bookshelf — things not just for the dead. I know what it is that I want to do.

I walk up the stairs carefully, counting each one. 42 stairs. The door to my apartment is shiny black. The warmth is beautiful. Someone is cooking with garlic and the hallway is pungent and I am hungry. I fumble for the keys in my pocket and open the door. There is my cat coming to greet me, there are my books, my bed, the rug on the floor, the television set, the table with a dirty mug. What are my relatives in Hong Kong doing now?

There are some incense sticks on the dresser. I remember the picture of my grandfather, turning towards me, smiling. There are pots and steamers and strainers on the wall behind him, out of focus.



He is washing dishes. I dig the photo out from an old cookie tin and put it on the window sill, the window sill facing west. And then I light some incense before his picture, the smoke wafting up towards heaven, though I don't know if he believed in heaven. The smell of smoky jasmine, my grandfather's picture, the window facing west. My grandfather has died, and it's all right that I'm not sad because here I'm remembering him, and because suddenly, I think that I *am* sad, *I think that I am sad though this sadness is not the opposite of happy, it is something I hold in my hands and send wafting up in the smoke for him, because he did all the cooking and liked to walk five flights of stairs every morning, because Good Morning, and pineapple buns, his chin, and this picture are all I have left.* I wonder, although somehow I doubt it, if across the ocean they are burning red paper houses for him. And I wonder where I might find a red paper house, or maybe I will make one for him, to send up with the smoke.

## Michael Crummey / DISCOVERING DARKNESS

*For we are men of yesterday; we know nothing; our days upon  
the earth are as shadows.*

*The Book of Job*

*All knowing darkens as it builds.*

*Tim Lilburn*

'*Magic Lantern.*' (April, 1889)

Bound for Great Britain and  
beset by evening calm,  
sails sheeted slack and lifeless;  
the likeness of stars on the water,  
hard yellow berries not ripe enough  
to be gathered  
Passengers and crew above decks  
avoiding the breathless heat of their berths,  
everyone wanting to be  
anywhere but here

Brought out the magic lantern  
and slides bought when I was last  
in England, set it aboard a table  
on the foredeck —  
every head turning to  
the breadth of the topmast  
when the kerosene flame was lit  
behind the lens,  
the Tower of London standing  
on the yellow canvas as if  
we had dreamed it there  
together

Flashed up the Crystal Palace,  
Piccadilly, the National Gallery,  
then London Bridge,  
the length of it shaken by  
a rare gust of wind;  
and the nearly-full moon rose  
above the topyard,  
the *Doune Castle* lying stilled  
in its light like a photograph  
projected on the water



## LEARNING THE PRICE OF FISH 1876 - 1887

*'And now to make a start as a boy of  
very little understanding.'* (1876)

After a single season jigging cod  
I gave up on the ocean,  
boarded a steamship bound  
for Little Bay Mines where  
I secured a position  
picking for copper;  
kept at it through the winter,  
a long shadow working  
effortlessly beside me  
while my back was shaken crooked  
by the jabber of pickhead on rock,  
my hands too numb  
at the end of a shift  
to properly hold a spoon

In June I jacked up and went  
back to fishing, shipping out  
with a crew headed to the French Shore,  
happy just to be on the water  
after seven months discovering darkness  
in the mine

Salt air like a handful of brine  
held to the face of an unconscious man  
coming slowly to his senses

~

*'A hard toil and worry for nothing.'* (1879)

Left Twillingate on April 15th after seals,  
steering off NE through open water, arriving  
in Quirpon a day past the Grey Islands April 21st.  
Sailed from there to Green's Pond, then to Gramper's Cove,  
dickering through slack ice until White Bay  
where we came on a gale of wind and got raftered  
between pans, the boat brought up solid  
like an axe in a knot of birch.

Lay there a week getting short of provisions  
and patience till the Captain decided some  
would have to leave the vessel or starve,  
sending six overboard with 2 boats and what food  
could be spared. We marched south toward  
Twillingate, hauling boats and supplies till  
we came on a run of open water in Lobster Harbour,  
rowing on to Handy Island before giving up for darkness.  
Set out for a long day's launching and pulling  
to Flourdelu at first light, the ice slobby and  
treacherous, taking us through to the waist on times.  
Next day on to Lacie, chewing handfuls of old snow  
when the fresh water ran dry.

Our fourth day out we passed Cape St. John and  
Cull Island where the schooner *Queen* ran ashore,  
all hands but one coming across on a line  
before the wind took her over. The papers reported  
how they perished there, and published Dr Dowsley's  
letter to his wife dated December 18th, 1867 —  
*my dear Margaret, I have been out to see if there is  
any chance of rescue but no such thing I would give  
the world for one drink of water but I shall never  
get it now We are all wet and frozen may God pity  
and have mercy . . .*

I was sixteen years old, my first  
time to the ice and I stared at the island as  
we slogged past it, a bald crown of rock and  
no sign of life to be made out there but shadows.

It was three days more past the Cape, trimming  
the shore all the way through Green Bay nearly  
blocked with ice; we didn't get clear of it  
until Lading Tickle when a SW wind took it off  
the land, we hung up our rugs for sails on the oars  
and straightened them out for home.  
Arrived in Twillingate on June 17th, our boots  
sliced through with the rough walking  
and blood still in our mouths from the snow.  
And on the 18th our schooner sailed into the harbour  
behind us, all hands rested and well fed, we had  
a hard toil and worry for nothing.

~



'*The price of fish.*' (September, 1887)

I have had a fair trial on the fishing line now,  
being 3 summers out from home, 2 summers on  
the French Shore, 4 down on the Labrador,  
and three trips this year to the Banks of Newfoundland,  
and this is what I have learned to be the price of fish

Shem Yates and Harry Brown lost with the *Abyssinia*,  
making through slack ice 60 miles NE of the Grey Islands  
when the wind turned and she struck hard on a block,  
the vessel split like a stick of frozen kindling —  
May, 1886

Tom Viven out of Crow Head, his boat running  
loaded down through heavy seas that opened her up forward,  
going down just off Kettle Cove and a good trip of fish lost besides —  
August, 1884

My last trip to the French Shore, Luke Brumley and Fred Strong  
sent out to take in a trap set loose in a gale,  
the rough weather filling their skiff with water  
when they hauled up the span line, the two men  
pitched under only a good shout from the *Traveller*  
but neither one could swim a stroke —  
June, 1882

Show me a map and I'll name you a dead man for  
every cove between home and Battle Harbour

I am twenty four years old,  
there is no guarantee I will ever see twenty five

~

## EXPECTING TO BE CHANGED 1887 - 1894

*'On the broad Atlantic for the first time  
to cross the pond.'* (November, 1887)

When I signed on the *Konigsburg*  
bound for Italy with  
a load of dry cod  
I had expectations,  
but I could not rightly say  
what they were

We hove up the anchor,  
sheeted our topsails  
and my family waved me out  
of the harbour  
as if they knew they had  
seen me for the last time

I expected to be changed  
and I thought a change  
would not do me  
any harm

~

*'Crossing the equator. Arrived in Rio Grande.'* (1888)

Set sail from Spain April 24th,  
arrived in Rio Grande after sixty nights at sea.  
Discharged our cargo and proceeded up  
the Port de Lego River for a load of horn,  
hides and tallow, arriving July 10th.

In Pelotas fresh meat went for 3 cents a pound,  
apples could be had for a good song  
or a chew of hard tobacco and  
we drew water over the side for all purposes.  
Once our cargo was secured, the Port de Lego  
carried us back to Rio Grande, groves of  
green trees on the shore bowed so low  
you could pick fruit from the branches  
as we sailed beneath them; ripe oranges  
went ungathered, dropping straight into the water  
and floating downstream beside the ship.

When I was a boy I went aboard every boat  
that sailed into Twillingate just to hear  
the sailors talk; there was a man from Devonshire  
claiming sight of countries where fruit is  
as plentiful as cod on a Grand Bank shoal,  
it seemed too fanciful a notion to put much faith in.  
We stood on deck with buckets and nets  
and we dipped them from the river by the hundred,  
eating till we were sick of sweetness, stowing  
the rest below for the voyage back to London.

~



*'Arrived in Hong Kong November 9  
The histories of China.'* (1888)

Sailed into the harbour early morning  
and made our ship fast to the old stone quay,  
the Chinese coming down in hundreds to greet us —  
a queer lot to look at I guess,  
the men wearing braided pigtails  
and the women stepping as if  
they were walking on glass,  
their stunted feet bound tight as a reefed sail

Went ashore after tea and received some peculiar looks  
though I was turned out as well as a sailor can manage;  
stopped into a bar where I checked myself  
in the glass and found no fault to speak of,  
perhaps it was my ears  
they were staring at . . .

Dusk when I found my way back to the waterfront  
and three parts drunk by then,  
14000 miles from Newfoundland  
to the east and west  
and can get no further from my home if I wanted —  
2000 years before the birth of Christ  
the Emperor Yu divided this empire  
into 9 provinces and etched  
their borders on 9 copper vessels . . .

The stars came out over the Pacific then  
and they came out over me,  
only 26 years old and all the histories  
of China at my back

~

*'Arrived in Odessa, Russia  
Bonaparte at Moscow.'* (1889)

Winter defeated Napoleon.  
Moscow razed by Russia's defenders  
to deprive the advancing army  
of food and shelter,  
not enough wood left among  
the ash of the city  
to make a proper fire.

November fell like a building  
hollowed by flame.

Hands and feet of the retreating soldiers  
scorched by frostbite,  
exposed skin of their faces  
dead to the touch.  
300 thousand men fell to  
the cold and to hunger  
on the long march out of Russia,  
their frozen bodies on  
the roadside like a knotted string  
being unravelled all the way  
back to France.

And Moscow standing again now,  
spired and magnificent,  
as if Napoleon had never lived.

~

*'Observatory on Mount Pleasant' (1890)*

Paid off a ship in St John, New Brunswick  
and no work to be had until I got word  
of a building going up in Mount Pleasant.  
The foundation already down  
when I arrived and the foreman  
took me on as soon as I mentioned  
being several years on the tall ships.  
It was twenty stories high when we finished,  
and I was sent up the pole to hook the block  
and hoist the framing for each floor.  
Each time up I could see more of  
Lily Lake at the foot of the mountain,  
the crooked arms of the apple trees  
laid out in orchard rows,  
and there was always a handful of nuns  
saying the Rosary outside the convent below.  
I waved in their direction from every story  
but they went on praying as if they hadn't seen me,  
perhaps it was my safety  
they were bringing to God's attention.  
Stayed on until the place opened in October  
and the night before I shipped out  
they sat me in the chair beneath  
a telescope the size of a humpback —  
for the first time I saw constellations  
the way a saint perceives the divine,  
almost clear of darkness.  
When I carted my tools down the hill  
those stars came with me, a branch of  
ripe fruit almost close enough to touch.



*'A hard looking sight but not lost.'* (1890)

Now I have been on board some hard ships  
but this one takes the lead of them all.  
They say there was six men killed on her last voyage,  
the Captain changed her name and still  
could not entice a soul aboard before  
my chum and me took a chance and signed on.  
We sailed into Bath Bay and took on  
a load of ice, leaving again October 22nd.  
The following day a wind came up with rain and thunder  
so we clewed up the foremain and mizzen topsails  
and had two reefs in the mainsail when a squall  
blew up and carried the works off in strips.  
The Captain stood to the wheel shouting orders,  
we let go the halyards to lower the foresail  
and take in reefs but the ropes burst or  
jammed around the peak block and the foresail  
blew away in ribbons, along with the three jibs.  
Only the spanker managed to stay up and  
the Captain hove to, keeping her underway in  
the storm so as to not be drifting for shore.  
The sea came across the decks and took the rail,  
the bulwarks and part of the upper bridge,  
all hands were engaged at the pumps to keep  
her afloat; there was no food or sleep to be had,  
the galley and forecastle were saturated and  
the fresh water spoiled, the men getting laid up  
one after another with sprains and exhaustion  
as we lay in that condition 74 hours and it would  
try the nerve of a mule to endure so long without rest.  
When the wind moderated we got her fitted up  
as best we could, mustering some old sails  
stored below, bending a mainsail for a foresail

and making way for Boston, swearing we'd never set foot  
on a boat again if we were able to gain the harbour.  
By the time the weather ceased there was only the Chief Mate,  
myself and the Captain left sound to manage the ship  
and we shimmied her safe up to the pier at last,  
a hard looking sight by then, but not lost.

~

*'Taking photographs.'* (1891)

Carried photographic outfit aboard  
for a voyage to Cape Town,  
having purchased my own from  
Mr. Waites' shop in London  
where I worked several months  
between voyages while lodging  
at Lady Ashburton's House

Second week out I sketched off  
the Captain, Chief Engineer and Mate  
on the starboard side  
and now have all I can do to  
keep up taking pictures,  
the passengers willing to pay me well  
for my trouble

Two days off South Africa  
met the four master on which I first  
crossed the pond, the *Konigsburg*  
bound for England —  
managed a decent portrait of her,  
broad side and set with full sail  
so even if the oceans take her now  
she is mine to keep

~



*'Now in Africa among the Natives.'* (1891)

*In vain with loving kindness  
the gifts of God are strown,  
the heathen in his blindness  
bows down to wood and stone.*

Sketches in the old mission letters suggested  
these people were grey, charcoaled,  
unhappy shadows slumped and frowning.  
I see now they are something altogether different —  
skin the colour of stained wood  
and teeth bright as the keys of a church organ;  
hair as rich a black as peat moss, their voices  
musical and muscular, echoing thunder and rain

God's will is God's will and if I once pretended to  
comprehend a portion I have since given up the lie;  
I've kept good company on Africa's shore,  
on the white beaches of Brazil, in China and Ceylon,  
it confuses me to have shared the kindness  
of liquor and song with these when some  
brought up under the sound of the Gospel would  
see you dead before offering a drink of water

I thought the world would make me a wiser man,  
but I am merely more perplexed —  
I've learned to distrust much of what I was taught before  
my travels showed me different;  
the faces of Africa are as dark as a night without stars,  
but they are not as blind as they are pictured

~

*'Useful information the Holy Lands' (1893)*

Desert the colour of winter sunlight,  
a yellow that is almost white, shadowless,  
constant shift of sand like  
a tide swell beneath your feet.  
Hills on the horizon as red as blood.

The Commandments carried down Mount Sinai  
by Moses in sandals, his feet blistered  
by the heat of God's presence,  
lettered stone scorched by the sun,  
his bare hands burning.

All of this was once under water —  
mountains rose from the parting flood  
like the Israelites  
marching out of the Red Sea  
to walk parched into wilderness,  
sucking moisture from handfuls  
of hoar frost.

I have spent my life on the ocean,  
seven years now I have worked  
on the high seas,  
my hands blistered by the water's salt,  
my tongue thick and dry as leather.  
The desert was familiar to me,  
I knew something of what it  
demands of a person,  
what it can teach.

I understood that it is mostly thirst  
that makes a place holy.

~

---





## CONTRIBUTORS NOTES

LYNNE BELL, associate professor and head of the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Saskatchewan, is a historian of visual culture whose recent work has focused on two collaborative research projects funded by SSHRC: the first (with Carol Williams, Rutgers University) investigates the diverse practices of women artists, curators and educators in Canada; the second (with Janice Williamson, University of Alberta) investigates interdisciplinary cultural practices on the prairies. Interviews conducted in these research projects are appearing in *West Coast Line*, *BC Studies*, and *Tessera*, among other journals. In 1996, she was guest curator of Urban Fictions for Presentation House Gallery in North Vancouver, a group exhibition which focused on the mixed cultures, histories and subjectivities of the contemporary city. She has also given numerous papers on the role of visual culture in the construction of the touristic nation and she is currently preparing this research for publication.

MICHAEL CRUMMEY's first book of poetry, *Arguments With Gravity*, was published by Quarry Press in 1996. It won the 1996 Writer's Alliance of Newfoundland & Labrador Literary Award for poetry. "Discovering Darkness" is based on the diary of John Froude (1863-1939) of Twillingate, Newfoundland. It will be published in *Hard Light*, a second collection due out with Brick Books in June, 1998.

LAIWAN was born in Harare, Zimbabwe, of Chinese origin. She emigrated to Canada in 1977 to leave the civil war in Rhodesia. She is an interdisciplinary artist and writer based in Vancouver, B.C. Since graduating from the Emily Carr College of Art and Design, Laiwan started the OR Gallery (Vancouver) in 1983 and has initiated various curatorial projects such as the Zimbabwean Women in Contemporary Culture Trust (Harare) in 1991. She has also participated in a variety of group and solo exhibitions in Canada, Europe, Japan and the US.

For the past ten years, Laiwan has been involved in community-based volunteer activism. Her writing can be found in numerous publications like *Mix*, *Kinesis*, *WestCoast Line*, *The Capilano Review*, *Harbour*. Her artist's book *distance of distinct vision* was published by the Western Front (Vancouver) in 1992, and a new book from Articule Gallery (Montréal), examining her collages and bookwork since 1982, will be available in February of 1998.

For the past three years, Laiwan was co-editor of *Front Magazine*. She is now directing her focus on new research towards a masters degree at Simon Fraser University.

LEA LITTLEWOLFE: During the last two years, since she emerged from the closet, she has been published in numerous literary periodicals and presently is in cahoots with the Winnipeg Art Gallery on a project. Home is the Onion Lake Indian Reserve on the Alberta-Saskatchewan border.

ERIN MOURÉ's eighth collection of poems, *Search Procedures* (Anansi, 1996) was a finalist for the Governor General's Award for Poetry. She is currently completing a new collection entitled *A Frame of the Book*. She works as a freelance translator and is based in Montreal.

TAIEN NG-CHAN has had poetry and fiction published in numerous magazines and anthologies, including the *Moosehead Anthology*, *Geist*, *blue buffalo*, *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Out of Place* from Coteau Books and *eye wuz here* from Douglas & McIntyre. To the dismay of her partner, she's decided to learn how to play the violin.

CAROL WILLIAMS is a doctoral candidate in American and Women's History at Rutgers University in New Jersey working on the final stages of her thesis "*Framing the West: Race, Gender and the Photographic "Frontier" in the Pacific Northwest 1862-1912*". The thesis explores the impact of photographic imagery, produced by professionals and amateurs, on settler perceptions of "Indian life" in British Columbia, Alaska and



Northern Washington. In addition to participating in activities associated with her profession as a historian, Williams has published essays and interviews on contemporary women artists and activism in Canada. She is currently a sessional lecturer at Capilano College and Simon Fraser University.



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