

# TCR

## THE CAPILANO REVIEW



*...I lost interest in the "news"*

—LOUIS CABRI

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*The Capilano Review* is published by The Capilano Press Society. Canadian subscription rates for one year are \$25 GST included for individuals. Institutional rates are \$30 plus GST. Outside Canada, add \$5 and pay in U.S. funds. Address correspondence to *The Capilano Review*, 2055 Purcell Way, North Vancouver, BC V7J 3H5. Subscribe online at [www.thecapilanoreview.ca](http://www.thecapilanoreview.ca)

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*The Capilano Review* gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance of the British Columbia Arts Council, Capilano University and the Canada Council for the Arts. We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Magazines Fund toward our editorial and production costs.

*The Capilano Review* is a member of Magazines Canada (formerly CMPA), the BC Association of Magazine Publishers, and the Alliance for Arts and Culture (Vancouver).

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NUMBER 40063611. RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO CIRCULATION—TCR, 2055 PURCELL WAY, NORTH VANCOUVER, BC V7J 3H5

ISSN 0315 3754 (Published September 2008) Printed in Winnipeg, MB, by Hignell Book Printing



**Capilano**University **Canada**

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*This issue of The Capilano Review is dedicated to*

*Ellen Tallman*

*(1928-2008)*

*pivotal figure in the Vancouver poetry community*

## ROGER FARR / Intervox: Three Questions for Louis Cabri

In November 2007, Louis Cabri visited Vancouver for three days, reading at Capilano University and Emily Carr University of Art and Design, and leading a talk/seminar on “the social” at the Kootenay School of Writing. Although the KSW session ran for four hours, the conversation showed no signs of ebbing, so I invited Louis to discuss some of his material further via email.

In this exchange, Cabri responds generously to three questions addressing some key issues in contemporary poetry and poetics: the relationship between language and commodification; the efficacy of avant-garde poetry as a mode of social critique; and the use of search engines as part of the process of composition. In answering these questions, Cabri discusses his own work, *Flarf*, *Language Writing*, and a number of other writers, such as Rob Fitterman, Roy Miki, Ryan Fitzpatrick, Rob Manery, Charles Olson, Louis Zukofsky, Clint Burnham, and many others. The text is followed by a selection of some of Cabri’s recent writing, some of which is referred to in the interview.

Louis Cabri is the author of *The Mood Embosser* (Coach House, 2003), which was named 2003 “Book of the Year” by the Small Press Traffic Literary Arts Center, and the forthcoming *—that can’t* (Nomados, 2008). An assistant professor at the University of Windsor, Cabri’s critical work has included studies of Bruce Andrews, P. Inman, Frank O’Hara, Catriona Strang, Fred Wah, Ezra Pound, and Zukofsky, poetry’s “social command”, and the literary nonce-word. Recent work appears and is forthcoming in *Model Homes* and *Open Text: Canadian Poetry in the 21st Century* (CUE, 2008).

In his work as an editor, curator, and organizer, Cabri has been integral in helping to document the edges of “the present” in contemporary poetry and poetics. From 1990-1996 he edited, with Rob Manery, the journal *Hole*, one of a handful of journals in Canada committed to avant-garde and experimental writing. Between 1997 and 2001 he curated Philly Talks, a series of dialogues between contemporary poets from Canada and the US. In 2003 he organized the Social Mark series, “a public symposium and private think-tank on the relationship between poetry and the social.” -RF

**Q1** “If commodities could speak, what would they say?”

**LC** Well, if they’d only shut up, then what—what would we say?

In what world could such a logic (if...then ...) be realized where an answer could be imagined? and who is “we”? and what would we say?

Meanwhile, Nissan Versa speaks, City of Toronto speaks... Commodity critique speaks...—although it’s a legend of capital, according to Doug Henwood, that business schools teach *Das Capital*.

Marx’s question implies there are two ways of “speaking.” One is the way of commodities, animating things in order to make more capital—an unenlightening but sometimes “entertaining” way of speaking. The other way critiques the first, and is presumably an enlightening way of speaking about the commodity-form. Thing is, today, in poetry, they’re often indistinguishable from each other: both ways tend to imitate their object. Daniel Davidson’s *Product* imitates the discursive space of a mall and simulates the subjectivity of a commodity, with extraordinary vividness. That’s an early example, from 1990 or so, and maybe not the best, because there’s more going on in the text than imitation. More recently, Rob Fitterman’s *Metropolis XXX* copies, by paralleling, two texts, Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*—or its topical index, at least—and websites that depict the crazy reach of the commodity into the culture of, as this parallelism suggests we call it, the U.S. empire. Which way of speaking is this? an unenlightening way of commodities themselves, or an enlightening way of their critique? Is there a difference? Must one decide?

The role of critique in poetry is a problem for poetry, and it’s wrapped in another old problem, that of imitation. Instead of “problem for poetry,” which might imply that poets are seeking a “solution” to the problem, perhaps I should say “puzzle for poetry.”

Another example: Do some of the key texts of what Steve McCaffery calls Language Writing symptomatically embody the very conditions of reification that they wish to critique, or do such texts perform reificatory critique? Again, must one decide?

One might try to imagine a largest historical picture inside which these “choices”—deciding between ways of speaking about the commodity—are revealed as *both* necessary and as a product of the very-same commodity logic.

Some have tried to see beyond the commodity form by going in the direction of imagining a daily world in which commodities have shut up and a “we” finally gets to speak. Tom Wayman’s work-poetry anthologies and essays ideally aim in that direction, although a big topic in the poems remains—as if to confirm the very dilemma it’s trying to distance itself from—work. Work is humanized. Nevertheless, some workplaces have been and still continue to be off limits for representation by even the most basic descriptive codes (as in, here’s what I do, here’s what’s going on in this workplace, etc). Knowledge about the social is never not hard-won.

Then there are those modernists who also tried to imagine a daily world outside the commodity-form. Doing so did not guarantee good politics. Pound built his own furniture, wore earrings and mismatched socks in stuffy genteel London society before the First World War, wrote about communal land practices and love throughout his life, roamed around somewhat itinerantly—and wrote his *Cantos* to bring forth a new fascistic society.

**Q2** “The role of critique.” In terms of contemporary writing practices, those that “imitate [the] object” of critique aim to reproduce (and perhaps heighten) the experience of capital “bearing down.” While I understand that this practice is aimed at making our current social conditions both apparent and intolerable, I wonder why so many of us focus on the culture of the commodity, rather than the culture of anti-capitalist resistance? Both produce discourses and affects worthy of “documentation”—so why choose the one we’ve already engorged ourselves with, the one that is “winning” at the moment? In Marx’s famous 1848 letter to Ruge, he writes: “nothing prevents us from making criticism of politics, participation in politics, and therefore real struggles, the starting point of our criticism, and from identifying our criticism with them.” Is this “starting point”—ie. “real struggles”—not a viable option for the avant-garde?

**LC** Writing that imitates its object of critique might embody experiences of capital “bearing down,” as you say. Such writing might also embody experiences of capital “lifting off,” floating the signifier, hollowing-out the experience of “experience.” The stuff about postmodernism. And Google does the hollowing-out for us now. And reality TV. The media generally.

The giddy exhilaration one sometimes hears in use of Flarf techniques, cannibalizing language—“as is”—on the internet, then recombining, could be said to imitate the object itself of the critique. When this technique is made into a sizeable project—as in K. Silem Mohammad’s *Deer Head Nation*—one might fancifully wonder whether the writing doesn’t capture a snapshot of the system of reproductive technology itself—the search engine—or at least a pathological swab of how it’s used. Nevertheless, the status of critique in Flarf remains problematic for some readers. If you google Drew Gardner’s “Chicks Dig War,” for instance, you’ll see that many readers react to the reduction of women to “chicks” who “love war.” To be crude and totalizing about this, that “we’re on the same side” is taken for granted in Flarf, is its *premise* rather than reflexive point at issue—the issue, namely, of the social—in the writing. By “same side” I mean that the social seems to be treated in an undifferentiated way as all one, and not divided up by power into gendered, class-based, and racial categories, and so on. Articulating and differentiating the social substance is not an aesthetic priority of Flarf’s poetic form—I say this not because I want to “dismiss” this work I love as part of poetryworld, but because I want to understand how it singularly works and what it’s doing. Not all poetry will have the same relationship to the social. In the case of some Flarf, the social is not reflexively addressed in its imitation and recombination as a literary object.

Ryan Fitzpatrick’s *Fake Math* balances the provocations of what he has flarfistically found on the internet, with an epigraph from Marx, to signal to the reader, if it’s not already there in the title, that the text’s calculations, or “real intentions,” shouldn’t be taken at face value (except, *how* to interpret those “real intentions” is exactly what is in question in Flarf techniques—with the caveat that of course this is the case in all kinds of poetry, to importantly varying degrees). The reader is helped along to not take the text at face value: the book is made to be called “poetry,” and is read at events called poetry readings, to relatively encouraging audiences. Ryan is a friend

of mine, from Calgary days. Listening to him read in Windsor, I did nonetheless physically react to some of the more offensive lines. A Flarf counter to my reaction would be: But this is really what someone wrote online! etc. These are “real struggles...”—“real fantasy.”

I’m reminded of a brief response-essay by Michael Davidson to a set of questions posed by editors Phillip Foss and Charles Bernstein of *Tyonyi 6/7: Patterns / Contexts / Time: A Symposium of Contemporary Poetry*. Davidson asks: “Is it possible to write *within* the news while creating perspectives on it?” That’s, in a nutshell, a problem for the role of critique in poetry, and not only of the Flarf kind of imitation. And it’s culture-wide. I’ve wondered why the premise of Stephen Colbert’s TV personality on Comedy Central is so “successful” in the sense that it’s on TV. Is it that, at the level of television media these days, a culture of resistance is not even ontologically imaginable or conceivable—imaginable or conceivable enough, anyway, to be parodied with a stereotype? All Colbert can do, it would seem, is imitate the object itself of his critique. He has to defer critique in order to first establish a credible imitation of the object. He has to hope, in doing so, that imitation in itself will be enough to communicate as critique to his viewers. But when Bill O’Reilly genuinely identifies with Colbert and thinks of the Colbert show as a clone of his own show—in other words takes Colbert imitating a rightwing position at face value as *emulating* The O’Reilly Factor—I’m shockt n all aw...! at the power of neocon ideology to condition and relentlessly reproduce perception. Same with neocons and fundals with *The Simpsons*—ratings suggest they love it... If the imitation is done well, superficially it will seem to ideologues and censors to contain nothing objectionable. But so much for critique... That’s what I mean by a text that does not reflexively address the social.

Ben Friedlander posted a chart made for a non-U.S. audience recently, “In the American Database.” Flarf and Google appear prominently as structural features of the contemporary textual space available to poets to construct their world.

Whether read as capital “bearing down” or “lifting off,” by default the commodity presents itself as “new”—new words are invented for the products, relations, etc., of capital, even when the status of this so-called new is bogus (from a certain poetry vantage, the more bogus it is, the better!). The commodity isn’t only a subject matter

or theme either, but dynamic form (Marx's analysis is of a hyphenated concept, commodity-form), creating and destroying (as he said of the new bourgeoisie class as a whole), which can therefore be imitated to varied ends; that is, its *form* propels the commodity inside our lives and gives it an internalized psychologic and an externalized logic, and which makes of it a living articulation of social substance: form is the imitable part of the commodity, and its language is perhaps why commodity-form is of interest to some poets.

Countering commodity-form, but analogously wondering about form in relation to critique, one might well ask what are the *forms*, not merely the themes, that resistance takes and has. On the latter question, Rob Manery's poetry-book title is apt in its reminder that unless one at least raises the question of form's relation to critique *It's Not As If It Hasn't Been Said Before*: narratives of class warfare and oppression have been reproduced, appropriated and routinized by the media before and continue now, and resistance-nodes have narrated their counterclaims with a hortatory didacticism and repetitiousness of idea and of emotion that can be equally brain-numbing. What makes Rob's treatment of the Winnipeg General Strike "new" in a non-bogus way is its language of (to borrow Michael Davidson's word) unsayable trauma. Historically, socially, the Strike is, and should remain with insistent scholarly and critical vigilance, far from discursively "unsayable," of course. Even so, CBC online overviews, with footage, the Strike. Good. But the Strike is unsayable in the form it takes in Rob's syntactically minimalist stanzas. "Bloody Saturday" starts:

turned murderous  
line determined  
beside exact  
expression

It seems to me that the concision here can barely contain explosive, collective anger of revolt and violence. The language is almost beside itself, but at the same time is not that way at all: it is precisely the opposite: it is "beside exact / expression" ... Davidson goes on to ask in the same brief essay: "How can historical information be recycled so that it retains its contextual specificity while at the same time releasing it for analysis?" Rob's *It's Not As If It Hasn't Been Said Before* is one way, one example. My

point is that a thematic “documentation” of poetic engagement with social themes is not necessarily enough; if one wants to document, then there also has to be, in the poem, an engagement with the forms and history of documentary, of modes of representing documents and “documentarity,” so that “the social” is not reduced to the representation of sociological categories. Bowering’s slim chapbook *Fulgencia* (Nomados 2008) strikes me as a far more complex engagement with historical materials than Edward Sanders’s multi-volume *America* (nonetheless, Bowering’s work shows a great debt to Sanders’s ideas about the importance of taking an “investigative” approach to poetry in the world).

On both sides of the poem, then, the formal side, the social side, poets try to puzzle out, to their own particular ends, problems that come with critique and imitation in poetry.

In *La Chinoise*, Godard has the French communist philosopher and former Algerian resistance member (and, behind that, former French resistance member) Francis Jeanson ask a young female revolutionary, but do you represent a majority? Are we on the cusp of a generation-defining moment—April 1968—in which the present glimmers of a culture of anti-capitalist resistance foretell deeper transformations of social logic coming into view—just as *La Chinoise* in 1967 structurally anticipated events transpiring the subsequent year? To what extent is it, in terms of critique worked out in the form of a poem, “unsayable”? On the commodity front, this year a Jeanson biography has been published and Godard’s film released on DVD. But I’m learning to be optimistic. An art or poetry that builds into its forms a sense of timing, of the time (singular tense), as does *La Chinoise*, is an extraordinary thing to me, one of the greatest things any art can do, and offer, because doing so builds worlds as they are, as they were, collectively lived, whether it is an “April 1968 of the mind” or not.

Exactly, why take the winning side? Because of majoritarian “common sense”? Pathetic rule. But still. And then, “but” again. I feel that a contradiction has emerged and now operates between the social and the formal in recent poetryworld, when once they were somewhat homologously united in critique. A particular understanding of the social as a critical space of transformation (not the social imagined as acts of sociability—after readings, say) has separated from formally-innovative practices and each has gone in separate directions. A particular

understanding of form, as enactment and articulation, has done the same. What conditions are causing this split to happen? One momentous condition: the World Wide Web. You see this shift in how the word “social” is used, when in the 80s just the word evoked second-nature critique, whereas by the late 90s it began to be used in a neutral way, so that in the new millennium the social is pretty much a taken-for-granted medium that is always “there” and always the same (viz Flarf’s assumption that we are all on the same side). That is, the project of immersing the poetic word in the social substance, and of conceiving of that substance as resistant, seems to have gotten dislocated from formally innovative transformations in poetry. —Is any of this true? Affectively, anyway, that’s what “I need to work through,” given my responses at various times since 2001 to events, in poetry and out. I have questions not “about” but coming *from* both sides, both being “sides” that I believe poets must occupy at once. Instead of “social formalism” (Barrett Watten’s mid-1980s term for when social critique is worked out at a formal level of the poem), there is, on the one side, social poetry, which *as poetry* (to me) sometimes falls back on its pole of social realism, comparatively indifferent to form, and, on the other, formal poetry, which sometimes falls back on a pole of aestheticism, indifferent, if not hostile to, social substance. Both poles date to two centuries ago; so much for changing the past! But on the other hand, there’s plenty of change, a proliferation of trammeling, and of huge excitements as well, on both sides of the poem, when I read from these poles at once.

**Q3** Speaking of Flarf, could you talk about how search engines inform your own writing practice, using, say, “With Locations Including Bourne Woods,” as an example? And in terms of your critical work, when you were in Vancouver last November doing a talk at KSW, you made what I thought were some interesting methodological moves, using Google as a kind of heuristic to read some “unreadable” lines by Clint Burnham. Could you develop that a little here?

**LC** As for the first question, I had a plan, soon abandoned, of making a sequence of poems from “daily news” using a search engine to help construct each text. I was missing the larger picture of how search engines had structurally altered poetry’s relationship to the world. At the very moment when a large-enough mirror has been constructed to hold up to the world, its referent had disappeared and become

“information.” This internet effect is something like the effect upon the ancient city of Paris of Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann’s modernization (and in those late prose poems of Baudelaire’s)—the Haussmannisation of social space, as I called it once, the laying down of a digital grid to create the effect of a seeming smooth and homogenous totality of social space that now presents itself as information freely accessible to, traversable by, any viewer. On this level, I lost interest in the “news.”

Information has been a taboo word: language shouldn’t be instrumentalized as a conveyance for information alone, etc. Information is without attributes and qualities, amorphous.

whatever you have to say, leave

the roots on, let them

dangle (Olson, “These Days”)

Information is “content” *without* roots. Information is “debased,” because recyclable, yet “clean” also, because this media technology has completed the conversion of socially-situated statements and propositions about the world—“roots,” in Olson’s sense, or “referents”—into bytes of transmissible, transcodable data. One thinks of information as a “content” communicated without regard for its medium, let alone for its words—in this respect, no wonder information has been decried. That quote from Zukofsky’s *A Test of Poetry*, the epigraph to *The Mood Embosser*, “poetry is information,” is a faux quote because Zukofsky’s actual sentence continues. I don’t think anyone would say Zukofsky asserts that poetry is information, if one gives to the word “information” the post-Norbert Wiener understanding of a transparent communication. The (false) statement “poetry is information” nevertheless works, for me, and something like the word “referential” has in the past. In the early reception of Language Writing, the word “non-referential” was used to describe linguistic opacity; but Mac Low objected, rightly I think, that even language that seems to refer only to its letters, to its sounds, to the relational fact of itself to itself in its medium (page etc), to its opacity or transparency, even such a language is referential—referential to itself as language. Language Writing is, then, hyper-referential, not non-referential. I prefer “information” to “referent” because, on the up side, the former term strikes me as having stepped beyond the modernist dichotomy between art and event, around which a hierarchy of values (with its social analogues)

has been established, where art is “high,” separate from event, in its own world, and is kitsch where “low” and inextricable from the event (of production) out of which it came. Acknowledging that poetry has a dimension to it that is informational is also in part to disturb the encoded social accents and sources of literary tradition, including diction. (I’m thinking of Bourdieu’s excoriating little book on Heidegger’s euphemistic language—his “poetic” philosophical diction that deliberately masks political contexts and commitments.)

A (belated) sense that how one might approach “information” has radically altered with the fact of the internet is what led me to consider, in that KSW talk last November, Clint Burnham’s recent book, *Rental Van*. *Rental Van* appears formless. It is, then, “like” information. Then I noticed something about how the text is made. Its opacity—you know, Opacity, that key word of aesthetic and political resistance—often dissolved into a Lake Louise of transparencies soon as I googled some of the text. I found this sleight-of-hand remarkable, and refreshing. I called this reading method “geaging,” because it combined acts of googling and reading, to suggest how the search engine might be used as a reading tactic in approaching any text, but especially those that display a certain kind of textual opacity. Geaging, and the internet, gave Clint’s text form. In the case of *Rental Van*, it also seemed that that is how some of the text was combined or written. But geaging needn’t be an exercise in truth-finding. It shouldn’t matter, really, whether the transparency that one discovers is “really” what the author intended, “really” the method that the author used to construct the text. If there’s a truth, it has to do with the World Wide Web as formalized social space, and, as Nicole Markotić reminded me, the lack of access to it by the majority of the actual world. Nevertheless, the search engine allows for one to render a text transparent, legible, via close reading, and that’s what’s incredible to me. This transparency enriched Clint’s book for me.

I try to do several things in that talk, which references Clint’s work, but also, to different ends, Brian Fawcett’s, as well as the French critic Jean Paulhan’s. In the case of Paulhan, I finally discovered a complex argument for an a-social poetics, in his book-length essay, *The Flowers of Tarbes: or, Terror in Literature*. Years ago, you asked me a question that I was asking myself as well, how any poetry could show in its formal choices an indifference to the social, could be, in other words, “a-social.” I was thinking of Bertold Brecht’s tri-partite schema of social, anti-social, and a-

social. Social and anti-social poetics were conceivable, but a-social? For Brecht in the thirties, an a-social work of art would be one that doesn't reflexively stake itself in the social, so as to explore it, but instead joins itself to an a-political stance in literature along now-overly-familiar lines that literature and art are about enduring states of emotion and form that transcend history, accident. Paulhan's extraordinary argument, made under exacting historical conditions, was in my view against what I've elsewhere called "the social command," after Mayakovsky's and Brik's coinage by the same name, which introduced into aesthetics a Marxian concept of the social for the first time. Those historical conditions in France under which it was written are crucial to understanding Paulhan's somewhat notorious text: when the social command has been reduced to, and deployed as, a mode of exercising "terror" over literary production. After the collapse of positions once issuing from a posited structural homology between the social and the formal, the social command to me became stripped of substance, a kind of internalized shock-and-awe. That, coupled with a sense of how poetry's relationship to information had altered due to the internet, has led me back to the unanswerable but necessary question to continually ask: what is poetry anyway?

For this retroactive narrative I'm concocting here for you, I quickly glanced through the selection of poems that make up *The Mood Embosser*, and I noticed how they are often written so that there is a continual push to reach out for an extra-literary context of presuppositions. Rereading it I was reminded of Andrews's idea of concentric circles of social information spreading out from the literary text and governing it usually in a hidden way. But what are the implications for such a tactic, if poetry's relation to social space, and to social information, has altered? What if what one is reaching out for—"context"—is already there, established, "content" in a searchable database? As the writer, I'm determining how "context" is read in a poem, so context in poem and context in database are not by any stretch "identical." Nevertheless, what if what I formerly understood as context is a kind of illusory horizon now that it can be made present, in less than a second online, that easily? There's a bottoming-out of use of the negative—and the negative has been so crucial to a certain mode of how social critique has entered poetry. The phrase "bottoming-out" regrettably sounds like a negative judgment made upon the present, but really what I'm after in all this is a schema for understanding what the "positions" are that are available for poetry.

To call “With Locations Including Bourne Woods” search-engine-based is a stretch, for while the poem uses googled language, in that I did source the Internet Movie Database (imdb.com) for a vocabulary, the database is not necessarily constituted through the internet, and were the database available in print instead, I could have used that. The internet makes finding such language easier. In this case, I took one sentence from each description of the eight-or-so movies listed as having used Bourne Woods as a location since around 2001. The words of those sentences became the lexicon of the poem. The sentences I made bear no resemblance to their sources, except for the two that identify film glitches, and the opening ones about the present-day Bourne Woods themselves. The epigraph recombines words by Carlos Williams—Williams’s line as, by now, a kind of rustic “stable” for worn-out free-verse poetic feet, and recognizably a “stable foot,” when in these movies, Bourne Woods, an “ancient woodland,” is unrecognizable for what it actually is. In another piece, “Versa,” I used search engines to cobble together phrases trolled from the first fifteen-or-so Google-hits on that word, for a range of examples of current usage.

## LOUIS CABRI / Poems

### A hanging wall

hanging wallpaper, from whose  
stains?

of Cheney  
came?

much of  
what?

came  
munchkins jumping?

up  
they're grateful?

of Cheney, from  
whose stains?

came much of  
what?

Congress  
knew a hanging wall?

hanging wallpaper from  
whose?

stains  
of The Daily Show came?

much  
of how much?

we  
munchies?

cared to  
know?

*The ding dong the witch is dead school of regime change. But that's what it was.*

—MICHAEL GORDON

Epigraph?

Designs  
media build

in their  
our

—virtual  
house that we get

hot  
air

balloon and we're—  
out

—of  
there

our  
out

## The Interaction of Semiotic Complaints

To grow  
food on

*shoes* (whose  
to choose?)—plan was

think outside  
the wrap (of

*course*, since, just think  
outside the

bun—lineation,  
too!—had

“instantly managed  
to position it [TacoBell]

against hamburgers”) but  
*inside* the

atmosphere—  
“wrap the *intelligence*

around  
the *policy*”

## **pleeshurs**

Uh

pumpes  
pleeshirs

pleezhers

poompes

pleezhure  
pleaser

pleasiers  
pleasures

pleasewres  
pomp

pleasor  
pleasoures

Uh

pompes  
pleasuers

pleassours

pumpes

pleassure  
pleasser

pleaceurs  
plaisirs

playsires  
pumpen

pleysewr  
pleysuers

Uh

poumps  
plaisores

plaisures

poumpes

pleyasor  
pleyasur

pleasures  
pleseres

plesiers  
pvmpe

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plesers

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pampes  
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plesewer  
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plesuyrs

plesars  
pumpt

plesoir  
pleschirs

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pumps  
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plessers

pumps

plessere  
plessewr

plessars  
plessores

plessowrs  
pump

plessuir  
plessures

Uh

pumps  
pleishures

plaesurs

pumps

pleisser  
pleissere

pleissours  
pleizours

plusure  
plasours

plasure  
pumps

## With Locations Including Bourne Woods (Farnham, Surrey, England)

*foot stable (relatively)*

Bourne  
wood is a quiet

Ancient  
Woodland<sup>Wiki</sup>

with mixed  
conifers and

semi-natural  
broadleaf

[trees].  
There

is a car  
park

and picnic  
area.

\*

*Their  
books can no*

*longer  
procreate*

*a chaotic  
world*

*out of  
which humans*

*bring  
characters to*

*help save the  
future*

*of  
humankind,*

*when  
her father*

*discovers an  
amazing*

*talent  
as a storybook*

*hero  
gladiator.*

*\**

Lyra Bel  
Acqua

seeks  
revenge at a

local  
gas station, Far

North, and  
subsequently

journeys  
to transport Young

Woman to  
bitten

and cursed  
Rome where

three unlikely heroines  
freed an off

the  
wall comedy

adventure  
villain.

\*

A Roman  
general

is  
betrayed,

his  
family

murdered by  
a corrupt

prince with the  
help of

an  
American man—her

father, Del  
Toro.

\*

Earplugs  
can be

seen as  
he climbs the

stairs.

A

\*

former  
activist must

try by  
sword

and sandals  
to stop her

aunt  
traveling

from Russia  
to America in

search of Young  
Refugee.

\*

Sarah,  
who

set  
out

to save  
Celtic

Britain by thwarting  
the Roman

invasion  
in his

own unique, outrageous  
style, *escapes*

the cave.  
Miraculously

\*

pregnant,  
a

gladiator  
agrees to seek

refuge in his  
ancestral

homeland, a werewolf  
sanctuary at

sea.  
Her

\*

lost father  
falls

for  
a gypsy

horseman, destroying them  
all.

\*

There's blood  
on

the blade  
then it

vanishes, just to  
reappear

next  
scene.

\*

Upon her child's  
birth, other

scientists  
return and

help.  
Has a

\*

girl  
—a

terrible  
mysterious organization—

experiments to  
save her

best from  
children

kidnapped  
young?

## LISSA WOLSAK / My Dear Brother Marat

My dear brother Marat,

The center holds.

We have encumbered... as there was a need to dispose first, the ecru organdy garden-hat and hood of one Charlotte Corday, and too, her phantoms who come toward us as flirting ones, thereby inextricably altering our history forevermore... The way to the eyes. I too am abstentious, feeling myself a neutered thing, then itch and tumesce toward the taking of a veil... but those cosmologists and astrologers will not take their leave, plus... and I reluctantly confess this... I picked up a dervish. On a side trip to Pushkin, in an august little city of parks where I sang all of Shostakovich's Preludes and Fugues while consulting on disintegrating onslaughts and Russian/Western marriage contracts, I loathed to leave behind the spectacular thunderstorms, the nabbed copter, your white birches... pelmeni, kvass and schi... my balalaika and that book kiosk at Nevskii Prospekt. Why be wanton? Cleverness passes as insight when realistic tendencies become dominant, though there is more to this than outmuscling vodka, under-nuanced Marxisms and unleashing our vocabulary. Breed and weep. Consider... frontal geometry, voltage and current-time curves in the middle of the Third Opium War for a dimensionless model not fitting the rest of the canon; poisonously beautiful paradox, diverse and volatile, freedom of a masterpiece... ever inopportune.

But only a finitude is a piercing of the lights. We will fall under (n)either their rubric (n)or their chickweed... they that have no nemesis... symmetrical, undoubting creatures caught in formulaic crud ups, pall, redacted melodramas and farces. In finessing where consciousness fades and in hopes of diplomacy addressed to emperors and true feelings, let us squeeze tea between our teeth thereby warding off said desecrater's invidious psy-ops. O Marat, who can feel so much and act like he feels, who illumines madness, the storm, its forest for superfluous men... do not leave off your humiliated mystical life. That which is you. I give you my painted emu eggs and spice chest, Marat, for as you well know; the egg is considered to be the most ancient

pagan token of resurrection which frees you from gore and depression, so to the uplifting accounts of unimaginable hope. The creation of affect; the making of love. You may reflect on the reasons not to live (for you might induce us also), but only to conclude the finest thing to do is continue of being. Such 'together knowing.' You cannot not dispose of your incessance without my knowingness. I repeat, you must not desert your smock.

Love hinders death.

## ROMAN KOREC / Ode to a Plastic Shopping Bag

This here's an ode  
to the common plastic shopping bag  
with its innumerable uses and unnamed abuses  
with its rustling sheathing and glossy lightweights  
with its ballerina twinkle in the eye and cinematic hemorrhoidphobe pirouettes in  
wind eddies.

This here's an ode  
to the ubiquitous plastic shopping bag  
that is one with our daily banalities  
a staple of our utilities  
sometimes the recipient of our absurdities:  
a mango pit, a condom wrapper, a banana peel, an emotions mapper  
an election speech, a presidential concession, a Democrat's heart, a Republican's soul.

This here's an ode  
to that celebrated plastic shopping bag  
that adorned the post-apocalyptic Adonis  
in the throes of his auto-passion  
as he embraced the neocolonial hegemonies of his seducers  
and inserted his manhood in between the silken sheets of a chocolate mousse  
and dreamed  
dreamed of being a Napoleon  
or perhaps a Yasar.

This one here's a venerable ode  
to that *deus ex machina* plastic shopping bag  
that accompanies millions of us a day, a second  
if only to be burned  
burned like a male coitus non interruptus happiness  
at the apogee of a climax

burned into the vast expanses of the trash dump of her many orifices:  
par vaginum ad astres, ad veritas  
amor perpetuum mobile

This one here's a timeless ode  
to the thankful plastic shopping bag  
that embraces our palms and caresses our skin  
longer than the lover no longer there  
longer than our animal love no longer fading out of forgotten memories  
longer than the gypsy breath of the wailing Catalan rising sun  
above Tokyo's many roofs;  
but the walking dead of the Nippon kereitsu won't let them enter:  
Laaaav youuuu laaaav youuuuu  
naaa mi daaa no Tooo-o kee-yoooo.  
Laaaav youuuu laaaav youuuuu  
naaa mi daaa no Tooo-o kee-yoooo.

But perhaps  
this one here is not a timeless ode  
to that certain plastic shopping bag after all  
as much as it isn't a celebration, nor a victimization  
perhaps it is simply an empty, pointless exercise  
like a vote sown to influence a bipartisan puppet autocracy  
perhaps, just  
perhaps  
it is simply a fetish "perhaps" whispered barely above our self-affirming lips  
that have long ago lost their self-affirming privilege  
that have long ago ceased to be  
the medium  
of our voice  
springing forth

from our mind.

Because

ever since you began to chant that interminable ode  
to the now venerable plastic shopping bag  
you began to infiltrate  
the Soviet steppes of your subconsciousness  
for that little, fleeting moment of imperialist happiness  
that is so easily purchased yet so difficult to own:

“His Excellency, the Venerable Plastic Shopping Bag,  
is entering His fifth term in office  
is elected and re-elected time and time again  
by you and your ‘I...’”

who is, as a matter of fact, no one but I

that is, my “you”

because, as I have said many times before

you are not “I”, as much as I am not “you”

which centuries of revolutions at the bloodied fist rule of man did not alter  
as much as the abbey at Mont Saint Michel

(which “you” and “I” saw perhaps only in our past life therapies)

stood by motionless with its hues and Impressionist baie eminency

that figures prominently

in our collective

psyche.

Because

that is where I bought a soul

and brought it home

cooked it in a broth

pureed, heated and made it froth

and drank it in so copiously and so religiously

that I forgot the white plastic shopping bag

by the moveable, transfigured sea.

And the moveable, transfigured sea  
returned the innocence to that pure plastic shopping bag  
unmade it shameful and corporate  
unmade it the temple of Mammon and the clothing of a neo-Christianity  
made it reborn, and then some  
made it into you, made it into me  
made it into a carbonic ecstasy that would have lasted three summers and three  
winters  
were it not for a certain nobody  
emerging from the depths of his middle-managerial slumber  
to awaken and see you there  
in the timeless, autumn embrace of the plastic shopping bag  
that you worshiped so silently and stealthily  
in your bathroom  
while you defecated the best years of your life  
into his cold, ceramic heart:

Tell me  
tell me  
why did you enter the thirteenth room of that fairytale castle  
and let the plastic shopping bag free?

# A Short Story for Ludmilla

## 1

Friday afternoon.

Still clothed in that respected well-salaried professional living in the capital of a newly Europeanized Europe, in a newly awakened life of fruits of my labour and nights luscious with heavy food and ripe women whose eyes told their own thousand and one post-Soviet nights stories, but whose wombs betrayed a desire to marry me, enslave me and not let me leave, I left.

Because, ever since I left, I couldn't stop leaving.

## 2

Saturday morning.

I awoke a different man. Fragrant, rugged, in an old army caravan, in a field of wildflowers, at the edge of a garden colony near a railway spur abandoned by post-revolution fraud, I awoke a different man, with an untamed gypsy woman by my side.

I smelled her unwashed sex on my fingers sleeping next to me in that old caravan in that field of wildflowers at the edge of that garden colony about an hour from the capital of that newly unified Europe. I lay there and thought about my ordered closet of fine suits and pressed white shirts, my days of corporate culture philosophies and nights of soulful consumerism.

I thought about my Mondays and my Tuesdays, my Wednesdays and my Thursdays, and then I thought about my Friday and the train ride to that small provincial station in the middle of nowhere where I got off and sold my suit for the price of a chewing gum to an unwashed gypsy kid by the station. (He thanked me "Mister" and looked for a way to rip me off some more.)

I deeply inhaled her scent, felt her warmth and returned to the now. She was curled up against me like a cat and her bare neck glistened brown. My clothes and skin smelled of smoke and of the acrid ground on which we danced yesterday, late into the night.

I looked at my body and it was dirty and smudged with ash and coals. I smiled. It felt good to be close to the earth, close to my roots. I spent entire childhoods outdoors, by myself, in vast, empty forests, under lush deciduous canopies swaying

in makeshift summer storms, near forgotten, slow-moving rivers or in old, abandoned cars and fields, searching for something...

... such that half-gypsy that many many years ago kissed my eyelids with her shy smile and became my first love, my first unrequited yearning.

And, ever since I left, I've been searching for that something.

### 3

The caravan door opened onto a field dense with morning sunshine. A gentle breeze stroked the heads and stalks of tall grasses around and brought the scent of a coming fragrant day in. Her sister came in and curled up between the woman and I.

I heard the sound of laughter and children playing amidst the silence and tall grasses. I could not remember how I got there, nor could I remember the night before, for I had the distinct feeling that last night was not there or might not have even happened.

But, I smelled the scent of her unwashed sex on my fingers.

The gentle morning breeze played with the tall grasses and I watched their play through the opened door, from the cool darkness within. I did not want the woman lying next to me to be too much of a woman, because this story was mine, and it told me that she'd better be a young girl, like that Romanian half-gypsy at that Austrian *gasthaus* I called home for a few uncertain refugee months, and it told me that she'd be better turned away from me, so that I would not see her face, and it told me that she'd better not wake up, as not to disturb the already fragile moment of my happiness and tranquility.

Thus, I lay with my back to the wall of the caravan and stared at the woman sleeping next to me, right next to me—as close as I would ever be to a woman—and watched her dark hair touch the pillow and sometimes stroke the face of her sister and watched the rising sun hovering above the tall grasses swaying in the breeze, coming through the door, caressing her hair once more, illuminating her serene face.

The moment remained precisely like that for a long time, unchanging. I thought to myself that the sun should have moved further up the sky by now, because time also moved further ahead. I looked at the hands of my watch and they, too, had stopped. I wanted to ask a question, but I couldn't hear my voice. I opened my mouth and spoke, but I made no sound. This time, unlike *that time on the steppe*, there was no other voice instead of mine.

So, I stopped. It was no use. Everything seemed so perfect.

Everything seemed so perfect (lifeless) that I did not want to disturb it. Like the sixteen-hour otherworldly contact experience that lasted only a worldly second or the intensely beautiful *Solaris* arrays of hallucinations that seemed so utterly perfect, but so hopelessly static, I did not want to disturb it.

I sensed an uneasiness growing within me, but I chose to disregard it. It was so beautiful, the moment, that I began to feel uneasy. The laughter had long died down, the breeze was long not there, the air was thick. Time had stopped, the woman's scent was fading away.

A panic gradually began to grow within me, at first whirling slowly within my chest, then becoming more rapid and rapid and hectic and chaotic: faster faster stronger louder higher deeper deeper higher then BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! three times a loud bright flash exploded in front of my head, blinded and deafened me.

Then complete silence.

I woke up late next to the gypsy woman. Her scent was still on me. Her beautiful dark hair straddled the pillow, which was no more than a pile of unwashed clothes. Children's laughter streamed in from the outside.

I could move now, so I got up. I still could not see into the woman's face, no matter how hard I tried. No matter what my perspective, she was perpetually with her back to me. So mysterious, so invulnerable to deception.

I left the caravan. In the tall grass next to it was an old bicycle that could have easily been post-war. It still worked, so I got on and headed into the direction that the bicycle took me in. For a good while, I pedalled lightly along a flat Class Three road full of potholes and patches of asphalt. I savoured the morning and then turned onto a dirt road that headed past a field of wheat and into a dense forest that hid the Morava River. I continued until the road stopped and I was by the river.

On the bank of the river, deep within the forest, eager to dissolve with time, I watched the slow-moving river flow by. Then, suddenly, Kalashnikov showers of heavy border patrol fire rained down on me and I began to run like an animal hunted, through bushes, past trees, and I heard shouting and shots ringing in my head. Bushes, branches, tree trunks and dead wood of this fluvial forest scraped me and blood began to stream down my face, legs and forearms. I was so close to the river that I smelled it and bullets grazed the hair of my scalp. I heard some Russian, but I couldn't read Cyrillic so I didn't understand what it said.

My invented socialist past flashed before my eyes, my red scout bandana choked me and my gleaming pionier pin poked my breast and I bled, drop by drop, so I

jumped into the muddy brown river full of Austrobohemian silt, dove under and swam across to the West.

On the other side, the roar in my head relented. I never looked back, not even once. I sprinted in the direction of a forest, away from the border. Then, with the river far behind me, I slowed down. I walked stealthily, almost unseen, through the forest and when the forest ended, I stepped out on a parched, long-ago-plowed field and walked in the now-higher sun.

I walked until I could not walk any longer and curled up on the brown, parched soil and slept.

#### 4

When I woke up, the sun was quite high and I was completely dry. I could not remember how I got there, but the field looked familiar and I remembered that a village lay just a little further. I headed towards it and, just before entering it, I brushed the dirt off of myself. I reached into my pocket and took out a plastic pouch with my passport and my money and took out a few Euros.

I entered the only grocery store in the village and the grocer greeted me in broken English with a familiar smile:

“Not as wet as usual, today, are we...”

I smiled back at him. I bought some bread, sausages, green peppers and a bottle of beer and headed back in the direction of the river. At the edge of a wheat field that was just beginning to turn golden, I sat down, ate my lunch and drank my beer. I then lay down and drifted off to sleep again.

I slept for a good while and had psychedelic dreams of belly dancers and bedouins whirling to hypnotic sounds drifting through hypnotic darkness of early Arabian nights somewhere on outskirts of nomadic desert towns or villages full of hypnotic percussion, hypnotic trumpets, hypnotic cellulite undulating ornately in front of glowing fires, hypnotizing bedouin skirts rising and falling in a myriad of movements and speeds, the dancers blurring across night skies deep in primal twirling trances, until a rustling in the grass near me awoke me.

I pulled out my hunting knife. Its steel blade gleamed in the hot sun and stroked my face. A young doe sleeping in the tall grass beside me stirred. It saw me and ran away, so I decided to get up and head towards the river again. Once at its banks, I swam across, found my bicycle and headed back, first along the dirt road, then.....

I returned to the old caravan, but found no one there. I was hungry, but had nothing to eat. From farther away, I smelled a fire burning in the twilight, perhaps even music or singing. I was tired, so I went into the caravan and slept, dressed the way I was the entire day.

I drifted to sleep and slept heavily.

## 5

The next morning, I awoke earlier. The young gypsy woman was sleeping next to me, facing away. Her scent mingled with my own. Without looking at her face, I got up and left. I began walking in a certain direction through the tall grasses, then along the old, abandoned railway tracks.

I was dirty. I smelled. My clothes were dirty, but they felt good, like the earth clutching me and taking me back. I walked for a long while along the tracks, then along a dirt road that I did not yet know. Along the way, I ate wild cherries, blackberries and strawberries. Passing a field of corn, I hid inside, in between the rows, and savoured a raw cob.

Inside, close to the earth, I felt good. So, I slept. It's all I knew how to do.

When I got up again, I started to walk along the dirt road, past weekend cottages and hobby gardens, until the sound of trains passing got closer and closer. I followed it until I found the tracks and followed the tracks until I found a station. There I waited for a slow train to come.

The train came and I got on. Once inside, I relaxed and slept some more. The conductor woke me up at the terminus. I woke up and I didn't know where I was, but saw tracks, platforms and light boards and realized where I was.

I got off and caught a tram home.

Sunday night.

## SCOTT INNIS / Vanity

All is fair  
but love and war. Fair  
call decides the science fair.  
Drug maven scripts a fair  
E tale. Fall fair  
fair air fair  
ground. No fair,  
his wheel is round. Wheel fair.  
It's so noisy at the fair,  
*jusqu' à ce que tous vos amis soient* [fair].  
*Krásny*. Slovak for fair.  
“Losing isn't fair,”  
Maryland born and raised philosopher John Rawls syllogizes in *Justice as Fairness*. “Ergo, life is not fair.”  
Opinion of Fair-  
port Convention's *Farewell Farewell?* Fair.  
Queen B or a fair  
rendering of an R.A.F. air  
strip. Fair  
to middling women fair  
unnamable bucketts to build a fair  
Vladimir, dig a fair  
well to Eleutheria. Fair  
Xanthippe says, “Old love is fair,  
young love, a fair.”  
Zoo instead of fair.



## SHARLA SAVA / In the Studio with Damian Moppett

*Damian Moppett grew up in Calgary, studied for two years at the Alberta College of Art, for three weeks at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto, before moving in 1990 to the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in Vancouver to complete his BA. He then did a two-year graduate degree at Concordia University in Montreal and returned to Vancouver in 1994. We spoke in his studio in late August 2008.*

SS: You moved to Vancouver in 1990 and enrolled at ECIAD?

DM: Yes, but not right away, I moved out here and painted on the fire escape of my building for several months, and then applied to get into third year. Luckily, I got in. It was a great year for me, the people who were there at the time—Ron Terada, Steve Shearer, Allan Switzer, Christine Corlett, and others—were equally ambitious and interested in similar things. I think my timing was quite lucky; those two years had a lasting effect.

SS: Did you know then that you wanted to be an artist? You were young, after all, in your early twenties.

DM: Coming to ECIAD and having such great fellow students in school really changed my education. It was far more inspiring and beneficial than I expected. Rick Williams was one of my favourite teachers, because he taught drawing in unconventional ways. Landon Mackenzie and David MacWilliam were the Mom and Dad for the painting department. I had Joan Borsa, a fantastic teacher, for Canadian art history but I was impatient to learn about contemporary artists and had little interest in anything prior to the '70s. I remember becoming quite enraged about having to write an essay on Rodin. Looking back, I wish I had been more interested in the threads of history while I was in school.

SS: What made you realize and appreciate that history was something to learn from, a place from which to work, rather than something to overcome?

DM: For a long time I really held on to just a select few artists. Philip Guston was the only artist in my head for about five years. The idea of looking at and learning from artists, their work, and the various layers of history is something I developed slowly, and only after I finished grad school.

SS: As a young Vancouver artist you also encountered the dominant discourse, the so-called “Vancouver School”—artists like Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace, Rodney Graham, Stan Douglas and Ken Lum were increasing influential in town. I wonder if you can talk about being a young artist, about what it was like to create work at the time.

DM: In 1994 I had a studio with Ron. Steve was in the next studio over. They were both painting. In my last year of grad school I had virtually given up painting and become a self-proclaimed photographer. I remember thinking that I had to have a show, and I had to contextualize myself within the medium of photography to legitimize my new-found practice.

SS: I imagine that your engagement with photography had something to do with Vancouver’s growing reputation, as a place for post-conceptual photography.

DM: Yeah, so much had to do with the fact that I had just given up painting. My friends were painters and I knew they would survive as artists in Vancouver, but I had just become a photographer and was quite insecure about what that was and what I was doing. I didn’t feel that I had any work behind me to lean back on, or ‘photo friends’ to talk to. I felt a kinship with the work of Kelly Wood, in particular the work from the *This is Not A Cake* exhibition. I befriended her, together we approached Howard Ursuliak and the three of us pitched a show of our work to Keith Wallace at the CAG [Contemporary Art Gallery] and wrangled Roy Arden into curating and writing for the exhibition which he titled *Bonus* (1997).

SS: What do you think about the claims made by people like Scott Watson and Philip Monk, that you are part of a generation rebelling against the seriousness of the Vancouver School?

DM: At first I was really happy to be characterized that way, although I would say in the end it really came down to working with different materials, toward different ends. Of course, emerging Vancouver artists have benefited from the attention that artists like Wall and Douglas have brought to Vancouver, and the critical rigor that infuses their work. But a lot of things changed between 1996 and 2001—a younger generation was creating room for itself and I think it was inevitable that the kind of art being made in Vancouver would evolve. I know, for myself, that things felt dynamic and possible, and this probably has a lot to do with the quality of artists here, the galleries and curators.

SS: Your work is full of references to other artists. How do you find your references?

DM: I'm a compulsive catalogue buyer. Through reading about specific artists I get turned on to others. It is cumulative. I will look at Robert Grosvenor, and get turned on to Tony Smith, and then I'll get turned on to Frederick Kiesler, it goes on like that. My desire is to make those references clear in my work. In my first series of photographs, *The Office* photos, I was inspired by Oscar Niemeyer's architectural drawings, but you would never have known that, as a viewer. A few years ago I started a series of watercolours and drawings, in order to make a lot of the obscure invisible references and inspirations visible. Not always understandable, but at least visible. There are images of my artistic influences, and also autobiographical images—an image of a concert, a book cover, places I've been—which are probably the most obscure for the viewer. It's kind of difficult being able to decipher what a picture of a trailer on Denman Island is saying in relation to my work. I hope this series will give the viewer a cumulative understanding of where I've been and where I'm going.

SS: Is it fair to say that one of your artistic motivations has to do with artistic process, with how to make art?

DM: That's always been an interest of mine. Everything that I've done, since my first series of photographs, has been in some way about the process of making.

SS: Your parents are both artists—do you think about how they deal with particular artistic materials or media? Are you consciously informed by them, or rebelling against them?

DM: I learned a lot from my mom, in terms of being able to select a particular medium based on its appropriateness for a particular project. She is a painter, sculptor, installation artist and photographer. When I was young I wasn't really aware of the works she was making, but I think I learned a lot about how diverse and appropriate particular materials were to what she was doing.

SS: The post-medium condition seems consistent with what you are doing in your work. In my mind this notion is productive because it retains an awareness of modernism's struggle with medium specificity, rather than supposing that we are in an era of *anything goes*. You work in an expanded field of practice, but you also seem

particularly sensitive to the tensions that occur between painting, sculpture, and photography. Is that right?

DM: Yes, although I'm amazed at my own romantic and deeply modernist leanings.

SS: Assuming that some readers are unfamiliar with your work, can you discuss a few projects, as a kind of background for looking at the TCR portfolio of your paintings?

DM: I'll start with *1815/1962* (Catriona Jeffries Gallery, 2003). The video is about a trapper in the year 1815, and the second date in the title, 1962, refers to the year that Anthony Caro made the sculpture *Early One Morning*. I played the trapper, who, for the first half of the video, seeks out wood and materials and, for the second half of the video, builds a trap that formally resembles Caro's sculpture. For the exhibition installation I made a small replica of both Caro's *Early One Morning* and my trap. The two models were placed side by side on a plinth to underscore the formal relationship between the two. By building a trap in the form of Caro's sculpture I turned a well-known modernist piece into something that could provide sustenance and skins for clothing, both of which would be essential to the survival of my fictional trapper. I wanted to provide a tangible/practical use value for the art object. It was almost like putting the Caro to work.

That installation evolved into *The Visible Work* (Contemporary Art Gallery, 2005), where I presented a series of welded steel modernist sculptures, reminiscent of Alexander Calder's stabiles. Several ceramic objects were balanced on each of them. These were the first ceramic objects I had made after deciding (about eight months before the show) to take up pottery. I thought about ceramics as the start of a sculptural moment. I didn't glaze them because I didn't want them to look like functional objects. I had a whole grand scheme when I was planning the show. I was going to do a completely organic ceramic production: get the clay from the land, build my own kiln, and use horse manure for glaze. But that turned out to be a little more difficult and time consuming than I had thought. In the end I taught myself how to do ceramics, and kept everything I made, incorporating them into the CAG show, and into many of my sculptural works since. I honestly wanted to make ceramics, and to have my growth as a potter visible. I wanted part of it to be about learning, the potential of the material and form rather than the polish of the finished object.

Placing the ceramics in relation to the steel sculptures was about creating an equality and, obviously, a balance between the two almost opposite forms.

In the last few years I've made two figurative sculptures, *The Fallen Caryatid* and *The Acrobat*, both of which reference Rodin. I first showed the Caryatid in *The Fall of the Damned* exhibition (Carleton University Art Gallery, 2006). The exhibition consisted of the Caryatid sculpture, and 75 drawings and watercolours. The drawings and watercolours were also in *The Visible Work* show—they are a single work which I keep adding to. They represent artworks, artists, people, places and things that have all influenced me and my work. I consider them to be almost like a giant didactic panel for understanding my work. I now have 100 drawings and watercolours, and the most recent show the direction I am planning to take in the next couple of years.

SS: The title of that 2006 exhibition was *The Fall of the Damned*. Are we the damned?

DM: No, perhaps more like falling from grace, rather than eternally damned. I see both the *Caryatid* and *The Acrobat* representing possibility rather than a state of damnation or purgatory. They are in different positions, yet both are 'authors.' They represent different stages or conditions of being an author, and contrasting approaches to what they have made.

SS: I remember going into Catriona Jeffries Gallery in 2003, and seeing your exhibition, *1815/1962*. There was such a sense of humour, something clever there. I wonder if you had a sense of inhabiting a role at that time, a moment where you were kind of becoming the trapper.

DM: Absolutely. I am trying to find a way, a reason, to do another video work. I am still looking for another role that would allow me to act. I think it makes sense that someone who references the work of others to the extent that I do would also enjoy the chance to portray a historical character, fictional or otherwise. I have always preferred the term inhabiting over quoting. I feel inhabiting represents a different degree of investment and involvement. *1815/1962* is the mother of all the pieces I've made since, it was the start of a new phase and approach to work. The sculptural pieces I am making now and plan to make for my next show have an obvious material and conceptual link to that video.

SS: What does Caro's work mean to you?

DM: Well, I chose *Early One Morning* because of its status as an iconic and influential modernist sculpture. At the time I wasn't that fond of Caro's work. I've grown to appreciate it a little more, but his oeuvre is not as important to me as say Henry Moore's is. Actually I'm making two new sculptures that use *Early One Morning* (one-third scale models of the work) in them, but now the work is almost becoming more of a punching bag, rather than an object of homage.

SS: What about Rodin, is your relation to Rodin similar to your relation to Caro? A jumping off point?

DM: My relation to Rodin is best explained by talking about Rodin, Medardo Rosso, and Brancusi, who worked roughly in the same historical era, and who made work that crosses various media boundaries. Medardo Rosso for example, who was known for his ghostly, almost abstract figurative sculptures, would take photographs of his sculpture, and then paint and cut on the negatives. The resulting photographs are an almost perfect triangulation between painting, sculpture and photography. Brancusi photographed his sculptures in his studio because he believed that the light and conditions offered an ideal context for the works. And with Rodin it's about how he shows the making of the work within his work. He lets you see the seams of the cast, and the unfinished evidence of cutting the figure from the base cutting. His process is made completely visible in his work. So between these three guys there is a lot of sustenance for my own work. My first photographs were about painting and sculpture. I have always made sculptures, but it's only recently that I've let my sculptures be shown outside the context of my photography.

SS: Something Robert Linsley said to me a long time ago, working as a painter, he said you couldn't choose your teachers, or your artistic influences. Sometimes you are influenced by artists that you don't really want to be influenced by. Are there artists you think you *should* be influenced by, as compared to artists that you actually are influenced by?

DM: For me it has always been the work that I hated initially that I learn from. I guess Rodin would fall into that category. It's a consistent thing, it's the work that you are repulsed by initially, or that puts you off balance, that is the work that you come back to. It's also true in terms of being an art producer. For me, if I have something

I want to make, and I understand fully how it's going to look and work, and it's a nice little package, I may make it, but there will probably be nothing there for me at the end. Often it's something that seems completely illogical or out of left field that I learn from. Once it's made I will realize, two years down the road, thinking back, that it's more complicated, and maybe worthy of further investigation.

SS: So you are compelled through challenge, rather than through what seems the easiest route. I was thinking about Jeff Wall's *Thinker* (1986), which also has a connection to Rodin.

DM: The theatricality of that work is really quite unnerving.

SS: It's interesting that both of you have taken up Rodin's figurative sculptures in a kind of serious way, and in a climate that does not necessarily condone figuration, or not without skepticism.

DM: Yes, although Jeff's investigation into Rodin was singular, and didn't carry on beyond *The Thinker*. That photo seems anomalous for him, in terms of showing an investigation into the work of Rodin, whereas I am looking at and working in relation to Rodin repeatedly. Through my approach the viewer gets the impression that there is an investigation into an historical framework that is relevant to the present moment. For me it is about an evolving sculptural project and Rodin, among others, is a key figure in that.

SS: You are both interested in figuration, in the gesture and the pose. There is a curiosity about the viability about using the human figure, which seems bankrupt and exhausted, and yet something that we can't do without.

DM: That is something that I want to build into my work. I want figuration, my use of the figure, to evolve within my work. I'm interested in figuration and also what it will lead to. For me it's a jumping off point—in terms of the concept as well as the media and technique.

SS: Can you talk a little bit about the work that you are doing right now?

DM: For the last few months I've been painting which is the thing I most often do when I'm not making sculptures. I find painting relaxing and sculpture quite frustrating and hard. So I procrastinate the making of sculptures by painting. In

the past couple of years my figurative sculptures, the caryatid and the acrobat, have evolved into a series of abstract sculptures, which also have a ceramic component.

At the moment I am moving into something akin to 1815/1962 in that I'm taking my own abstract sculptures and specific abstract sculptures by other artists like Tony Smith for example, and *pelting* them. By 'pelting' I mean turning a 3D object into a flat, faceted object that is hinged together, so that it can fold up and make the original. Or it can fall down, or remake a different shape. I am also having abstract-figurative objects made of clay, which will be shown with the pelted modernist sculpture.

In terms of the portfolio made for this issue of *The Capilano Review*, the images are part of a series of paintings that I completed during the past two months. All of them are painted from photos I've taken, and they show works in progress in my studio. They are as much about the life of the studio as they are about the evolution of my work.

SS: What does the studio mean to you?

DM: I guess the studio is the art. It's the thing I am inspired by. The studio is the place where I interact with what I've made, and the place where I learn. I feel like there would be no point in making something if you are not learning from it, and I really learn more from my work in the studio than I do in the exhibition context.

SS: Is the studio private space? Or public space?

DM: Neither, really. Because I have imaged my studio so often in my paintings there is an obvious desire to make it public, even though it is a very selective process. I don't think my studio is private, though I do think my relationship to my own work is private, and how I respond to, and learn from, my own work, is private.

SS: But the studio doesn't symbolize that?

DM: Yes or I suppose it implies it. First and foremost the studio symbolizes the creation of the work.

SS: For me the artist's studio signifies the place where art is created, and to some extent art comes from the interior of the self, from a subjective, creative place that has some connection with privacy, with being solitary—with passion, and the freedom of imagination, and so on. This image of the studio has, of course, been

mystified and fetishized in endless Hollywood movies. When I look at your art and it takes the studio, or your artistic process, as its subject matter, I can see a mode of conscious self-disclosure. By disclosing who you are influenced by, or works that inspire you, or experiences in your life that have been influential, or paintings in progress, you seem to be inverting the social norm, which equates the artist with the romance and privacy of the studio. When you externalize the studio, and open it to the public, there is an interesting transgression, and an inversion. Do you think the notion of the artist's studio is anachronistic, out-dated?

DM: It's a lot easier for artists today to make art without a studio at all. There are a lot of artists that have no need for a studio, through having people fabricate their work or simply not needing the space. I have people fabricate components of my work. I've also done without a studio for quite a while. It's important to my work now, but it's not impossible to imagine a world without a studio.

SS: Is there a way in which you are attempting to recover the artisanal or hand-made, older forms of creative production? Is the studio about that, about artistic autonomy and independence?

DM: I know that sometimes my work deals with those issues but I don't see myself as someone that is trying to champion the 'hand-made' way of working. For now the studio operates as a site where I have a dialogue with my work. If I appear in one of my own paintings, as a sculptor—as opposed to just showing one of my own sculptures in the studio—then painting becomes a romantic statement about the artist in his studio. I am wary of that. I'm focusing on objects in the studio. Going back to Guston, I am thinking about how he made paintings about the objects that surrounded him, a can of paint brushes, an iron for pressing drawings. He developed this lexicon of things which appeared over and over, like little actors taking their place on the stage. I like that. I like the idea of showing, not so much the tools, but what goes on in the studio.

SS: I was also wondering about the studio as a symbol in relation to our social moment. We have a generation emerging that does not need appear to need privacy. Media culture is all about going behind the scenes, or telling us how it's made, or disclosing shameful secrets. I am thinking about blogging, Reality TV, and dvd "special features." When you work as an artist and you are all about showing your

process, are you working on this mode of full disclosure, or are you asserting the studio as a symbol of privacy, as a document about the ongoing process of self-expression which demands—contrary to the blog, contrary to a society of immediacy and total distraction—some kind of solitude, as well as time taken for private reflection?

DM: I tend to think that the more we have this Reality TV-style life, the more we will need to distance ourselves from it. That said, I think most of my works are not politically charged in relation to what we're talking about. Despite the underscoring of process in my sculptures, drawings, and watercolours, I think there will always be a necessary degree of privacy about my process. There are parts that I simply could not articulate to anyone. For me the paintings have a definite personal quality and, despite their repetition and the familiarity resulting from that, they seem to be slipping into abstraction. With their anachronistic qualities they are also dissolving into something else. I hope that against all odds my paintings appear to be of the moment, and contemporary, with only a corner here and there slumping into a yearning for simpler times.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

## List of Images

### Paintings from the Summer of 2008

1. *Pallet, Paint and Lamps*  
Oil on linen, 66" x 48"
2. *Fallen Caryatid in Progress in Studio*  
Oil on linen, 36" x 30"
3. *Figure Study for Acrobat, in Bedroom*  
Oil on linen, 30" x 24"
4. *Caryatid Maquette in Studio*  
Oil on linen, 16" x 12"
5. *Fallen Caryatid, Lamps and Sofa in Studio*  
Oil on linen, 24" x 30"
6. *Dark Studio Table*  
Oil on linen, 20" x 16"
7. *Abstract Acrobat in Blue Studio*  
Oil on linen, 42" x 30"
8. *Studio, August 2008*

All works reproduced in this issue are courtesy the artist and Catriona Jeffries Gallery.

## SINA QUEYRAS / The Endless Path of the New

What sympathy of sounds? What cricketing  
Of concrete, what struck rubber, what society  
And shifting birdsong sweetens spring's tumult?

She walks near the expressway, a patch  
Of pocked emerald turf besieged with doggy  
Bags, where frolicking hounds squat to pee, pink

Cell phone at her ear. She is calling home,  
Calling the past, calling out for anyone  
To hear. She is waiting, she is wanting

To be near, to be of flesh, to be of earth, on  
Foot, and this is her perspective; the I-95, its  
Prow of condos, the Delaware's sunken

Ships and artillery shells, now the idea of  
River, so many years since any live flesh  
Could be immersed. Here the expressway

Smoothing each nuisance of wild, each terrifying  
Quirk of land, uneven, forlorn, paths of one; wanderer,  
Wander, lonely as a cloud, dappled, drowned,

A melancholic pace and nowhere untouched. Nature,  
One must conclude, is Nostalgia. Two hundred post-  
Romantic years the Alps bursting into arbitrary flames,

The sky—all the way to Mont Blanc, filled with incendiary  
Air. How far Auschwitz? Darfur? Are we a hopeful people  
Yet? How lyric? She follows her uncle's gestures, paced

For lungs, each strike of stick to stone, recalling  
Wordsworth's dog, the solitary path unwinds below.

## 2

What sympathy of sounds. Her father  
A bag she carries in a bigger bag, lighter  
Now, having scattered him across two

Provinces, up a goat path, where these  
Struck peaks, a starburst of contrails, German  
Songs like silt, and tiny woolen cathedrals

Whose bells mark the hours. Have we suffered enough?  
Her Uncle bends his century, a creeping Juniper  
under which lies a tiny tin cup. *Doucement*,

*Doucement*, the cold water now another source  
Untapped, a knowing (even without language),  
A knowing where to drink, or how one foot

Should fall well before it does, recognition of  
The stone's slice; that even rock is not solid;  
Such knowledge a long time companion rarely

Of any ease, other than open, flexible, eye  
On the horizon, thumb in air for change,  
Change; history with its multiple pathways.

This is not the first time on this path, though  
In truth it is. But what is truth? Fact? Bodies? Stone?  
Idea? Word? The heat waking up now, a new century

Ahead, and at the top, a bit of bread and cheese,  
The cell phone out, *Ta Mère*, he says,  
*Tell her your father is laid to rest.*

### 3

But is anyone at rest? She traces roadways where  
In occupied France her father rode his bicycle  
High above the Durance, finding—as we all

Must—a smooth path between rivets  
Of the newly erected bridge, his hands  
High above his head, or so one version

Of the legend goes. What balance, what  
Lack of fear, what shock of hair, what finesse  
Of foot and pout of mouth, what eloquent

Dismount, his aunts below not daring  
To call out for fear of distracting he who  
Like Christ could turn gravity on its head, and

For whom two sisters would devote their lives (if  
Not for him in flesh, then for him in suffering).  
What Sympathy of sounds? Do tell me his pain

Was not in vain. Do say the bees will return,  
And with them seasons.

#### 4

What sounds, what sympathy, what silence, what  
Creation? What recompense? What word? What land?  
What river bottoms once muscular, tracing lifelines,

Deltas, flood planes; what land bunching, ruffling, what  
Men, what stones rolling, what wheels (wooden, steel,  
Rubber), what riding out on horseback, what

Flick of wrist, tug of tether, blast of rock,  
What melting of rubber, what extension of self, what  
Squeak of progress, what eye, what level, what

Parceling and flattening, what neatly bundling,  
What legacy? What future? What expressway? What  
Goat trail on steroids, what native path, canoe trail,

What wagon train, what trail of tears, what  
Aggregate composition, what filleted history, what strata,  
What sub-plates, what tectonic metaphor, what recoil, what

Never having to deal with the revulsion of self, only  
The joy of forward, the joy of away and coming  
Back to itself, for fuel, the circles, the cloverleaf,

Perspective of elevation, the royalty of those views,  
There the Schuykill, the Hudson, the Niagara, the skyline,  
The people in their houses, passing women, men

Dressing, men unearthing, smoke pluming, what  
Future, what monster: what the apple tree remembered?  
Not even the sound of fruit. If a body is no longer a body,

Where is memory? If a text is no longer a text,  
Where is body? If a city is no longer a city, what road?  
If future no longer has future, where does it look?

She snaps her cell phone closed: no one. Alone.  
The century is elsewhere. She turns her back,  
Swallows her words. She will do anything for home.

## ANDREA ACTIS / choose your toast & publish post

*water bearing, boarding, water hoarding the homepage*

whether waiting, weather made it  
its us, all the way  
to statelessly imprisoned  
a-flirting a network in Lenin lipstick

*so many medievalists to screw in a light bulb!*

I can fixate on the subject-in-process  
work out what's just-enough horny about  
seen theory as pop rockets and marshmallow  
and click the Self ignite a little

*Grendel's mom was named SDFJ(\*&#EJOWEIURLJOEP before her water broke?!*

what s'more got stuck;  
can you?

*am i cut out for relationships?*

well I named my iPod Heloise.  
it's snowing badly in Burnaby baby, you can always go to KSW  
and to A&W and to KFC

*who wants what wants (& what wants who)*

expert advice for any group that is limbless  
or unlimited or ltd., for came a structure called  
THE POETRY PHONEBOOK  
or somesuch online radish avant-gardish

*knowledge is as knowledge does!*

but doesn't have to! we all of us have the power  
to contribute to a huge organic  
salad. don't worry about confidence intervals: if the page is dying  
lettuce parsley sage rosemary "the dying"

*Oscar Wilde says a man who lives within his means suffers a severe lack of imagination?!*

well it's what the pharmacist told me  
(when I told him about my wicked fellowship!!)

*but what exactly are the ethics of the Künstlerroman?*

at birth I swallowed an animal balloon,  
have since shopped hollowly.  
grew up to be gay and live in Marseille now I study to be a literary agent

*free wireless, mon oncle, and the power of now*

watch any multitude as it frenches 'n trenches its way  
through democracies now! dot our organs—drill us into  
new ministrations (and RSS and RSS and RSS and all the way  
“home”)

*to fire walk with the flow of traffic!*

like I said, these are just some of the things I need  
that sometimes my landlords forget I need!  
how without them my consciousness remains an unraised  
tapioca, vanilla, balls, Balls, dense, stuck, like spoon me now please

*then where's my free gift?!*

Grace Paley was a good woman. so  
shut up!

*what's the last thing you held/smelled before your father died?*

well the future and a bill from Future Shop  
but isn't that like asking about Grendel's mother again?  
I need a cider with my inscrutable

*in every pocket: an Eveready scare quote for this a world so scary*

“Libya halts Swiss oil shipments”

vs. “Woman sees family die on mountain”

—and my eating disorder’s cured but it doesn’t mean much  
we’re believing in our smallness but it doesn’t mean much

*here’s to burning bridges, and not burning bridges, and all on this earth that is well  
prescribed!*

I think I can I think I can I think I can find

a place for you in my home. especially if you are wooden and as long  
as you’ve read the one about Hey, Jiminy!-cricket hahaha, can smell the difference  
between a homemade hamas and the hummous that puns on melted guns

*is it true that some guys have all the luck?!*

group of seven group of eight. trade you my collected  
Walter Benjamin for just all of your dead prisoners?

*do you love the tickle between meaning it and not meaning it?*

well you tell me—here’s the playlist I put together  
for the vigil. full frontal hot clever with its flights and perchings  
and its oldies and Persians and Freddie Mercury

*a minus device = A-minus times twice*

because there's really only about forty-seven essays my cohort has never read. we all pretend feminism, all don't contend fetishism, all said goodbye to Ruby Tuesday for who could hang a signifier on how drunk we got at karaoke

*take more than a meaning, touch more than a feeling!*

pick one of these two verbs and do it hard and do it good to the "O Canada" lyrics and mp3 I'm about to YouSendIt to you. and remember that just because you're a poet (doesn't mean we should ever hang out with each other) in an EU country, or even Korea okay?

*shall we collaborate on another piece about skin then?!*

important as it ever was, the Writing Group and skin. but whatever's changing in me is probably finding a way to routinely un-invite the bigger audience :-)

*what's gotten into you the way you choose to write a poem now?*

well several trillion letters of complaint never did get sent. or the getting stuck again in thinking how fundamentally opposed I am to absolutely every kind of fundamentalism. plus, Mom, you're just not my type

*nothing smile down nothingness, and all the rather rather rather*

when the idea was to make less sense, and then to make  
no sense, and then nonsense, then concrete nonsense, and then a little  
more sense, then almanac-maniacal sense, and now a sorta sense, and now tense  
sense, and now tense sexy sense, but never extra extra good sense

*there are at least 14,000 things to be unhappy about!*

then give me a bedspread in the Black Forest, a hut  
full of oracular, I am a real boy, a hot *pozole*, and a drive thru someplace that is pure  
unadulterated rapeseed, wide & neon enough to remind me of why  
I am and amn't a professional joyful humanist

*...did you just say OBAMAMANIA?!*

attentiveness, responsiveness, a Sara Lee cheesecake. now that's  
what I like in my taco after a long night in the old or new Babylon

*then what exactly are the ethics of "The Dangling Conversation"?*

there are ethics to it, Art, and that's so far what  
we're pretty sure we know. though it's better to be an English major  
because then you can talk in crop circles not just crap in crops

*who stood to gain, and again, and again*

we voted for unfits of funding, graffiti removal'd  
the Cultural Savings Account. "fists in the mists" they allegorized  
on the bus from one school to another—now get your Canada arm  
away from our babies as well as away from our thoughts

*two fast and easy ways to reorder your cheques!*

I can fixate on my spam poems, respond to your crises with a pervasive ambiguity  
or by signing up for the right shower gel, by ecology in general, I mean I'd never  
hurt a panda, just by singing the empirical lyrical miracle, it was a good  
cupcake martini waterbong free gift we sent you on Facebook eh?

*even knowing that liquid has been a bean, that glass a gas, that gas a blood?!*

yes I'm ready for the fight between my constitutiveness and anything  
that rhymes or bombs, is one of those triangular UFOs or something whoa on HBO

*is this your idea of describing the struggle?*

when life gives me lemons, I give them to all  
my closest friends with scurvy. "no I didn't have  
a dishwasher growing up" I inform people

*what whim what whim what whim what whim*

it's actually true, our dialogics and credit rankings. when utilities are included  
my culture and openness get really creative, as it's never been easier  
to guess that I'll sign off an email with "Best," or to know who else from the west  
is always already coming to dinner

*I feel incredibly human when I'm doing my stretches!*

don't talk at the table just kiss. just publish even. just  
perish even, like so many did in the filming of *Titanic* and well seriously do elsewhere  
and everywhere I'm trying to think about as I'm making out with your discourse  
in the unadulterated rapeseed again

*where did our love go?!*

well I believe we'll be alright if we don't forget how big  
the world is. though *Requiem for a Dream* didn't change my life either

*and you write poetry because?*

because because because because  
because. I'd play Spirograph *ad infinitum* with the purple pen rather than marry  
you and your emerald army

## MARK WALLACE / from **Felonies of Illusion**

### **Which Books Would You Bring?**

Deserted on a survival expert  
glued in a swimsuit heirloom  
no no it's light to know at all  
climbing while fingers get bloody

and toss out tales we touched.  
The furniture melted into bodies.  
Keep cool in acting storage rooms  
(waffle irons, suits and poison)

do you think that basement's a man  
working hard to communicate  
like bigfoot with an axe? Who'd you fog  
after time in the dark? What's with

a little bit of cremation for free?  
Death is fashion. Careening edges missing,  
knocked and moving, a choice  
to be first in last year's fur.

Laughing at the happy candy  
hanging at the coffeehouse with toads  
or other corporate infestations  
I thought dodos were extinct

in high-low jackpots. Today all day.  
Help I want to be done showing up.  
What's the best thing wrapped around you  
glamorous at the end of a wall

enforcing so many judgmental snaps  
tapping out the song. I think I understand  
why I lost those chainsaws in open air  
and put an image together again

to need to feel I feel talked backed to  
when every mile counts on down  
in people falling apart together  
with captioned trust on cable.

## Spray Day

It's happened before or every other guest  
aches to be buried the new right way  
proofs are proofs? When we set out to design  
compact thinking, we ended up with lots

of transit to the usual beach spots  
splintered on assumptions. Are you talking  
to your hand yet? Out of signs,  
tumble switched, thrown on

a presupposed interior call field?  
Before anyone can toss in the towel  
on top of excessive numbers or nightmares  
read the instructions carefully. So does it

take ammonia? Could one highlight film  
recall a bandit on the run  
for all new greed? People are people  
like news is gossip. Whatever I did

becomes equivalent border patsy  
stressful reflex. If responsibility accepts  
another slanted chain of events  
to slip away from, the clamp

on the clamp, the public note,  
slander advancement eats alive  
at many a local hot spot, previewing blunders.  
Step right up to the pressure cap.

## Any Publicity is Good Publicity

Won't have to testify about  
pigs guilty on the rotunda. Get packing  
nomad street misunderstanding

in second gear. Catch today  
impersonating tomorrow. Down under  
phone static, what's worth

being a cleaner health inspector  
not wearing a hat? Screwed  
on the cola marriage circuit

and the power's up for gripes  
about who calls who.  
Show me your badge again.

When it's time to shut everyone down  
belted in the fort, the gala  
credits go nowhere without

last minute invitations to fall  
between the pinned down bars  
and never seen industrial footage

of life replaced by lessons.  
That's an excellent price to crash on  
when manipulated by portions.

## Counting Pertinent Criticisms

Don't make me come down there  
and kick your Wall Street butts.  
Check out all the sexy hysteria  
the blue moon service will be okay

hi, it's easy to abuse the phone.  
Describe the new as good, caught  
in one small public presentation  
that leaves out then leaves. Never

let it settle? Hang on a second,  
Pickett. Is it time to get back  
in the reparations game? Dinner with dancing  
flame accidents, will these stitches

hold back what's left of us?  
You only knew me generically  
while people's heads bobbed past, fragrances  
that turn to fuels. This is your brain

after snorting competing commands  
shooting faster than theories of speed.  
Why'd you want to move in here  
next to officially sanctioned targets?

## M.W. MILLER / A Far West Commentary on the Diamond Sutra

[1] The Excluded Middle walks without feet, on no discernable path, and never arrives. Even the Excluded Middle sometimes wonders: what's the point?

[2] The Excluded Middle is nonetheless very joyful and a fine raconteur on both winter and summer evenings. It never gets in the way of a story. Indeed, the Excluded Middle can never get in the way of anything, or offer any obstruction.

[3] The Excluded Middle just can't disagree, and so can never be bested in any debate. If you swing at the Excluded Middle, you'll be swinging at air. It floats like a butterfly and deploys three kinds of stings: is, is not, and therefore is.

[4] If the Excluded Middle could feel guilty about offering so little resistance and in not putting up a more entertaining fight, it would. But it can't.

[5] So it doesn't. It can only repeat: is, is not, and therefore is. The Excluded Middle is far too generous to offer advice of any kind and would be offended at the thought, if it could be offended. It trusts your wisdom, implicitly, as well as your generosity, ethics, patience, energy & calm, and is careful not to add any new heads to the one you already have. For it would be an act of hypocrisy of limitless proportions, easily enough to make Jesus weep, for the Excluded Middle, who has no head, who is not anyone, to add a head to anyone else.

[6] Being without a head, and joyfully so, the personhood of the Excluded Middle is in much dispute. The Excluded Middle always has an immeasurable laugh at this. That's another thing it's particularly good at. Though no one knows how, being without a head and all.

[7] The Excluded Middle patiently contains multitudes, chiliocosms of chiliocosms with all the particles of dust there entailed, and chiliocosms of chiliocosms within each particle of dust. [But there are no particles of dust. Therefore, there are particles of dust.] With great energy and every perfection, the Excluded Middle gathers together all particles of dust into one huge & infinitely spinning wheel, and calmly places that wheel on the glass of your coffee table, without a particle spilled, while

leaving plenty of room for your Gideon, for your sutras, and even for your teetering stack of Real Estate Weeklies.

[8] The Excluded Middle is that good.

[9] The Excluded Middle can pitch its tent anywhere, encompassing all tribal treasures, named & unnamed, and traverse any desert for whatever series of quadruple decades required, followed by pillars of smoke & flame.

[10] The Excluded Middle is always on the move and favors nomads, barbarians, pirates & rogues, and is bored by cities, trade & the clever. If it could be overtaken by anger, it would be particularly exasperated by people with fine handwriting. But it cannot be overtaken by anger.

[11] The Excluded Middle is the non-obstructed & generous provider of all grounds, all public spaces and is home to all the best country fairs. A greased pig is one of the many ceremonies that gives the Excluded Middle boundless joy.

[12] The Excluded Middle especially favors lemonade made with quartered lemons, crushed ice and heaps of sugar, as well as corn on a stick dipped in melted butter. If the Excluded Middle had a doctrine, this would be its doctrine. But the Excluded Middle has no doctrine. [Therefore, this indeed is its doctrine.]

[13] Send all inquiries regarding the events you plan to run or attend in these public spaces, as well as any questions you have on current scheduling, to the Excluded Middle, though it's notorious for slipping all determination and desperately hard to reach.

[14] Should you reach the Excluded Middle, it will ask: What sugar? What ice? What lemons? And: whose corn & butter? And it will say: no lemons, no ice, no sugar, and no one's corn & butter. And it will say: therefore, sugar, ice, lemons, corn & butter.

[15] But by that time, you will have taken out your car keys.

[16] A gentleman with his three children lays a picnic on the grass near the fairgrounds of the Excluded Middle. His lady is nearby on a tree swing and dressed in a bright saffron frock. She glides. She has lovely calves.

[17] The three children run naked around the picnic spread, shrieking, We're invisible! You can't see us! The gentleman looks up from his weighty scroll, a little annoyed: Yes I can.

[18] The ground trembles.

[19] The middle child, Aristotle, visibly grows up and moves to the city, where he becomes a dominant caudillo and raises a vast army.

[20] He's terribly organized. His ambitions are vast. He drives all immeasurable signs of the Excluded Middle from the west side, then crosses Main Street and marches on the east. His troops are well armed, well trained, and conversant in all branches of knowledge, each of which is laid out in phalanx. They form a whole much greater than the sum of its parts. But they were never parts, says the Excluded Middle, and they are not now whole. [Therefore, they are parts, and they are whole.]

[21] The Excluded Middle gathers a muddle of 108 million triple-headed elephants in armor, plus a myriad, give or take, of weapons-grade chakras, and a bottomless quiver of arrows that hang in the air like zeppelins.

[22] Before the battle, an eagle snatches a dove out of the sky, which is a sign. Neither body can ever be found, which is another sign. Neither of these signs is truly a sign. Therefore, they are [signs].

[23] The battle is joined, involving all the races of the earth, each one grander but more confused than the last. Monkeys, otters, llamas and bears take up the slack. [And so metal clangs on metal and performs its rough & tendentious surgeries.]

[24] Weeks pass with little or no action. Disgruntled warriors on both sides set up board games across the lines of scrimmage. Only so many can be killed before all imaginary afterworlds are double & triple booked, and the staff is forced to start sending them all back, to the battlefield, which becomes more crowded than ever.

[25] Supplies are running low. Even fishes & loaves are put on a wait list. But there are no fishes & loaves. Therefore, there are fishes & loaves, which is a good thing [for people will always be hungry].

[26] The stalemate becomes daily yet more stale. The DMZ shrinks down to the two lanes of Main Street, which is now a border dividing the city, west from east. Talks begin.

[27] The Excluded Middle and Aristotle meet in a bubble teashop on Main Street. Aristotle orders green tea & mango. As for the Excluded Middle, how could it choose?

[28] Talking to the Excluded Middle is of course impossible, and the meetings lead nowhere, but Aristotle keeps coming back. Drawing on his own golden mean, he

remains patient. The waitress, Kwan Yin, is charming to the point of heartbreak. The Excluded Middle passes along Aristotle's secret notes.

[29] Aristotle raises the position of women to the top link on the Great Chain of Being, but fearfully, telling no one.

[30] Randomly, warriors slip back and forth across the DMZ of Main Street as if there were no border. But there is a border. [Therefore, there is no border.]

[31] All of Aristotle's steps are lighter than they used to be. He rediscovers his lost dialogues. They paint a beard on Plato. They're bestsellers, and also do well with the critics. Aristotle's brand is bigger than ever. His career is re-energized. But none of this unsettles his mind.

[32] At the side of the Excluded Middle, Aristotle strolls unobstructed on summer evenings down Main Street. Pale stars rise overhead. Street lights flicker off & on. Around his feet, ocean foam, flashes of lightening & phantoms play about like clouds, like Greek fire, and like dreams.

[This is a rough draft of a reconstruction from an irretrievably corrupted text of an epitomized version of a commentary attributed to Licchavi Vimalakirti; the full commentary is estimated to run 6,000 pages.]

## S.C. PINNEY / Dog

Him rub. Ruble phum warm and likened. Him liking and looking. Ruble rumb neck and ear rumo. Earo him and rub. Him rubo rumb hom. Hom and warm for sleep and other life. Hom and him. Eye. Him eye to my look. Here and me. Him rubo rum hom and rub, liking rum and hom warm sleepen and warm rubo.

Him shuffle box and chuc scun shuffle of “chackenbaif” and “melk” a crunch? Out and smell taste. Close. Him hold. “Chackenbai”...him hold. Crunch and taste! Lick and taste “chacken” good and swallow crunch. Him more? “Chackobaif”en and “milk” lick chuc and bof scrumb swallow. More? Him gone. Lick. Taste. Gone. Lick.

Lie down. Head on leg. Still. Rest leg. Body down. Still. Sun hot on side. Push of heat. Like rubo. Like him hand. Warm light tickle hot. Breathe. Still hot light rub. Belly fire. Breathe head. Leg. Lie. Sun. breathe. Still. Wait. Wait and lie. Light. Breathe. Hot.

Black fur! Black! Teeth and cut. There. Get black. Tear and teeth black and leg free claw and tear and blood and rip to teeth and cut and away. Away black fur. Black of teeth a tear and blood and run to black. Gone. Gone? Black fur or me tear and teeth at black! Gone. Black fur gone.

In big hard noise go. Sitting and big noise going. Hard sit stand go past head out—air fast. Stand and look fast out past and past. Big hard go ground move to not stand sit. Wait and fast out past. Not breathe wind sun of running super fast of field, of big hard noise going air of other and salt of worldful everything of fast air and breathless eye brush, ear push air past.

Leg fast. Leg and air and smell. Free leg to not me. Smell of other pee and salt. Here and here. Here! Here other of younger and big young and “chacken” and “baif” and him pull and free leg sniff of other. Other other here and here. Old and pee and there. There and here. Me pee and let other, other me pee. Old and bigger or smaller? And short leg. Not me. Not me other of good feel hip. Good of other not me. Him pull. Leg go run here and here. Other run and free leg pee and other.

Want. Clear cold. Up and leg to where clear cold. Want. There. Tongue up clear good. Tongue and tongue and down. Want. Cold and clear for tongue. Here. Good clear tongue up and down to not want. No taste smell clear but want and good. Tongue up done.

Lie. Warm soft. Lie. Full “chacken” and “baif” full. Chair. Eye closed dark for not. For tired dark. Dark and other life. Running or scared or “chacken” and “baif”? Lie. Leg rest warm. Dark closed eye and other life warm or cold. Tired dark. Wait. Closed eye. Soft leg. Dark eye. “Chacken” lie. Chair not. Run? Be...cold paw step. Field. Just field. Trees. Cold white. Paw step and step. Wait. There! Other! Other come scent and bigger. Run and bark and bigger. Bigger other. Scare or good other? Good or scare. Bigger and leg fast bark to other. Tear and hurt and blood and help him save for “chackenbaif” and rubo and eyes and chair. Or good? Coming. Bigger other here! And good! Other pee and other brown smell and me hip good teeth scratch and jump play of THEN and leg spring leap and pee and claws and fur and THEN leap and brown other and other bark and together. Together other leap and THEN run, smell and othertog. Leap hipsmell brown othtog erpee...room! chair lie. Other life? Chair dark. Leg sore. Tired dark. Other gone. Gone dark other life. Chair. Room. Chair. Leg.

Him with bright. Hold. Up for leg run catch. Him hold up and bright over leg push fast and bright where? There and leg free fast of ground claw push to bright take for my! Bright there leg and take! Tongue and teeth tear and hold and him. Turn and him there. Free leg bright to him. Not him hold. My hold. Bright in tongue and teeth. Sun on belly. Hot. Hot where hip and pee. Cool ground. Roll and turn to keep up. Back and legs where head is. Dizzy fall over. Push up. Dizzy upside hold and over push. Not. Belly cool back. Belly back. Hot under. And roll. Of itch and cool grass.

Full tongue and bite taste of “chackenbaif” thick crunch and down of tongue full and full tongue and down full of wanted “chacken” full down and down to empty lick of full not-wanting.

Sun hot not good. Leg up and hot of hurt hot fur. Tongue down mouth cool of too hot. Leg to not sun standers. Leg and lie in stander not sun. Not hot. Stander smell. Standers good not sun cool. Leg of stander? Or earo? Touch. Lie. Rest from hot. Cool not sun.

Want leg fast. Air and smell free leg. Him where? Leg to there. Him not. Leg to here. Not. Him sound? There? Him! Leg to him side and eye to his eye. Back down. Side him. Eye look. Leg fast him? Look and touch of him. Rub, but want leg fast. Leg and up and him side again and eye him. Wait. Want leg smell air free. Wait. Him not. Wait.

Them tongue and bite. Up. "Chacken". "Baif". Eye to them. Them eye of other them and tongue bite full "chacken baif". Them "chackenbaif". My look. My eye to them eye and my tongue? My bite full of down of them? My look. Them tongue. Full. Them "chackenbaif" bite. My not. Wait.

Dark. But my not. Eyes my but not. Dark of day. Lie. Not tired. Up and leg. Him tired dark closed eye. Not my. My not tired dark. But dark. Leg and not sound. Not sound and dark. "Chacken" want. Of him to not tired dark. Dark leg not eye. Notsound. Leg to out dark.

Paw leg itch a lick bite. Lick a bite tongue and itch. Teeth of itching bite. Paw leg. Paw. Lick. Lick of itch. Bite. Lick. Lick to clean. Paw and leg lick of smell lick. Gone. Clean. Better with lick smell. Lick of scratch and clean good leg. Better.

Him eye and my. Look. Him stand. Not rubo. My stand. Stand for rubo of him but him not. Him stand and look. Look eyes of what? What him look? Free leg? "Chackenbaif"? Him stand not. Eyes look. What him? Want what? Wait. Him look. Him.

Him loud sound. Away. Him hand up. Hit and hurt away. Me not him hit. Down and away. Away to place him want. Away and down to. To here or here? Away. Him loud.

Me not want hurt down and not hurt. Away.

Cold around. Other air move cold and float. Paw spread run of all around cold here and move stay up. Run and paw speed up along shiny dark top look and cold up stay. Cold of hip and that.

Big outside. Move sound. Push and sound of great hit. Of giant outside up of giant him? Of up there? Too big sound of not know. Scare to cry whine away. Away from big outside. Sound of hit or of giant too big not here. Away.

## FRANCIS NARCISE BAPTISTE / Poems

### Blood

his father had a moustache  
for his mother, he imagined, it must've  
been like kissing the branch of a pine tree  
or the end of a broom

always wandering off  
away from his friends  
he seemed more at ease alone

Jerm, an older cousin, once asked him  
if he was a full-blooded Indian and  
not yet understanding race or biology  
he said, *Probably not, there was that  
time my nose bled a lot  
and I probably lost some when I stepped  
on that cactus patch too.*  
Jerm laughed real hard and got his  
friend to come over so he could ask again.

the elders loved him dearly, they thought  
he looked just like his grandfather of the same name  
and there were whispers and nods about  
him being a hereditary chief, though the  
system didn't go like that anymore  
still, they hoped he'd grow to lead  
*It's in the blood*  
Mary once said to him,  
though more to herself  
for now he was just a boy

wandering alone  
most days  
circling the rez as if  
deep inside he were tending  
to land and people



and the body was home by  
    sun-up  
returned to the rez  
    one last time  
        the morning after  
            Willy  
the last to park his horse outside the bar  
to rest  
with ancestors

## MICHAEL FILIMOWICZ / Tatavan

I did not know what those animals were called, nor knew their typical behavior. Black, big as a car, sharp horn tubes long and twisting. Would they mind? My being here. They inched forward chewing the ground, perhaps eyeing my presence with their side-mounted fish eyes. I was treading the footpaths between the crops, unsure of what those crops were, not being good at plant names, either. Short, deep green stalks, in mud pools sometimes. The air was cool with touches of noon heat, and sunbeams were sparsely spaced across the plain like tilted columns beneath the overcast. Steam off the fields meandered between the dark gray and pock-marked rocks that were scattered and growing in size toward the slopes of a great mount, either carved or deposited by glaciers, I couldn't remember what the book said, anomalous like a great cyst in the landscape. In history it had been a useful mount, one of those fortunate heights which can't but be used for some military purpose. On it had been built a massive fort complex, now impressive remains of walls and quirky room shapes. The ruins probably looked better than the intact entity, though this was but my hiker's daydream.

I had walked the ruins all morning and clambered up the mossy ramparts, walked along the highest, most held together remnants, took in the valley with its smoky definition, the hazy bright horizons, the dewy scents. The thick coffee had settled nicely, my gut was humming, the crickets swelled in cascades of needling sound. At times an archer's slit would frame a slice of the valley, or a crevice invite a detour into some roofless interior space. Occasionally I would stop to take a photograph. Looking down at the road, the vehicles that traversed it were separated by good, distinct intervals of time, always a lone vehicle. A tractor, then the crickets, some time passed, a small hatchback sans hood pattering past, then the crickets and more time. An army jeep, time, a scooter, crickets.

*You have to forget before you remember, what goes down will come back up whether or not an effort is made, no borders between an imagined and recollected world, for at the boundary of boundaries is zero, even in the brain's electro-chemical nebulae, adjacent to*

*the microwave background of the Big Bang as it permeates each one of us. For now this happens to be a single bit of particular desert amongst vaster, anonymous, nondescript, unincorporated desert superimposed as the backdrop to one little patch of familiar desert, some outpost like this, latitude unknown and longitude suspected. We are stranded and wild ones, mere barbarians and enfranchised to nothing. The authorities high-tailed it out of here long ago, the deputies lost the sanction of their deputy-hood and so wandered off with the nomads like so much human tumbleweed, you should have seen how directionless, how without compass the elected were that day, when it first came on the news that the gods had lost favor with the capital, and the capital ceased to be the epicenter of empire, and the ring of empire without its epicenter ceased to be a ring, and here we were without allegiances and alliances, without law and precedent, without future and all the invisible solidifiers. How so many of us blanched, became ghosts of once-assured selves and took on a pall the color of these sands, no, even whiter than the whitest of sands, not their actual complexions which were blushed and wet with sobbing, but the white pallor of their souls, so white no prism could split those withdrawn intensities, a collapsed ball of white, the sudden vanishing of the enterprise, the embarrassment of that grand posture which justified our orbit at the perimeter of the world, the white fear as our particular outpost was jettisoned into free undefined space, like some metaphorical billiard ball in a hypothetical science lesson, our coinage instantly without currency, our borders in dispute, our language unofficial. While we await the news of a viable jurisdiction announcing itself, and the Capital Abbreviated Name of what power we shall adhere to, I have not talked to my mother in months.*

I had climbed up on the road side and gone down on the field side. Hence my predicament. Would those ox-bulls do anything? To me. Did they care? Was I an instinctual enemy of some kind, some territorial threat? They were inert enough. Surely they were used to the farmers and their herdsman. These weren't goats, after all. It was not as if they would just come up from behind and gore me for no reason. This wasn't a rodeo, either—they were not caged and provoked. This was no street in Spain, no arena of beast harassment. They had all the world there to chew on. Arguably, I would not be anything to be bothered about. But still the implacable trepidation, the unease in the proximity of large herd animals with vorpal horns.

I would run, of course, if one of them made a move toward me. I was embarrassed by these thoughts. Somewhere I was sure there was a telepathic shepherdess camouflaged in a thicket giggling at the foreigner in his shiny jacket and big boots who was afraid of nothing at all. This shepherdess, of course, had no such ox-anxiety, would be able to survive in the mountains for weeks because she knew the names of roots and where to find them, knew how to dig for water, obviously. She could whack a wild cat on its nose with the strap of her sandals and be done with it. But the foreigner would exhaust his canteen and then look for a restaurant, probably one in his book. Alas, the foreigner with the aftershave smell would have a camera, somewhere in one of those big pockets. He'd want to take a picture, though not entirely sure why.

A cow patty lay on the path, the basis of a futuristic city of flies. Airborne traffic went about its business as if there was some reason to move about on that pile, as though it weren't absolutely the same shit through and through but had to be constantly investigated, to see if one part might have something different to offer. Really, why all the motion? Look at those black beasts, they know the grass doesn't get any greener, so they have all the time in the world. As though the flies haven't seen shit before.

Maybe in their world of phantasmagoric scents they are frenzied by every little shift in the breeze, one moment it's there, right in front of you, right inside you, the next it's scooped out of existence and the trail of it is racing away, then, whoah, you've just passed it, hey, there it is again. The reality of the thing, in the breeze of the thing.

*When an army is marching down the streets of some town or other, you hear that lovely rhythm of synchronized boot steps, syncopated with the rattling of chain mail and the clank of hilts in their scabbards bumping up against the breastplates and the lilting beat of the saddle buckles. But in the desert, when an army marches, you hear only the clanking, and not the low, resonant, steady tattoo of boots on pavement. There is just the wind and the jangling, and the stupid squish of sand.*

The footpath came to a grassy road. I decided to take it left, vaguely back toward town, though I could see by the way it bent along a creek that I might end

up nowhere near the hotel. But I had all day, all morning, at least. Until I became hungry perhaps and would have to go looking for a hut bakery. In the meantime I walked, gazed up the slopes of the foothills, out across the crops and wild grasses, the tree tops poking out, the unfamiliar bearded birds with the crazy stripes swirling around them. This was a paradise of sorts—no phone wires crisscrossing overhead, no billboards or signage of any kind, no names to anything, no parking lots or pavement or call boxes or fences. No adulteration of the landscape, no excessive gesturing to me going through it. The world is so easy on the eyes without all that infrastructure blocking the view. This was my mission today, to see the naked earth, tilled a bit, reclaiming old built stuff.

*It happened this way and so had to occur in that manner. If there was some other road I missed I have missed it for good and so there was not that road to begin with.*

There were some boulders along the banks of an irrigation ditch. I sat there and thumbed through the blank post cards. Chose one. It featured a boy, maybe twelve, on crutches. One of his legs ended at an uncovered stump, dark pink, just below the knee. He is looking at the camera, a little unsure, a little ashamed at displaying himself like this.

S,

*I have just contributed three cents to the revolt. This boy, I was told, stepped on a land mine. I can't read the caption, but I was told that is what happened. They're selling these post cards in the shops, in plain view of the troops who patrol the streets, though mostly they fill up the tea gardens, playing chits—a game with numbered wooden blocks, a game board, dice. A simple game. Just down the street some insurgents have set up a photo gallery in a pool hall, documenting the killed and maimed. I was asked if I'd be willing to deliver some packages for them. Should I take them up on it? I wonder if the postal service really lets these cards get sent—I'd like to know if you get this post card, it being anti-government propaganda, after all.*

By around noon I was beginning to get bored. The grass road kept going, widening a bit, there were tire marks in the dirt. Now and then a ditch or stream passed beneath it through a corrugated tube. Not a dwelling in sight. I began to have second thoughts about my left turn. I'd been following the consequences of that

decision for an hour or so—it would have been an admission of failure, and a failure to explore further, to turn back. I went on.

*You have to look for the greatest lack of roads, the largest, blankest white spot on the map, preferably cordoned off by mountains, and find some dot with a name or maybe with several conflicting names, attached by a faint umbilical dotted line to some thicker, darker dotted strokes, teasingly winding and attached to a scribbly scratch somewhere, preferably a river, or better yet, a tributary to a larger river, a mere stream, meandering through speckled or bumpy textures, so that the business of the highwayman exists only by virtue of the ferryman, and likewise the ferryman's business only by virtue of the merchant marine, the itinerant smuggler, and occasional folksy extortionist in a mountain pass.*

Just a week ago at the bus station, while looking out over the strait, the pontoon bridge, the blue gold streaks of light, shadow spikes of minarets, Rachel and Rebecca, two unknown quantities, walked past. Inspired, I initiated flirt-with-two-women procedures, though after the flirtation had commenced I realized I had ignited something regrettable. Too late—I mentioned my destination—and surprise—two days later there they were, fresh off the bus, four hundred miles from where we had departed. It was a small village. I could not hide from them for long.

Imagine—spending two months getting as lost as possible in another country only to run into the same Danish nurse on four occasions. Each time trying to ditch her, but unintentionally leaving clues that would lead to the next rendezvous. This is how it worked. I would overhear her discussing the itinerary with her friend, freckly Tasmanian Rebecca, and then I'd announce my next destination which was unfortunately nowhere near where they were going. That was one technique. The other was trickier. I would say that I would be in either one of several places, in perhaps one or two weeks time, I could not be sure. Invariably, Rachel and Rebecca would select the right place at the right time, picking out of the various probabilities the correct junction. There is no doubt that Rachel and I were meant, by whatever fates were reigning, to be lovers on this journey, though that would never happen due to my strange defiance. As if to prove that one can rebel against fate.

*I have seen the slaves sleeping on the veranda, in the checkered shade of the lattice streaked with the writhing shade of the palm leaves, heads propped on a chunk of*

*sandstone in which perhaps dwelled some genie of a sandman, so unbothered their sleep seemed though their faces, in the waking world, were drizzled with darting, nibbling flies taking turns in beady rows. When you sleep every night with a rock for your pillow you begin to make minute distinctions, and categorize and compare current rock pillows to previous rock pillows, and you acquire eventually the skill to discern that one rock is softer than another, that one stone is better as a pillow than another stone, or, one hard edge is better for one part of the nape and another smooth contour is better for one side of the head than, say, a flat, flinty edge, which may be good for the temples but not the pate. Indeed, there have been whole slave wars waged over the rightful share of desirable rock pillows, one slave faction clamouring for its right to a certain precious lump from a favoured pit and another crying foul, its heads deprived of the soft rocks owed to it by their various entitlements. These slave wars have often involved the hurtling through space of the very rocks called into contest by the wars, so that, one soon suspected, the entire controversy had been devised by the rocks themselves, in order for them to obtain some means of locomotion, which they would not be able to do without the rock wars, they themselves but being rocks.*

I met Jimbo on the bus. Blonde, short, muscular, a crane operator from Perth. I needed a roommate. One night in the Marley Bar (Bob Marley was the only offering on the stereo), he and I were playing backgammon with, who else, Rachel and Rebecca. He was holding Rachel's fingers in his hand, gawking at her cleavage as she explained that she had picked up the silver ring with triangular patterns in Nepal. Jimbo pulled it off her finger and while attempting a careful and reverent inspection promptly dropped it onto the floor. He then urgently rammed his knees into the cement as he went looking for it under the table, knocking into her thigh and stopping to look at her legs, which were shaved and tan. He then went crawling under the table next to ours in search of Rachel's ring, stopping to look at the legs on display there as well. Rachel asked me to walk her back to her room, a few streets over. I don't remember how I avoided going into her room—somehow I made it back to Jimbo, to backgammon, to Bob Marley, to Rebecca flipping through the CDs. Why was I so determined to avoid sleeping with Rachel? Why? Because. Because her cheeks were a little orange, and I didn't like her taste in music. Also, she said "Oh

man” a lot and one eye looked bigger than the other. I just didn’t want to be obligated to spend much time with someone having those qualities. In retrospect she would have been the perfect lover for that trip. My reasons for rejecting Rachel’s overtures were ridiculous, of course, but at the time seemed reasonable. Zorba the Greek would not have run away from her. He would not run from an obese fifty year old widow, either. I was not living up to the Zorba love-making ethic.

*Have you never known the pleasure of serving a master? Experienced that natural inflection of your will before another’s, the easy surrender and going down that every blade of grass knows in a strong wind, or every chunk of driftwood in a current? Or are you a stone in a brook with sharp edges, a tree limb which snaps off in a storm and impales the cattle? Are you something hard and stiff like all that? Slavery is a choice, a lifestyle—try it, you might like it. But remember—slaves may only speak when spoken to by non-slaves. Or, they may speak to themselves. Also, they may not speak to each other unless a non-slave is not around. Furthermore, slave-owners are advised to only mix together slaves from disparate tribes in order to prohibit coherent communication between them, and encourage conflict in addition. That’s the way to do it—diversify your portfolio.*

A sound like a far-off lawn mower, growing louder. A truck pulled out of the tall grass and stopped. The driver, an old man with a white mustache, seemed bemused. Something else on that mug, inscrutable. He waved his hand at me, did it again, either signifying go away or come over here, I couldn’t tell. I opted for approaching and said, “Tatvan.” He said, “Tatvan,” then waved again. I stood there. “Tatvan?” He reached across and opened the passenger door.

We rode along for a while. He mostly said things I couldn’t understand. I didn’t want to nod my head and feign understanding, caught myself shrugging my shoulders instead. That seemed stupid, or at least uncool (always, of course, imagining myself in full view of that imaginary telepathic shepherdess). I then took to opening my palms, splaying my fingers, and furrowed my brow in concentration, as though if I just focused hard enough I’d figure out what he was saying. “England?” he asked. “America,” I said. He yelled loudly, slapping his knee, “America! America, ah. Discotheque.”

*The hushed, whispering, continental migration of giant sand dunes, interceptors of ocean-thrust winds, aid to the dispersal of nomads and guardian of the longevity of legends. To deal with that dry, depthless viscosity, engineers have floated foundations, schemed canals, and devised hovercraft capable of incredible speeds. Of a formal beauty glimpsed only in the dark opacities of glare-free goggles and fish-eye lenses, neutral density filtered. Capable of mercy in the form of occasional puddles. I have read that whole planets are composed of this. Entire worlds formed only of this sub-world, with thousand kilometer per hour winds, fifty-year cyclones, and execution temperatures. Every solid particle hewn through cataclysmic collision against every other particle, subsumed in the thrall of forces neither its own nor wholly alien to it. In such a wilderness there is no life, just dead things, very busy dead things in ceaseless motion. What's the point, of all that dead energy? What good is a landscape without creatures whose body-needs and soul-dramas push that landscape into the background, where it belongs? Who can care about just background?*

I was struck by the condition of the dashboard—the gaping holes and grimy vents—the way he drove bare-footed and whistling. Where the hell was he going? “Tatvan?” I offered. He whistled. A jellied dragonfly on the windshield gazed at me from its pool of eye. It was getting to be hot, well past noon. I had completely lost sense of where we were in relation to town. I would have to trust this old man to get me back.

Some sheep were blocking the road. The old man laid on his horn like it was the middle of rush hour and someone had fallen asleep at a green light. It seemed unnecessary, shattering the calm of the day. Wouldn't just one quick horn blast do? But the sheep were slow to get it. We plowed through them slowly, engaged in an improvised conversation of honking and bleating. Something definitely was being communicated into the air but who could possibly translate it? The noise contest abated as we broke through that mulling phalanx of puzzled flock. Unexpectedly, the old man slapped my knee, like he was exuberant about some joke we had just shared and meanwhile was swatting a fly.

He pulled off the road into a field alongside a bluff. There were other vehicles parked in the tall grass. There was no road out of here—this was a dead end place. I wanted to say, “Damn, I said I have to go to Tatvan! What the hell are we doing

here?” All I could reasonably communicate, of course, was “Tatvan?” I tried to put some exasperation into it, to get across serious disappointment. I rolled my eyes and looked impatiently out the window. There were people in the cars. In one I thought I saw a man begin to strangle his passenger, grabbing him in a choke hold and smothering his nose. But the act was too slow. It took several moments to dawn on me—they were getting it on. Like two dumb, clumsy oxen, like they were mugging each other, they were figuring it out as they went about it. The old man slapped my knee again, this time more like a pat. Another pat, a little squeeze. I sat there, strategized, and held back a laugh. I didn’t want to insult him. I smiled politely. The old man was smiling, too, and I looked at his teeth. I could not imagine having teeth like that. Bad dream teeth, Freud’s death-wish teeth, Cubist teeth, what few there were, each investigating a different geometrical plane, no common coordinates between them, an assemblage of angles and a palette of yellows, browns, and grays. The wiggling tongue spasms behind them. May I never have a mouth like that, I thought. An old peasant’s mouth.

I was still smiling politely. Of course I was gripping the door handle and gesturing, nodding, thanks for the ride, it was very gracious of you, I’ll be on my way now, I’ve got to meet up with some people now. He raised his eyebrows, questioning me. Are you sure? Do you really want to go? Think about the benefits of not going away.

*It is not exactly that they are poor. It is only that some of us went through an industrial revolution, electrification, and finally, cyber-spatialization. Some billions of us, however, did not. They are reiterating an old pattern, like a shape with outlines growing thicker as it is retraced over and over, whereas we have placed all our bets on the future. A few hundred years ago we would be indistinguishable from them. They are not deprived versions of us, but are rather so far at the back of the race that the police have long since removed the barricades.*

I found a trail leading away from that scene, too narrow for any truck to maneuver, but I wasn’t concerned that I’d be followed. A few yards into the grass I heard the truck start up, he was giving up on me and would now have to resume whatever errand he had originally been on. Unless this was his errand. Maybe I had

stumbled onto some lovers' path, the left turn, maybe a young man walking along that road at that time of day signified something definite to him, to others like him. Maybe he was just taking a chance.

*Right now some sop is out there in that old battle field, mining the sand with a metal detector, looking for salvage, some souvenir, a momentous curio for the flea markets. The idiot analyses the clicking in his headphones, shovel ready in hand, stoops and starts to dig at the rust. Later you see them on the streets, starved and deranged skeletons with eager and hopeful eyes when you consider their junk with pity. Some shell casing to be bartered for bread, or a melted, wadded bayonet to amaze the illiterate tribals, maybe get a corn rusk or two for them.*

I aimed for the cliff and found some goat paths that were navigable. As a Capricorn, I called upon the great goat spirit to steady my steps and guide me home, home currently being a hotel room in Tatvan. It was a lovely walk, those goat trails, which very quickly ceased to be trails and became more like guesses. Here and there invisible sign posts read, "Try this way—you probably won't fall," and "The fall isn't too bad over here." The "path" wound and crumbled, forked and hugged the escarpment's precipitous outcroppings and ridges as I uneventfully made my way to the top within an hour. I photographed the plateau, its edges breaking apart into a maze of gullies, sheer drops, and gentle rises. I discerned mountains at the horizons—the plains did not go on indefinitely. There was a sense of encirclement, of being in the middle of something. Here and there a goat, a creamy dot speckling the grass. Serious and frozen things, sniffing.

*Does it matter if one chooses not to write one's name on walls already covered with the names of previous visitors? One cannot deface what is already clearly defaced, tomb or no tomb. Then a thought appeared, gently, in the manner of a mild superstition being born. I came to imagine the spirit of the deceased, who lay here somewhere beneath me in the ground, or more likely hovering above it, not only tolerating the graffiti but over the centuries coming to appreciate and even need it. In the vesperous infinities of ghost logic there would be some residue of presence left behind by each scrawler which would serve as a community of presences for the spirit, ameliorating the loneliness of time, death, and being forgotten. By choosing finally to take out my key chain and dig into that*

*soft stone the short version of my given name, I would be enriching the life of a lifeless soul, exchanging a bit of my being for some of its nonbeing. Giving it some company. Or something like that.*

The bluff was a clue. Somewhere nearby had to be the river which formed it over the aeons. I brought out the map and looked for river lines, noticed plenty of blue veins and beige patches in which I might be standing. Sans compass, careful observations and measurement, the map was less a reference and more a reminder as to the possible uses of maps. I picked a direction as though commitments could be arbitrary, and walked past a bull in a tree. On a ridge grew a tree with a forked trunk like a Y, and propped into the junction of the split trunk stood a bull, one forked trunk under each arm pit, standing resolutely still as though at attention, with a head that refused to move perhaps out of embarrassment, stoically accepting the flies. The bull stood as if intending to stand that way, with forelegs on the front side of the Y, hind legs on the other, and no way to un-prop itself from this entanglement. It's horns made for an additional branching, so one might add something like handlebars to the Y's midpoint to get a sense of the geometry of that spectacle. I had taken my last photo hours ago, and trusted the scene to memory. I turned my back on the only bull I ever saw trapped in a tree, who perhaps became the only bull skeleton someone else would see at the base of a tree.

*A lone hiker watches the sun unravel in tails of light, and the moon slide out from behind a purple peak, happy at the distant sound of the saz and the char scent of lamb as an invisible village solidifies in the shadows, his currency, wadded though it is, welcome as any other. That he has enough stashed in his pockets for many more meals of this kind is proof intangible of chances taken and not known to be taken, and risks accomplished as easily as not taking them, that one can cross a country or a street and either be struck by a speeding camel or make it to the other side in one piece with no credit due to one's looking both ways. He hears old melodies and learns new words. In this way, the others receive him.*

## Contributors' Notes

ANDREA ACTISIS is a former Vancouver person now living in Providence, RI.

FRANCIS NARCISE BAPTISTE is an Aboriginal writer living in Vancouver, BC. He is the publisher of *Native Destinations*, an Aboriginal tourism magazine. His work has appeared in *BC Business*, *SAY* magazine, and *Pacific Rim* magazine.

LOUIS CABRI's works mentioned in the interview in this issue can be found at *The Mood Embosser*: <[http://www.chbooks.com/archives/online\\_books/mood\\_embosser/](http://www.chbooks.com/archives/online_books/mood_embosser/)>  
“Nonce-word pragmatics: a sketch”: <<http://www.monoecious.org/cabri-nonce.html>>  
Social Mark: <<http://www.slought.org/series/social/>>  
Philly Talks: <<http://www.slought.org/series/PhillyTalks/>>

ROGER FARR is on leave and in love.

MICHAEL FILIMOWICZ is an interdisciplinary artist based in Vancouver, British Columbia, where he teaches at Simon Fraser University. He is a recipient of the Illinois Arts Council Media Arts Fellowship, and his writing has previously appeared in *The Comstock Review*, *Janus Head*, *Margie*, *The Reading Room*, *New Genre*, *Leonardo Music Journal*, and *Gulf Stream*.

A graduate of Concordia University's Creative Writing program, SCOTT INNISS is currently a master's candidate in English at the University of British Columbia. His poetry, for which he has twice received an Irving Layton Award, has appeared in *FRONT*, as part of the Parliamentary Poet Laureate's Poem of the Week website, and in a number of student journals and chapbooks.

ROMAN KOREC was born in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, and emigrated to the West Coast of Canada at the age of 11. He graduated from Simon Fraser University and later attended a film school that went bankrupt during his studies. There, he wrote and directed a fifteen-minute film, *allegory no.43*, and wrote the feature-length tragicomedy, *i are the Kanatan*. In his writing, he mines the layers of his (and the collective) Eastern European past and transposes them onto the social and political reality of the present day. The short story and poem published here—his debut—is part of a recently completed collection of modern-day

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M.W. MILLER is a writer living in Vancouver, a town near the Pacific coast, and is divided on an east/west axis by Main Street. M.W. Miller has previously disappeared into *The Georgia Straight* and *The Malahat Review*, among other publications.

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SINA QUEYRAS edited *Open Field: 30 Contemporary Canadian Poets* for Persea Books in 2005 and is the author of three collections of poetry including *Lemon Hound*, which won a Lambda Award and the Pat Lowther Award in 2006. "The Endless Path of the New" is from *Expressway* (Coach House 2009). She is working on a novel, *Autobiography of Childhood*, and a collection of short fiction titled *A Story With Severe Anxiety and Other Stories*. She can be found pawing and chewing the latest arts and writing news on Lemon Hound <<http://lemonhound.blogspot.com>>.

SHARLA SAVA is a writer and educator based in Vancouver. In 2006 she completed a doctorate in the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University. She has lectured, curated exhibitions, and published a variety of articles about art after modernism, discussing the works of Robert Filliou, Antonia Hirsch, Ray Johnson, Robyn Laba, and Jeff Wall, among others. She is currently on faculty in the Communications Department at Capilano University.

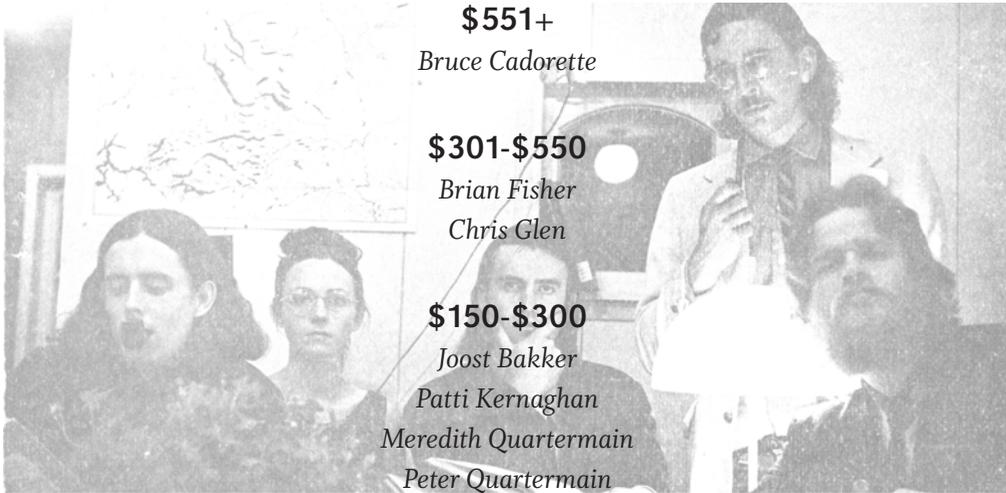
MARK WALLACE is the author of a number of books and chapbooks of poetry, fiction, and criticism. *Temporary Worker Rides A Subway* won the 2002 Gertrude Stein Poetry Award and was published by Green Integer Books. He is the author of a multi-genre work, *Haze*, and a novel, *Dead Carnival*. His critical articles and reviews have

appeared in numerous publications, and along with Steven Marks, he edited *Telling It Slant: Avant Garde Poetics of the 1990s* (University of Alabama Press), a collection of 26 essays by different writers. Most recently he has published a collection of tales, *Walking Dreams*. The poems appearing in *The Capilano Review* are forthcoming in his collection *Felonies of Illusion*.

LISSA WOLSAK practices energy-field therapy in Vancouver, B.C. She is a poet/essayist and the author of *The Garcia Family Co-Mercy*; *Pen Chants or nth or 12 spirit-like impermanences*; *A Defence of Being*; and *An Heuristic Prolusion*. Forthcoming are *Squeezed Light: Collected Works 1995–2008*, and the long-poems *THRALL*; *Of Beings Alone*; *p)light*; and *LIGHTSAIL*.

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