

# TCR

The Capilano Review



Margaret  
Christakos/poetry

Jason Wood/aerial  
photographs

Special section/  
Northern poets



the they. the who, the us in the disintegrated  
disintegration - nothing can be known; its own hopeless  
statement - the north / everywhere ( but not revealed -

— Barry McKinnon

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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. Address correspondence to *The Capilano Review*, 2055 Purcell Way, North Vancouver, British Columbia V7J 3H5. Subscribe online at [www.capcollege.bc.ca/thecapilanoreview](http://www.capcollege.bc.ca/thecapilanoreview) or through the CMPA at *magOmania*, [www.magomania.com](http://www.magomania.com).

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*The Capilano Review* gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance of Capilano College, the Canada Council for the Arts, The Department of Canadian Heritage Magazine Fund, its Friends and Benefactors, and volunteers.

*The Capilano Review* is a member of the Canadian Magazine Publishers Association and the BC Association of Magazine Publishers. *TCR* is listed with the Canadian Periodical Index, with the American Humanities Index, and available online through Info Globe. Microfilm editions and reprints are available from Bell & Howell Information and Learning, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Printed in Vancouver, BC by Advantage Graphix  
PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NUMBER 151335. RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO  
CIRCULATION DEPT TCR, 2055 PURCELL WAY, NORTH VANCOUVER, BC V7J 3H5.

ISSN 0315-3754  
(Published December 2004)



The Canada Council for the Arts	Le Conseil des Arts du Canada
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Series 2, No. 42

Winter 2004

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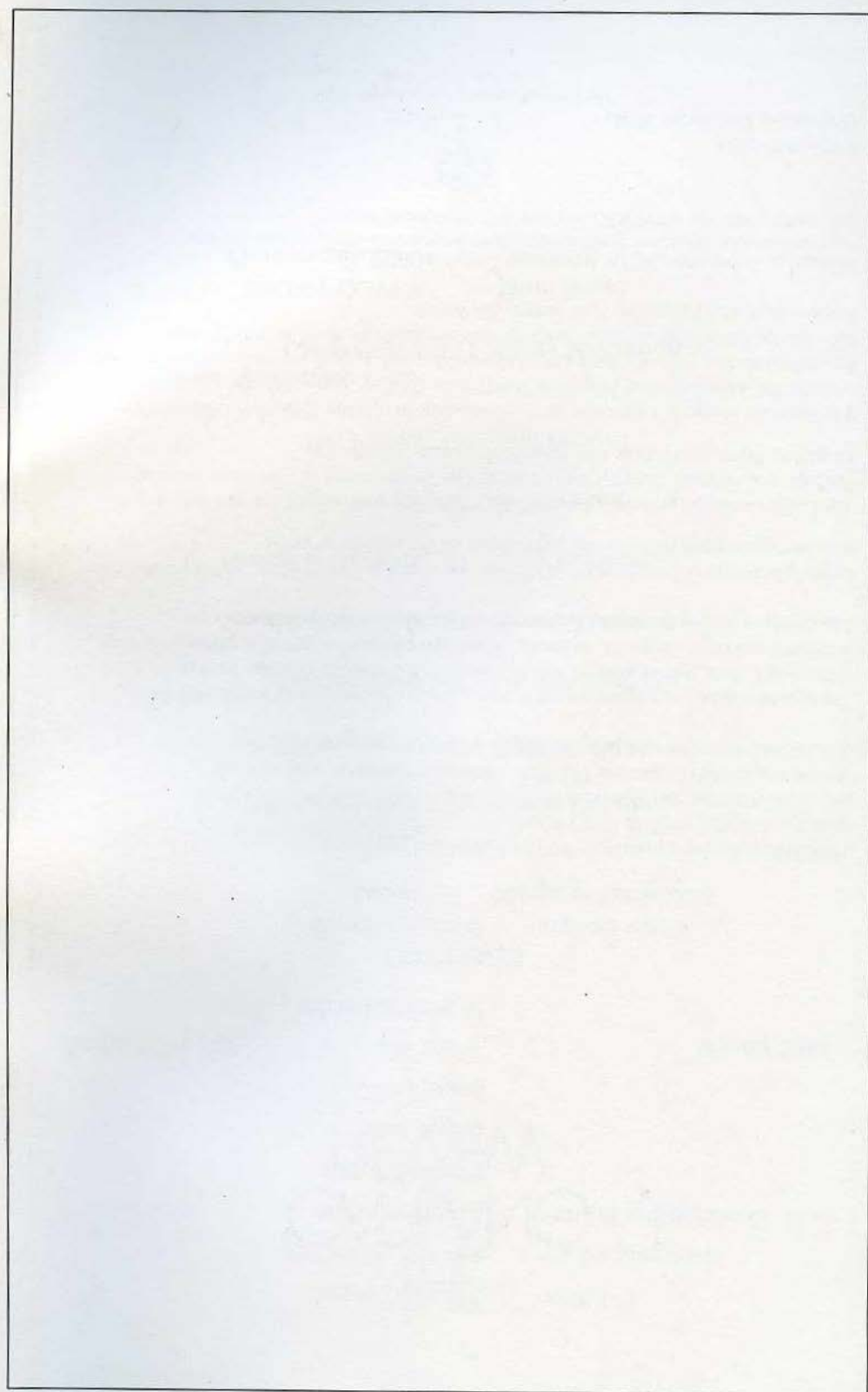
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## Margaret Christakos / LUCENT

For the sky was red and the subway shuttled from  
its tunnel and out one oblong window he saw it,

a solitary shimmering carmine-edged cloud afloat in an oozing rouge  
pond. Around him, people hunched into their bellies, pulling from

the public gaze all the intensity they had invited over  
the afternoon in their offices. He looked at his hands,

cracked and small-knuckled. He pretended to read the corporate posters  
while snatching glimpses of the upturns and sunken wounds of

people's tired eyelines, the glowing skin of one girl, the  
tragicomical beard of a flesh-cheeked college kid up too late

the night before. Who was his father and how must  
he love this large boy of his now? In his

own skin he felt both beautiful and completely unprepared. He  
hadn't brushed his hair, he hadn't washed. His last shower

was Tuesday — no, Sunday. Five days. But he didn't emit  
an odour, and felt protected by the pall of ordinariness

which kept others from looking at him too closely, scrutinizing  
his features. He'd always been interfered with in public space

and enjoyed slipping incognito whenever possible. Without his children on  
the subway, people couldn't ogle him easily. He became an

anonymous middle-aged male again, no longer a teenager or young  
man whose body was open property. He had a seal

around him like a second skin, and an impertinent gaze  
of his own to cast upon particular female passengers, the

ones who would have intimidated him in his youth. He  
tried to summon works of literature to his mind, political

ideas, mathematical quizzes, but could not distract himself from the  
radiant motion of sex wafting through his mind and body,

the lucidity of his appetite. How stupid he had become,  
reduced to its pressured urges. Here he was among other

adults his general age, adherents to the accepted culture of  
detachment, all clothed in hundreds of dollars of well-chosen coordinates,

flickering their eyes assiduously away from each other's essential physical  
self. A bunch of naked fuckers, all laced and bound

away from desire, as focused as eagles on the next  
task to achieve, groceries to buy, appointments to keep, disdain

to project. It was as if every one of them  
had dedicated her- or himself to the annihilation of the

public at large, that there should simply be no community  
of unfamiliar humans, that if one didn't know the person

sitting next on the seat that one should assume the  
living unit there to be as sentient as a car.

One looked at the shine of the bumper, the onomatopoeia  
of the license plate (all the labels read one by

one, an identity-assemblage), the value-peaking accessories. But wiped out the  
real flesh and blood; wiped them out until their sheen

of absence reflected the sudden sleek red sky like metal.  
In a streaming ray of light, dust filtered up off



the strangers' coats and hairdos. Several lawyer-types talked into the void of their cellphone handsets, which were merely small pads

pressed to their own ears, without any mouthpieces at all.

It was the perfect era for an insane talkaholic; even

he could have charaded holding two fingers up to the side of his head and started speaking about bathroom renovations,

or more likely, what time it was and how soon he would arrive at a certain destination, and what obstacles

he anticipated en route, and how the weather had progressed, and now how the train was in a tunnel again

causing the sound to fail and perhaps that he'd talk to his respondent in a couple of minutes because the

train was suctioning air quickly, back to normal compression, and he anticipated that he would arrive as he had projected

a couple of minutes before, and that his respondent should take it easy, that he loved her, and would see

said person in a few short moments aboveground. Several conversations of the sort ended as though a conductor had swooped

them to a skilled decrescendo, and the train pulled into the cavernous yellow space at the city's retail flashpoint. Suddenly

everyone rose to their feet, and looked directly upon the body and face of one person whom they had been

tacitly ignoring during the ride, with a look that was like high-gear seduction, then swung themselves by one snootily extended

forefinger and thumb around the grease-printed silver pole and exited. He watched them go, especially the radiant girl whose hair

at the back was tapered and wisped to look as though she'd just gotten out of bed as naturalistically endowed

and fresh to the world as a four-year-old, and the boy whose buttocks were visually halved by a thick black

belt charged with holding in place a massive pair of orange parachute pants. His hands were fidgeting with both earlobes,

realizing he'd left the house without his earrings, and disappointment snowed through him for a moment. What an impression he

might have made just then, with the earrings. One hand flitted to his breastbone, ah yes, there at least was

the blue medallion hanging from the slender silver chain. And his shoes were contemporary enough, black chunks of assertive yet

youthful shitkickingness, with a counterpointing touch of the gamine. Moments of self-centredness shocked him with their predictability. Almost 40 and

the narration did not cease, the measured silken voiceover. Millions of non-celebrities wishing they could star in a commercial, and

then the few thousand who'd actually had that opportunity, whose grandchildren could be told, yes, Grandpa used to be on

TV, he was so gorgeous that a bigwig producer picked him right out of a crowd one day, as he

left the subway. A real stand-out. The ad was for kitchen floor cleaner, groundbreakingly masculinist at that, about the multi-tasking

a man of the new age (well, here we mean the "zeroes," that's what we used to call them) could

achieve by cleaning his floor while doing calisthenics, with washing scours that attached to the bottom of his Contoured Men's

Nikes! He didn't want to leave the train. The children would be in school until 3:30, and it was barely

lunchtime. He'd imagined all the passengers to be ending their day, but it wasn't so; like him, they were working

at surviving the noon frenzy. From seven a.m., when the children woke him with shrieks of embattlement, the day's hours

had seemed to infinitely reproduce and expand themselves. And the red sky? It had been only coloured toxins in the

air penetrated by the bold eye-of-God sun. The unshaven boy probably had just gotten himself out of bed, and his

dishevelment was the product of oversleep, not the kind of exhaustion he might have endured as a university student bent

on originality. Up all night making paintings for an alcoholic has-been teacher whose idea of great composition was the dissection and redistribution

of every element of the male form, coloured in great swaths of pigment, textured, worked up, as though the surface

of a painting were a thought screen for a paranoid schizophrenic, projecting that, as a young post-virginal man, he might

relate to the skewered body of this art, the hyper-porousness of self one felt being fucked over and over from

every angle possible by an experienced fucker's imagination. Really, these were the sorts of conversations one could pay the university

in which to engage, and then in fatigued befuddlement at four in the morning he would wander to the freight

elevator at the rear of the all-night garage of a studio and see if the object of his obsessive interest



of the moment were there. There exactly she'd be, monkey-squatting  
in one corner of the elevator, arms straight and swaying

from between her knees, completely looped on acid, glazingly staring  
past him and drooling slightly, fulfilling his exalted idea of

a sexual Messiah. It was months later he actually slept  
with her, rolling on a mattress that had dropped like

an oxygen mask from the far wall in her little  
dorm room. She'd said with earnest and generous praise, now

you are the sort of boy who really should be  
on birth control, lamenting the condom she'd been smart enough

to stick on him. He wouldn't have known how to  
layer it on the moment, moving with the velocity of

a plunging plane to the sudden airbag, woozy with beer,  
wine and cheap ouzo, in addition to her homemade spaghetti

and garlic bread; the measures she'd taken rather presciently thoughtful  
the same way a kind uncle might plan a birthday

celebration. He'd left uninjured and rather head-floaty, as if the  
pieces of desire-narration to anyone else in the future would

never completely make sense, yet he would never care for  
that gap anywhere near so much as for the fact

of having been finally initiated, and decently. There, the obvious  
untranslatability of all desire. Whosoever should be picked out as

anyone's love object must be distinctive from the norm, for  
if the norm actually were stuffed with amorous charisma, we'd

all be in love with the same sap. Each of  
us lands on the illuminated bulb of difference, and try



explaining it to your best friend. It's no easier than making a convincing account for the senior relatives. There's no

real point in loving anyone beyond the claim to human kinship, but love is what is done, with frequency, and

many times even with plausibly novel flourishes. No one on the train had caused him to fall in love, however,

and he became sad at the thought that this new crew aboard proved the average toss of the public dice

produced a plateful of single-digit disappointments. There were really not that many attractive people, those for whom the norm was

warped to the specific angle he liked. One in a few hundred, if that. And each of the truly attractive

ones was only so due to her or his charming reminiscence of others he'd already admitted to loving in some

way in his past. They echoed something that had been defined earlier on. They were not new. They were walking

memories the way dog-owners air their dogs, looking sidelong in the opposite direction when the pet begins to shit in

the middle of someone's garden. Daydreaming like sailors, a cool wind tossing their hair playfully over their eyes, and then

a tug to bring the darling animal, really exactly like a winsome toddler, back into the fold of the sidewalk.

Then off they'd go. Sidewalks were spaces he always felt safe. He liked the way they were built of squares,

some stamped with the date of their pouring, their smoothness. The odd times when the children began chanting, as if

infected by faeries' slime, about stepping on the cracks and breaking his back, he winced and reassured himself that children

must hate their fathers a little, or be careful not to hate them too much, and that like every other secret this

hate would be immediately confessed to the only person they loved as much, their father! He had said it over

and over about his own father, wondering what the words meant, really, what did they mean? It was a riddle

against sex, evidently, that trespassing the asshole would lead to that back-breaker, murderous incubation, then delivery. They railed against their

own presence on the sidewalk as children born from their father's pain. Who cared; it was a skipping song, one

that got them off at a good clip, marched them flightily to school in a private competition that released him

from supervisory precision. As long as he could hear them singing they were fine, like in the tub when he'd

gone to fold the laundry and instructed the littler ones to keep their voices up. It was wrong not to

see them, but it was also wrong to sit lazily observing them splash bathwater on the tiled wall and get

nothing done. He couldn't stand, most of all, getting nothing done. There was one woman on the train now who

had forgotten to look away. Perhaps she was thinking of something or someone, and not aware her gaze gave the

appearance of activity. He blinked downward, shy of reciprocal encounters. Embarrassed to be seen without his children, for here he

seemed moorless, jobless, thought-free, indolent. Who was he to be riding about on the train? Where was he going? An

itinerary of destinations occurred to him, as if an urgent email had popped onto his screen, or a note was

passed to him by an underling at a tense moment during a pivotal meeting with a client. The gym, a

movie, Metro Hall, a doctor's appointment, a focus group where he would provide his opinion on a new mouthwash, a

date with a photographer. That was it, he was off to meet his photographer. He was going to have his

picture taken naked. This was not planned as a present for his wife, not at all. Instead, an image bound

to be compared with his own Polaroid-blue record of the body he'd had as a twenty-year old. He was supposed to

arrive by two, and, in order to suppress natural bloating, not to have eaten for 18 hours. The chocolate biscuits

he'd snuck making the older girl's lunch couldn't count, surely. And the bulge below his chestline never left now anyway,

not even when he starved for an important occasion, or at the change of seasons. If he caught a bus

immediately from the platform, he might make it to the glorified storage locker where Lucent worked, marked by a giant

lilac-coloured door, the kind that ripples upward like a magic withdrawal of insecurities, a bold reconciliation of desire and self-denial.

If he missed the bus and took a cab, he'd still get there but it would set him back an



extra twenty-odd bucks. Once you've committed to a thing, missing it altogether, and for such a flimsy excuse as poor

timing, seems the greater sin. He would peel one of the three twenties he tried to always keep in his

wallet; kiss it good-bye. You only live once. His clothes would fall away. Lucent would place a glass of wine

and wink when it was permissible for him to let it delve down his throat, stinging a little as he

swallowed, and then he'd resettle his lips into the slightly parted semi-smile he wanted to see himself make. Not one

of those boyish grins — secretary grins, he called them. Ladder climber grins. Mid-range family restaurant waiter grins. As if a

man is born to show his diffidence as a mere aspect of cosgrain masculinity. This portrait would be art-directed from

the inside out, and the evolution of his agency and beauty would be self-explanatory when he held the proof alongside

the cloying photo of his first engagement party, 1984. He deeply wanted there to be definable differences. At the age

of 21, he had planned to marry. He had asked, in fact, and been accepted, though not without drama. He and his

girlfriend had been in Mexico, at a roadside tortilla stand, and he'd choked on some cheese going down sideways. He'd

choked chiefly because he was about to confess how he didn't know if they were right together, but translated this

to its opposite, almost as if the words emerged, one after the next, to the fluttering butterfly identity of all



good emotion, out of the nasty, dank, boring chrysalis of  
rumination. Colours surrounded them, and after tracing out various ribbon

shades with her green eyes, she smiled broadly. On the  
next bite he choked, and she hoisted herself on the

weight of one forearm and jerked upward under his ribs.  
The wad of cheese flew out like a piece of

gum. He was unstuck; he was stuck in love and  
the idea of a wedding he couldn't even imagine, not

being the kind of man who'd made his Ken dolls  
marry, or throw baby showers, or any of it. On

the plane home, the cabin jolted and dropped, and a  
steward fell into his now-fiancée's lap, one flapping hand flat

on her jeaned crotch, followed by the remainder of his  
slender waist and hips and perfumed hair. How about *you*

marry her, he thought, you've got a career already, you've  
seen the world. Me, I've seen the prairies, the burping

clam burrows of Cape Cod, my dorm. I've fucked two  
women, what am I thinking? The steward scrambled upright and

opened and clenched his hand a few times, unsure of  
how to politely thank her for her help while erasing

the embarrassment of inappropriate implication. As if mere contact was  
a sign of will, choice, desire, destiny, aim, intent, consciousness.

All of the surrounding passengers caught it, and right there  
and then he was able to hold the event against

her, to glaze it with other such indiscretions, to build  
a case for the unsuitability of their plans, now that —.

But really, it was the male student he slept with  
who undid his marriage prospects. Call it a college fling,

a gender excursion, a re-orientation, the image of his naked  
body under and against another man's shimmered as though dipped

in love heroin. His senses came alive, he laughed instead  
of sobbed after sex, he felt lifted and reformed. Not

that he stopped caring for the girlfriend. It was just  
a verdict about the true and eventual package deal; he

wouldn't marry. She was surreally understanding, as if the idea  
of the engagement, like a cake in the oven for

half its baking time, hadn't really set, had congealed only  
about the edges. The moment of inflationary magic had not

occurred, where the trapped air puffs up inside globules of  
batter and the whole concept lifts to its highest potential,

then seals itself into that classically impressive form, until it  
cools and is eaten. So no one was really hurt,

he remembered, no one was defiled by his own flailing  
attempts to know himself. Even he was never bitter about

the change of heart. What was the rush for everyone  
to decide and measure and set down regulations for their

wants and whims and why did he not feel the  
same implicit obligation like a noose around his waist? The

rope tying him to the rest of poetry was a  
ribbon wound in concentric hulas, and he'd learned to swing

it loose and breeze-like. It kept winding its way around  
him as he aged, up through the teenaged years, through

the twenties, through the thirties, but he was not tethered.  
He was held, yes, but not stymied or leashed or

preregistered for a certain pattern of china or stemware or  
silver cutlery. He was in the whirl of it. His

eventual wife did not expect much from their wedding day  
beyond a manifesto of enduring mutual self-revelation; and he returned

this promise, and they kissed in front of everyone who  
meant anything to them (except for Elevator-girl) and went nowhere

for anything like a honeymoon, but settled down to have  
their first child, a daughter who taught him to stay

up most of the night while still staying up all  
of the day. He could tell his wife was troubled

by her deep identification with the girl, and he cajoled  
her into viewing it as a natural confusion, more to

pacify his own shortage of such feelings. There she was,  
a small squirming, sometimes-purple-faced human who could suck milk right

out of his wife's body and settle. He wished he  
had the capacity to render another person subliminally, subcutaneously, full.

That the wife's body was slowly trickling down to become  
the pillowy flesh of their baby . . . it was almost unbearable

to think of. He awoke shuddering some days, despairing for  
the old days in the studio. Almost like a commercial

break where the TV volume suddenly rises, the train squealed  
into the next station. He'd missed his stop for Lucent,

and now that the choice was upon him, he felt  
uninclined to spend even ten bucks on a cab anywhere,



and instead transferred out of the burgundy-upholstered car onto the platform. His knees ached a little against the shift

of activity. The kilt had been a poor choice, for the wind still bit at the back of his thighs,

pushing quills of cold up his spine and out along the backs of his arms. His elbows were pulsing and

he squeezed them against his sides. He would walk out of the station and slip off down along the ravine,

stumbling a little on the thick rubber heels that seemed to swell the proper size of his feet, almost like

snow shoes for the tar sands. Got his balance by calling up the physical memory of navigating a balance beam,

when a youngster in junior gymnastics, of imagining a thread dropping from the middle of his brain through the gall

bladder and due south through the perineum's span, then dangling auspiciously between the stockinged moving calves. Give this thread a

pull and up his arms and legs would pike like a startled cartoon character! He laughed to himself, smelling fresh

new leaf growth, the fiddleheads unfurling to their feathery tips. A mulch of fallen leaves and cedar twigs held early

morning rain and a squelch burped up with each step. He watched his thighs move underneath him, like a metronome

carrying his torso into music. Ahead the river unspindled. A few joggers gusted past, their sweaty smell hanging behind them

in the air, attaching to his hair and cheeks. He instinctively stopped inhaling. He didn't admire the smell of strangers,



and felt himself to be unduly porous in a crowd,  
as if the pall of people extended past their skins

and clothes and could adhere untidily to his own psyche,  
tainting him somehow. He liked to remain separate. Soon the

woods felt quiet, and he stopped expecting another runner to  
burst in on his solitude. From a young age he'd

craved this kind of moment, the sense of absolute privacy  
in a natural setting, where he could simply breathe, amuse

himself with the beginnings of games and songs, where he  
could speak out loud to imagined friends, conduct relationships of

import and magnitude, discuss why things must be as they  
were, where he could use his pidgin French as if

a high-ranking diplomat sorting through the most privileged of receiving  
lines. He hated the actual presence of others, but loved

to imagine himself surrounded, hosting them all. He would think  
of himself as a ball-gowned princess, even. Or a thug,

running drugs and hoisting women onto beds in dank motels.  
One image would move and float into another. Alone in

the woods he felt perhaps more comfortable and accompanied than  
at any other time, regardless of the lover or friend

or relative he might have been with. Perhaps now closest  
was his sense of peace when reading to his children,

or watching them play their own games of magical intervention.  
His wife had admitted being jealous a few days before:

Why can't you relax with me? Why must you leap  
up from the couch like that, when I've only been

leaning against you watching a silly cop show? You spend  
an hour with the children putting them off to sleep!

What is it you're trying to get away from? He  
had blanched and lied, and she'd said, I can see

right through you, don't you realize? You're the worst liar!  
He'd shaken his shoulders as if his hands were tied

and he needed to rid himself of a coat, or  
perhaps it was as if he were trying to shimmy

like Houdini out of a straitjacket, the emergent thought like  
a new raw shape of himself into the room, until

there it was, the thought that he preferred being alone,  
or with the kids, and what was so wrong or

unnatural about that? You don't see anything lacking? His wife  
had turned to him with reddened cheeks and a half-open

mouth, and exhaled as if simply frustrated past the point  
of speech. He countered, Would you rather I didn't love

the kids as much? She began to nod her head  
and press her lips into a grimace, There's just nowhere

to go with this conversation, I'm going to the basement.  
What for, at this hour? To do some of my

own work, and see how you like being abandoned at  
the best part of the evening, when we could actually

talk or — Or what? Is it that you want to  
make love — Oh sure, make it all so serious, I

was talking about TV and you turn it into sex,  
every time. With that line, they'd burst apart, into opposite orbits,

and pretty soon, each would breathe more easily, sensing the plenitude of oxygen in each annex room. His chest would

puff up as though he were a duck about to fling itself up into the sky, away from the shrill

surface of the river, its triangular feet inelegantly tucking back and up into underfeathers, the wings stretching to either side

and lifting, lifting him like a football toward the clouds. So what if the argument had been required to lift

off; each felt freer in their own space, he felt sure the wife was happier there with some time to

herself after her long day at the office, a few moments to putter about and put things in their place

and sense the calm of the house now that the children were safe and away and wouldn't be up again

for seven or eight hours. Ah, that time whole like a horizon, and even the ducks flapping far left above

the subway station and far right above the bulldozer pulling up loads of garbage to expand the ravine did not

intercept any of the whooshing liberty of this moment for him. The quiet and rapid ascent. As he crested a

breeze he thought about how the subway ride was frightfully similar, how the solitude possible among other riders was perhaps

the next best thing to climbing to the centre-point of a bridge and staring beyond the trestle at the ground

below, the way trees looked like cabbages, how houses dotting the landscape shone like baseball plates for an athletic hawk.



What did flying require, really, except the expectation of a conscious touchdown? He turned his eyes from the distant ravine,

covered his ears against the gulls calling him to join them in their frenzied anxious pack-behaviour; he made his way

to the crosswalk at the east end of the bridge and buttoned his collar as he walked scrupulously between white

lines leading to the far side, to the shops, to a drug store. He would buy a box of condoms

now and slip them into his knapsack, then head south to the rolling hills of the park. Surely there'd be

someone to fuck today. His scrotum ached for the right press of an unknown human receptacle, craved the complicated sensory

mesh of entering and being entered, of flying and not landing, of seeing from a high point what a ceiling

accurately looked like close-up. No doubt someone would open to him. He would instruct his own prudery to take itself

for a walk down the path while he unmasked and decorated his best features. The latex smell had a way

of jamming itself in his nose and he winced, oh, to have just the powdery flesh again in the mouth

without all the fear, all the tremulous and preparatory proxy. But forget it! A thin envelope keeping him from the

world was consonant with all his habitual preferences, he wouldn't fight it, especially if it meant keeping his family safe

from the aspects of privacy that were not private but shared privately. His wife had her own world, he was

sure, the realm of the office where colleagues invited her to lunch and delivered birthday greetings, with more exuberance than

he and the children had mustered in their parallel stirrings toward the school day, while foraging under the couches for

missing library books, in locating the hair brush and matching rainboot and slipping the nutritious lunch into each backpack. Their

cards were heartfelt and graphically splendid, yes, and his pancakes were flawlessly studded with organic berries, their juice running navy

with heated sugar, and each had kissed her specifically on her birthday forehead as if she were the daughter among

a quartet of adoring caregivers, and she had smiled forcelessly and looked satisfied. Then left for the office, and he

with the children across the several blocks to school, with the eldest sparkling powerfully at her ability to give pleasure

in the world and the younger ones humming and skipping. Hardest about this preference for solitude was his unsurpassed desire

to give to others, without the usual conversation about decent reciprocity. He'd rather, on virtually every occasion, simply give and

give and give. He became annoyed at how he was expected to slide to the spectrum's opposite end and receive

and be grateful and charming, instead of frantically but invisibly exhausted at the strategic triumph of his provisions. He liked

best the guest who knew to say thank you, and thank you again, who skipped the "What can I do

to pitch in?" with full recognition that this one, odd, parenthetical occasion required only surrender and sensuous presence. That on

almost every other occasion it would be exactly the reverse,  
that they would be the planner and executor of every

detail of service and innovation. His wife had pulled him  
aside, though, the previous year, to suggest he at least

feign interest in help from the other husbands, for they  
were becoming offended and a little hurt, and this too

was part of a good host's responsibility, to allow the  
most minor of assistance to be cast as gold-circle kindness.

Perhaps I should pin up names on a donor wall!,  
he'd snapped, and she'd hushed, No, everything's lovely, we all

appreciate you so much, do you think it's time to  
bring in the cake? The sulphur of doused candles stung

his eyes; there was no place to look except the  
crotch of the man approaching from calm's green foyer. He

opened his mouth and torqued his neck as though hanging  
from a bungee cord. Clouds gathered like photographers, crackling and

nudging themselves into position. There was a slippage of the  
man's thumb against the head of his cock, the fleet

bagging of the member, then the hot tube of the  
foreign mouth suckling him in and out, drinking him to

the surface of himself.





## Tamas Dobozy / SAD PRESENTIMENTS OF WHAT MUST COME TO PASS

We had, for a period far exceeding our original schedule, been studying war. It's not that we were scared of the subject, but that it was so difficult to zero in on that by the fifth year we were holding longer and longer recesses between sessions, scared of what we might do to one another if we were again locked up in the debating chambers.

It was during this time that I met Heinrich Ganz, a scholar so totally composed of rumour he seemed to have spent his entire life living in advance of himself — entering rooms to find he'd already been there; rushing along to catch up to his own story; nodding when he was first introduced as if he knew, *just knew*, that this would be the moment when he seemed most familiar, and that after this he would grow weirder and weirder, until the day you turned and found yourself confronting a stranger.

Apparently, he had been born to German parents in Sarajevo, where he was raised and educated, and where, in the early- to mid-1990s, he had endured starvation, siege, and the death of everything he held dear as the snipers, politicians, and rockets transformed his city into a cemetery; and afterwards, unable to bear the memories, he had emigrated to America and resumed work as a professor specializing in the history of Nazi Germany (which was also my area). What I knew for sure was this: Ganz was tall and thin and wore wire-frame spectacles and spoke softly, and in the preceding years had taken a seat on as many subcommittees as would have him, where he gained the reputation of being "intelligent to the point of paralysis" — a statement that could as easily have applied to the committee as a whole, given that our reluctance to move ahead was in direct proportion to the quality of minds working on the problem.

Of course, I was to learn, by the time the committee dissolved (due to the efforts of people such as myself), that the reason I hadn't heard of Ganz prior to Ottawa — hadn't run into him at conferences

or seen his name in print — was not because he was exclusive to the classrooms of the elite college he'd invented, but because he was a fraud.

In that last quarter of the fourth year, Ganz and I were called in to the office of the Committee Chair, who at that time was professor Nils VanderHagen, and entrusted with delivering something of use — *anything at all* (by that point nobody could afford to be picky) — on the Nazis, with Ganz to tackle the question from the angle of the party and its members, and me to look at it from “the ground up” — which is to say from the point of view of the *victims*. VanderHagen said we should not be trying to reproduce some binary mode of investigation — the powerful versus the powerless, the oppressor versus the oppressed — but rather to proceed “dialectically,” to meet and reconcile our findings — to attempt, in his words, “a synthesis.”

Naturally, I could not have known then, looking at VanderHagen, either about the influence he would exert over the committee, or about his relationship with Ganz, though in hindsight the history is easy enough: VanderHagen was to prove the longest-lasting of committee chairs, but only in *the sum* of his various terms, since — what with the infighting, backstabbing, and secret alliances — the politics of the committee had become positively *Italian*, with chairs lasting no longer than a week, or, at best, two months, before being forced to resign (often to be re-appointed at the very next vote). VanderHagen, of course, was more successful than most because he never took anything personally, and was always prepared to court whatever faction was fashionable at the time, and accept all criticism with a nod and a smile so that everyone left his office with the warm glow of having *taught him* something — which was exactly what he counted on to get him votes the next time around, knowing as he did that most scholars prefer a sympathetic simpleton to a pig-headed visionary; and thus, flattering everyone's vanity, he served a record fourteen terms, even managing — despite enormous public outcry — to chair the “Conclusions Board” set up in the seventh year to dismantle the committee and churn out a number of “media packages,” whose vague language transformed our work from what it



had *really* been — six years of futility at taxpayers' expense — into what it had *never* been — “a body of knowledge that will influence foreign policy for many years to come.”

Looking back, VanderHagen's tactics seem transparent; but during the period I am speaking of I saw in him only an ineffectual man dissolving around the middle in a soft, middle-age spread, whose intrigues were only hinted at by the *stilted* quality of his dialogue with Ganz — as if the two men had written their lines in advance (and not, as most scripts of that kind are meant to do, in order to *persuade* anyone, but rather to increase our uncertainty and indecision).

Ganz objected to VanderHagen's assignment; he started by saying we were not the right people to undertake this study, given our personalities (I wasn't sure where he'd gotten his information on me, but I objected to this); then said there should be some third party put in charge of synthesizing our findings (not to confuse the issue, he assured me, but to enable greater objectivity); then rejected dialectics entirely, calling it an “outmoded form” that worked “adequately for the nineteenth century,” but was too implicated in those aspects of the past — antithesis, opposition — to do anything but reproduce the kind of “conflict mentality” we were supposed to be seeking alternatives to. VanderHagen smiled, saying these were exactly the observations and objections he'd expected from scholars of our calibre, and that we should proceed along our assignment keeping these very things in mind.

And so Ganz immersed himself in studying the life of the Nazi party, spending the better part of those early months studying the regalia, ideology, personalities, and rites of the Nazis, while I, by contrast, followed up on the consequences of Hitler's rule, so that in that time I did nothing but peruse long lists and images and reports from the various fronts of World War II, the death camps, and final days in the bunker (including the suicide and immolation that was the regime's final exacting logic).

At the end of this “preliminary research phase,” Ganz and I began getting together to attempt the synthesis VanderHagen had



requested. I remember how it would go every morning: we would enter the hotel lobby at roughly the same time, both of us armed with folders full of papers, nodding a greeting over the complimentary breakfast service, selecting rolls and jams, grabbing napkins and cutlery, and then moving into the lobby and sitting down to begin our deliberations. We were only a week into it — both of us surrounded by stacks of books and files, sipping on coffees and staring hopelessly at the overwhelming mass of evidence — when Ganz got up, came over to the couch I was sitting on, sat beside me, and laid a hand as light as flyleaf on my forearm, asking: “Who is more correct: the one who studies evil from the perspective of the perpetrator, or the one who studies it from that of the survivor?” — so that by dusk we were bogged down in the problem that would prevent us — as it had every other sub-committee — from completing our mission.

Whenever I tried to get off the subject of this “correctness” (hoping that maybe we could just forget about it, pretend it didn’t exist, and thereby get the job done), Ganz would come around to the same point: “If you study this history from the point of view of Hitler and his thugs aren’t you in some way justifying the centrality of the Nazis? Remember, *they thought of themselves as central to history* — so we’d just be proving them right. At the same time, if you study it from the point of view of the people whom the Nazis murdered aren’t you in some way reducing those people to ‘victims?’, to objects defined exclusively in light of the effects of Nazism? I know you don’t agree with me, Henry, but I think it important that the committee understand the full implications of what you and I are doing,” he tapped on his temple with an index finger, “which, of course, is going to take some time.”

Shortly after this we began our daily walks along the Ottawa Canal, our white breath ascending the winter air — with me trying to figure out a way to overcome Ganz’s objections and complete our task, and him looking for a way to prolong our stalemate, not because he wanted to antagonize me (as I had thought then), *but to ensure a lasting peace* (a tactic that would only come clear to me much later) — two men standing there day after day, lost in thought above a frozen river, watching what clouds had come to pass.

Everyone had assumed it would be different. Back in 1997, when most of us received the letter from the Liberal government inviting us to participate in the committee (at full salary plus “distance and stress augmentation rates”), most of us were thrilled: eager to be airlifted out of the drudgery of teaching and marking, and to be given an entire floor in the recently built “Adjunct Information Centre” beside the Houses of Parliament, along with access to any and all data we required. It was a chance to do what we had dreamed of doing since graduate school. So we came winging into Ottawa with our robes and diplomas flapping, eager to arrive at answers and see our names attached to the most important (and well-funded) scholarly congress in the history of the country.

But within a few days we were already in trouble. I can’t remember which battle they were debating, but it had taken place somewhere in the Mediterranean prior to the advent of Hellenic culture. They had the evidence they needed: various stone tablets that described the conflict, and the reasons it had taken place, as well as lists of purported casualties; and had even flown in a world authority on the military history of antiquity to answer questions about troop sizes, weaponry, and movement in relation to terrain.

We watched in expectation as they brought their findings into the debating chambers, watched as staff carried in box after box of files, books, articles, and physical evidence, stacking them against the wall behind the semi-circular table where the sub-committee on “antique warfare” would hopefully inaugurate the first in a series of substantial policy recommendations.

And, with that, we were plunged into the fiasco — watching as the members of the sub-committee began interrupting and contradicting one another, saying that if they had agreed upon the present report, then why the hell was Colleague X saying that he had “issues” with the conclusion, and Colleague Y bringing in information they’d already agreed was irrelevant? The bickering went on for two hours before we began to shift in our seats, and the sub-committee, noticing our discomfort, stopped, looked at one another, and agreed to investigate the matter further and deliver conclusions very soon (we never heard from them again). Ganz, as far as I knew, was still on that committee at the time of our



collaboration on the Nazis, though he never spoke of it — never indicated that they might be arriving at, or *close to arriving at*, some kind of agreement.

And it was the same with every sub-committee since.

Over the course of the committee's six year term, it became usual to see scholars come and go, the old guard disappearing or dropping off, new members joining, growing disillusioned, also leaving. At the same time, some members celebrated their cynicism, not only abandoning all work for the committee but even all *pretense* of working, to sit around all day in the archives pursuing personal interests, or simply living it up on the wage-augmentation program, sampling the finest of Ottawa's many restaurants, bars, and hotels. There were some who'd even go so far as to say they hoped we "never resolved" the issue, because this lifestyle was "as good as it [got]," and they hoped to "milk it" for as long as the government "had their heads up their asses."

I don't know who among us suggested that we avoid getting bogged down with resolving one historical period and just move on in the hopes that resolving a later one might help us go back and finish up those we couldn't deal with the first time around, but it was a bad idea, since this only led to further irresolution, which only further snowballed into a crushing fatalism. We might, in the end, have been better off sticking to one era until we'd reached a consensus, and only *then* moving on. At the time I am speaking of, the press had just begun to murmur about "committee deadlock" and what would happen to the project if the Liberals lost the next election — so that most of us were experiencing a creeping anxiety that had yet to blossom into the full-on panic and flight of the last two years, but which, nevertheless, was strong enough to send us out for frequent brandies at the "Boiler Room" — a brassy fern bar down the street from the Adjunct Information Center — or Prime Rib at McMurtry's.

Ganz and I would walk for hours along the canal, staring across at Hull, Quebec, and commenting on the Museum of Man, and on the drunken, violent orgies that took place there every weekend, when



drinkers would leave the bars in Ottawa, which closed early, and head across the bridges, where the bars closed late, and where the booze flowed like water from burst hydrants.

"Many are thinking of quitting," said Ganz one day, reaching across and touching my elbow as we stood by the wrought iron fence beside the Parliament, staring at a bunch of tiny houses built to shelter the city's stray cat population. "Many are thinking of resigning before this whole thing explodes."

I noticed that he seemed angry, and on the walk would continually drift away from me whenever I paused beside a store window, or lifted my trenchcoat to protect my face from the wind while I lit a cigarette. I'd look back to where Ganz had been standing and he would be already far ahead, moving in whatever direction the streets permitted. I'd yell to him but it was as if he didn't hear, and just kept marching along, not altering his pace a bit, so that I'd have to run after him, often abandoning my cigarette, which meant that in lighting a new one we'd repeat the same pantomime all over again.

"What would they have us do," he said, "fix on some definite program?"

"Well, we're not getting anywhere *this way*," I said, catching my breath, thankful that the glowing hand had stopped him from crossing the street, and that we were finally addressing what I thought was our problem — his and mine — as well as the committee's.

"I had been hoping for better than this," he said. "Weren't you?"

"If we could just stop all this second-guessing," I replied.

Ganz looked at me oddly then, not with anger, exactly, but with the expression of someone who has just realized that the person he'd been confiding in these last several months has not at all picked up on what he'd been saying; as if during that time he had expected his secrets to have become known to me, not explicitly, but through the nuances of tone and gesture, and hearing what I'd just said had brought him face to face with their incommunicability, his shoulders slumping as he again took on — alone — the full weight of this hidden knowledge.

That night, having gotten off the phone with my wife, and having poured myself a Scotch from the complimentary bar, and having walked out in my bathrobe onto the balcony of my suite to watch the falling snow drift over the canal, I reflected on the things that were preventing the committee from achieving its mandate, and decided that even working alone I would have been farther ahead of where we were now (nowhere). I sipped my whisky, then quickly gulped some. Like most of the other scholars, I'd had high hopes, and had come eagerly, sensing for the first time in my career that maybe here was a chance to do something other than "expand my field," or "add to the existing stock of knowledge on twentieth-century warfare": here was an opportunity to have an *actual effect*. And while I had been disappointed in my hopes for the committee, I discovered that night that I had yet to be disappointed in my hopes to contribute something to the cause of peace.

During the phone call, my wife had stayed quiet on the other end, not wanting to influence my decision, though this silence betrayed an expectation, her slow breathing like that of someone so close to what they've been hoping for — to what they're *desperate* to see happen — that she has to fight off sucking in a ton of air and screaming with all the force of her lungs — "Yes! Finally! Stop wasting time and get your ass home!" — for fear that her outburst will scare off the very thing she's wanting. Instead, my wife had said, "It's a good thing to think about, given how you've been describing the committee lately."

My call to her had been only partly influenced by the walk with Ganz earlier that day, for what had really intensified my disgust, and prompted the call, was instead the letter I found in my mailbox upon returning — signed by VanderHagen *and* Ganz — asking me to volunteer for "The Sub-Committee on Sub-Committees, mandated to regulate and police and prevent the fracturing of current sub-committees into yet further sub-committees . . . a disciplinary body of autonomous configuration which will work in freedom from established procedures pertaining to the rest of the committee in order to restore a sense of adherence and loyalty to the committee process as a whole."



What was Ganz doing, co-authoring this document? It seemed so totally at odds with his outburst earlier that evening — his despair at keeping the committee together (or that, at least, was what I *thought* he'd been saying). He must have known — unless he was naive beyond belief — that this letter would only further alienate people such as myself, already fed up with the bureaucracy stifling the committee, and give more fuel to those who were so bored by the easy life we lived that no opportunity for posturing, for creating trouble where none existed, went unexploited. It was as if the scholarly life was of so little significance — with its forgiving schedules, paid “research terms,” funded travel, and university club buffets — that even *pretending* it was important (even while you, and everyone else, knew you were pretending) was preferable to facing the truth. The letter was exactly the opportunity they were waiting for — a chance to show the world how indignant they could be — all to the effect of frustrating the committee even further.

And so I stood on the balcony and weighed my rage against the fear that resigning from the committee might harm my career, a conflict that lasted the half hour it took me — my wife's breath echoing in my ears — to realize that for four years I had been at war with my hope — which is to say at war with myself — and that, along the way, and unnoticed until now, this war had produced casualties: namely, my family — a woman and three boys who had seen their husband and father a total of three months in all that time, and whose sacrifice had been wasted on a project doomed from the start.

The next morning, I met Ganz in the lobby of the hotel, and there had never been a morning where the contrast between us was greater: me with my haggard, sleepless face, in rumpled clothes, the edges of papers sticking out of the cracks of my suitcase; Ganz with his sharply pressed pants, spotless white collar, sipping his coffee and looking through a folder that seemed much thinner than yesterday, as if he'd spent the night sifting through his research and paring it to the essentials (I counted maybe three pages, total, stapled to the top of the folder). “Looking a bit beleaguered there, Henry,” he said, smiling far too cheerfully.



"You're not," I replied, heading over to the tea caddy and tossing some breakfast on a plate and coming back to sit across from him, noting his quizzical glance at my briefcase. "I was thinking about our walk yesterday," I said. He looked at me as if yesterday had never happened. "C'mon," I said, "all that stuff you said in front of the cat houses?" I picked up my slice of buttered raisin toast and looked across the lobby, where people bustled between the staircase, the front doors, and the concierge desk. "I'm quitting." His eyes opened, and he closed the folder. "I'm going home."

"But why?"

I opened my mouth in preparation to speak, and then stopped and looked at him. He was staring at me with such sadness I couldn't believe it was the same Ganz who'd greeted me a few seconds ago. And he must have seen something on my own face, a look of surprise or wariness, because in a second his own features relaxed and he leaned back in his chair, putting one leg over the other, and then shrugged, as if he had no idea what my problem could be and couldn't care less. In response, I opened my briefcase and brought out the letter on the "Sub-Committee on Sub-Committees" and threw it down in front of him. "Did you help write this?" He nodded slowly and carefully. "Why? I mean really," I looked at the raisin toast in my hand and threw it on my plate. "You know the effect it's going to have? All that stuff you said yesterday. . . ?"

And then something entirely new came over Ganz, I don't know what, but a kind of helplessness that suggested not so much defeat as siege, the gaze of someone who has endured winters of sleeplessness and starvation, someone who no longer flinches as the shells burst against the upper floors of the building he's huddled in. "Can I trust you?" he asked, then leaned in and continued without my assent, "I've been working with VanderHagen since his third term. We were behind the 'Nominalization Project.'"

I sank back into the lobby chair, and made a weak grab at my raisin toast, my hand not rising more than four inches off my knee before falling back. The "Nominalization Project" had rocked the committee during its second year, though luckily the scandal had been confined to the Adjunct Information Center, and had only become apparent to about half the committee, many of whom joined

together in a three-day clean-up operation — involving the deletion of several hundreds of emails, the shredding of numerous documents, the complete reformatting of certain hard drives — in order to prevent the disheartening news from reaching the rest (and, most importantly, the public). We never really determined who had set the Nominalization Project in motion, but the idea (gathered from several fragments of anonymous emails and letters) had been to assemble an “inner elite,” a small group of hardworking and tightly-knit scholars who would determine the course the committee would take, and keep their activities hidden from the remaining members, who would be farmed out on bogus research activities or special sessions (“Nominal Sub-Committees”) where they could bicker their hearts out without impeding the actual work being carried out under their noses, all with the intention of speeding up the committee’s work so that we could achieve our mandate that much faster. Luckily, someone (and this agent was still unknown) had leaked the news, allowing us to stop the plan before it was implemented.

“You did that?” I said. Ganz nodded, lifting his eyebrows at me as if he expected sympathy. “But why?” I asked. “You know how much time was wasted on us restoring the protocols?” He bit his lip and peered down into his coffee cup, as if he’d just made a huge mistake and was catching hell for it. “Who else was involved?” I shouted. Ganz shrugged. “You know how long it took us to clean up that mess?”

I stared hard at Ganz, noticing that his arrogance was all caved in, as if in confessing to me with such pride he had expected me to be proud as well, perhaps even to have congratulated him, as if his designs were so obvious to scholars of our intelligence that he shouldn’t have had to spell them out. But, instead (and this is only apparent in hindsight), he was disappointed, having realized his mistake in thinking I could make this leap of faith, and that it was too late now to explain the real purpose of his manoeuvres without making any such explanation look woefully ad hoc. So he stumbled over his words: “You were supposed to discover it . . . to create a peace!”



"By stripping ninety percent of the committee of their rights?" I yelled. "By creating some kind of shadow government? By bogging us down in months and months of wasteful clean up?" I stood over him.

He put his hands out to either side and looked up at me in a pose I had not seen before (and have seen only one more time since), the effort of a man who has not achieved the martyrdom he's been aiming at, who knows that his defeat will not bring to light the sacrifice he's made, nor advance the cause he's fighting for, but who needs to make the effort anyway — since anything else will only bury his cause under another layer. "You're right," he said, without conviction, and when I stepped away, my briefcase banging against my thighs like an iron apron, and turned back, I saw that he was holding that pose, staring at where I'd stood as if I were still there, above him — as if there were still time to say what he should have said before our talk turned into a disagreement.

I went from the hotel to my office and typed up my resignation, and from there walked down the long steps to the Office of the Secretariat, where I selected an envelope from the wall shelf, slid the resignation in, and addressed it to Nils VanderHagen.

I bought a train ticket next, and spent the evening in a restaurant off the committee circuit, then browsed for a while in book and music stores, and afterwards went back to my room to pack.

It was seven o'clock, two hours short of my departure, when Ganz showed up at the door; and though I had been expecting him I found I still wasn't prepared, so that when he entered I stood in the middle of the floor with no idea what to do: throw him out or thank him for having made my decision so easy.

He looked terrible: his tie limp and loose around his neck like a wrung-out snake; his jacket rumpled, with the wrong buttons in the wrong holes; his shoes covered in mud and grass; and a bottle of cognac sticking out of the pocket of his overcoat, which was covered in leaves and twigs as if he'd just risen from a forest floor. "I heard." These were his first words. I nodded. "You misunderstood me," he said, gesturing behind himself. "We were not talking the way we should have been," he said. Then he gave his head a shake, as if to confirm that language was our problem, as if everything could have



been settled if we'd just use different sounds, as if the problem was the ugliness of English pronunciation. "Listen," he said, stepping close to me (I forced myself to stand my ground), "listen to this." And he bent in close to my face and stopped, still at a loss, and then, in a moment too quick to push him away, he put his arms around me and pressed the side of his head to my chest, so that the two of us were frozen in imitation of mother and child, an image marred only by the fact that my arms were hanging limply at my sides, as if I was less shocked by his sudden action (though I was) than caught between emotions, neither prepared to embrace nor deny him (which was exactly where Ganz wanted me: at the edge of something that was both restraint and violence — a moment of contradiction). We stayed like that until the emotional conflict — and the stasis it implied — terrified me into pushing him away. "Get out of here!" I said, fighting my panic.

"I apologize," he said. "It's important that you stay." His words were odd, as if he no longer believed what he was saying, or as if my pushing him had jarred something in his brain, a small door that opened on a view of the future he had no choice but to face, a future that was, despite all his best efforts, as indelibly part of him as the past.

And then, as he took a step towards me, I stepped into him as well, and hit him with my fist, as hard as I could, in the face. The impact rocked him back on his heels, and he collapsed to the floor, right onto his back, lying there with his eyes open and staring at the ceiling, his nose flattened at an odd angle against his left cheek. The force of my swing had carried me forward, so that I was slightly bent over his body. Though instead of pulling myself up I stayed crooked and slowly brought up my hand, still closed in a fist, and saw that everything I had done for the committee, all the lip service I had paid peace, was a sham, and turning back towards Ganz saw that he was already squatting, trying hard to get to his feet, the blood running from his nose settling in the line set by his lips.

He looked at me, stricken, and backed out the door, his face contorted as though he were less interested in revealing *his* emotions than on forecasting how *I* would look — years later — having arrived to the knowledge Ganz spent all that time trying to deny.

I was so shaken by that episode I found myself checking every corridor, scanning the insides of elevators, looking over my shoulder on the street — so worried that Ganz was following me — ready to step out from around a corner or doorway and trap me in another embrace — that I almost missed my train. It was only at the station that I realized I was not really running from Ganz, but from what I might do to him if he caught up to me. In other words, I was running from myself, and it was only with some effort that I managed to get to the bathroom and wash my face before it betrayed any more of what I felt.

During the ride home to Toronto — past miles of flat farmland, and Lake Ontario, and the hundreds of beech and maple trees still showing the splintering harm of the ice storm of a few years ago — I pored over my scuffed knuckles, reflecting on the fact that Ganz had twice gone out of his way to make me quit, and yet, that morning, it had seemed that he'd only wanted me to stay. On the letter to VanderHagen I had listed my reasons for resigning as "personal," but that was not really true, since my fears were all professional in nature: on one hand I worried about what staying with the committee, and being associated with its almost certain failure, would do for my reputation; and, on the other, about what quitting would say about my character. I was frightened to stay, frightened to leave.

And even after I'd returned home and thrown my arms around my wife, and hugged each of my three sons in turn, I was still — there is no right word — *haunted*, by both Ganz and myself, and that scene in the hotel room. I realize I must have been in shock, still feeling violated by the turbulence of that emotion, and that this feeling probably led to what happened next: my investigations into Ganz's life, and the start of my attacks on the committee, in the company of those other scholars and politicians and reporters who also saw it for the waste of time and money it was.

Half a year went by, however, before any of that happened. During this time I was occupied with reintegrating myself with a faculty I had been absent from for four years — during which a whole term of headship had come and gone, along with a departmental review, a



number of retirements, and the recruitment of several junior colleagues who treated me as you would a bit of fragile, fossilized brain. I was also dealing with shame. These new faculty members, as well as the old ones with whom I'd lost touch, looked at me as if I were a refugee, someone who had managed to survive an ordeal only by running away from it, or by being chased away. And I know that many people ran to their telephones and email, communicating with those scholars still left on the committee, wondering why I had abandoned such a lucrative position; and that they must have received replies that were as uncertain and disbelieving as their initial queries, since I could tell by the way they sidled by me in the halls, by the deference of their hellos and goodbyes, that they weren't sure whether I had returned out of failure or because I knew something about the committee — about its practices, its failure to have yet produced a single meaningful report — that they did not. And maybe it was their attitude — a mixture of caution and sarcasm that made me feel lonely, unaccepted, and desperate to counter any suggestion that I was a reject — which forced me to get in touch with the "Alliance for an Alternative Peace" — not, I am ashamed to say, because I really wanted to bring down the committee (I would have happily forgotten about it), but because I wanted it to look as if I'd quit not out of fatigue but ethical integrity.

The A.A.P. had sprung up in 1996, shortly after the inauguration of the committee, and was composed, at least initially, of those scholars who had not been selected to take part in the work. Those who had applied but whose CVs had been found wanting. Almost immediately they got together and began publishing critiques of the procedures by which the committee agreed to govern and police itself (some of which, upon rereading, I found amazingly prescient). Their numbers — and general credibility — had been bolstered by recent big-name defections from the committee, whose coming on board lent weight to their accusations.

I made my reasons for joining very obvious from the start: I was still committed to the abolition of war, deplored the waste of time and money and effort represented by the committee (and especially scholars like Ganz — who had been on my mind constantly since that last day — who were obviously exploiting the committee as a



testing ground for fascist notions of organization and commitment, as well as for the purposes of personal advancement). I began with an article, commissioned by the journal *Practice* (a forum for A.A.P. members), a quasi-editorial in which I related my "personal experiences" on the committee; and, then, when that proved popular (with letters coming in from places far beyond the usual circle of A.A.P. converts), a series of articles in which I continually stressed bureaucracy as the "eventual downfall of the organization."

And it was one of these responses that got me looking into Ganz's past. It was nothing serious, just a few short lines from a scholar in Indiana, in a letter otherwise filled with vacant praise for the work I was doing. "You are dead on in regards to Heinrich Ganz," it said, "who worked here, briefly, as a sessional, before moving on to God knows where. He was continually tying us up with requests for greater administrative 'openness' and 'faculty democracy.' I'm not sure where he went afterwards, and, to be honest, wasn't quite interested, since we were all so happy to see him leave." What surprised me was not the sentiment of the lines, which echoed my own, but rather the fact that Ganz had worked at this dinky institution, The University-College of Middlevale, and worked there as a *sessional*, since all the rumours had never presented Ganz as anything but a scholar at the top of his profession — from the moment he finished his prize-winning dissertation, to his short tenure at a Yugoslav university prior to the outbreak of war, to the moment, post-emigration, when his services as full-time professor had been the object of a "bidding war" between several small but elite American colleges.

For the next several months Ganz became my obsession. And I began scouring various faculty directories, conference attendance sheets, scholarly databases — to immediately discover that nothing in his rumoured background — neither the college where Ganz was supposed to teach, nor the awards he'd purportedly won, nor the professional associations he was said to share — actually existed. Not one of them. And when I tried looking into his Yugoslav background my search was even more fruitless, as it was impossible to access the places where he was said to have studied and taught and published.

Naturally, all of this — in between my regular rounds of teaching, researching, publishing, and traveling — took some years, so that by the time I'd finished the lengthy article I was writing — exposing his empty background, and tying his influence to VanderHagen and the corruption of the committee in general — it was too late, because the press had already done my work for me. And in the spring of that year I found myself with an essay that was six months too late, obsolete beside the editorials and articles that may not have gotten to the information on Ganz before I did, or may not have presented it as eloquently as I, but had published it first, which was all that really mattered. And I spent the next year on the sidelines, watching as the committee, along with select Liberals, got shredded in the newspapers. VanderHagen had it the worst, of course, as his intrigues were exposed and the media descended on him, digging up every extant memo or email or letter he'd written and publishing them with lengthy "interpretations" by noted scholars who regarded him as "a virus in the system" whose sole purpose had been to mess up the channels of communication, confuse the issues, and more or less cripple the committee. I couldn't help but feel justified in having had the foresight to abandon the committee before it had gone under, and made sure that everyone on faculty knew it, noting with relief that many of the younger colleagues were now openly seeking my advice on a number of "administrative" and "professional" issues.

Some years went by before I saw anyone from the committee again, since many of them disappeared after those terrible last months, some into early retirement, while others hid away, cocooned in the bare minimum of faculty duties, coming into work to teach their classes, attend one or two mandatory meetings, and vanish before anyone had a chance to ask questions. Eventually, of course, the media attention petered out, and the Liberal government set up the "Conclusions Board," and VanderHagen — in an act of public contrition — produced his negligible revisions, which nobody paid attention to, and then the whole thing vanished, in an instant, as the media shifted to other scandals.



The thing that finally made me look up VanderHagen was a belated article published in the back pages of a magazine — I can't remember which — suggesting that he and Ganz had been lovers, offering as proof several grainy photographs of the two men holding hands outside unrecognizable restaurants, and along the canal (I am fairly certain that the man identified as VanderHagen in one of those pictures was actually me), along with a number of ambiguous notes in what may or may not have been their handwriting. I stared at this article, remembering Ganz's embrace, then threw it against the wall in fury.

What made me angry was not that Ganz may have hit on me — I couldn't have cared less — but the fact that this is what our efforts on behalf of the committee had come down to, this final word: a homophobic article in a newspaper that linked our failure to some reactionary notion of "sexual perversion." I couldn't think of a conclusion more at odds with what we'd been trying to do: to create a space free of such exclusionary modes of thought, a way of proceeding that led not to blame and hostility but to acceptance. And I wanted, then, to find Ganz and VanderHagen, and not so they would refute what I'd read, but rather confirm it. For although I did not realize it at the time, I think I must have had an intuition of what Ganz had been trying to tell me during my final months on the committee, though I believed I needed to know they'd been lovers simply because it would have somehow mitigated what they'd done, made it look less like an act of sabotage than the attempt of lovers to create a scene of disorder in which they could hide out, under the radar.

While my attempts to find Ganz were failures (he'd disappeared the minute the media onslaught began, leaving not one contact or phone number that anyone could remember — or *wanted to* remember, since association with Ganz was professional suicide), tracking down VanderHagen was easy. He had retired shortly after the findings of the Conclusions Board, and, following that, had been divorced by his wife, who took sole custody of their four kids (my guess was that she'd either read the aforementioned newspaper article, or that VanderHagen, knowing his secret was finally out, had had no choice but to come clean with her). And so, disowned by his



family, he took refuge in a large frame house near Sidney, Cape Breton Island, where I caught up with him.

VanderHagen was fatter than I remembered, almost bloated, as if his body were waterlogged, or as if all those insults and criticisms he'd swallowed while committee chair had finally stuffed him to the point of bursting, clogging up all his arteries and guts, so that with any movement I expected to hear a terrible ripping of skin. I had phoned him from Sidney, and he was sitting on the front steps, under a trellis of hanging wisteria, and sipping a beer in the afternoon sunshine when I pulled up.

"Hello, Henry," he said, getting up.

I shook his hand, surprised by the warmth of his grip, and then sat on one of the wooden lawn chairs while he went inside to get me a beer.

For a long time we talked about the island, and the house he'd bought and "fixed up" by himself during the last couple of years, and then about dwindling fish stocks, and about the re-election of the Liberals (not so amazing, really, since the Canadian right-wing — being perpetually divided by pig-headedness and poor leadership — still posed no threat to them), so that it was evening before I felt brave enough to ask the questions I'd come to ask.

Upon hearing the first of these (the only one that mattered), VanderHagen looked away, down the slope on which sat his house, my own gaze so intent on his that I could see the ocean reflected in his eyes, and then simply replied: "Yes, it's true," and said nothing more — did not add to or qualify or excuse the answer or the history it suggested. I found myself sitting in the chair under the wisteria and feeling the odd sensation of my questions washing away, like a wave crept up too far on the sand.

"The Nominalization Project," I whispered.

VanderHagen narrowed his gaze on the Atlantic as if he, too, finally understood that my question was more than the voyeurism of someone who has read an inflammatory article. He rose from his chair, indicated I should wait, and went into the house, returning with a pamphlet that he handed to me, a tattered bit of yellow paper folded six times, which contained an essay in a style I recognized as

belonging to Ganz. The title was "The Virtues of Paralysis," and VanderHagen nodded as I started to read.

It took me ten minutes to get through the whole thing, mainly because I'd already figured out the thesis, and when I was done I carefully folded it up, as if it were the most sacred of letters, and handed it back to VanderHagen.

"It was his idea," he said. "Confusion, disorder, endless uncertainty; and thus debate; and thus factionalism as a way of keeping us from banding together to exercise our power. I don't know how many times he said it: 'War begins with decisions. War begins with taking a stand.'" VanderHagen shifted in his seat and brought the buttons of his bulging shirt in line with his belt buckle. "I don't think I ever fully understood what he was talking about," he said. "But I do know he had seen it in the place he escaped from: how men can stop at an idea, and how, when they do, ideas become acts of war. Blame, for instance, is one such idea." He glanced down the slope, "Maybe it would have been better for both of us if we'd been honest." And, having said that, VanderHagen looked up from the sea — with that same look I had seen on Ganz that day in the hotel lobby — the eyes finding only a sky deprived of blue, gone black, as if someone had scratched it out with a nail. And I realized that in returning to my family I had helped VanderHagen lose his, not because I had hated him but because he and Ganz — by which I mean people — had stood in the way of the abstractions I prized more highly than them: reputation, progress, a scholarly ideal, and the goals laid out by a "mission statement."

I stood almost involuntarily, and while I would like to think it was with the force of discovery, I know that it was rather with the force of shame, of coming all this way to interrogate VanderHagen, of having only realized then — in that garden facing the sea — that my knowledge had not been adequate to Ganz, that I had been looking for terminal solutions when I should have been looking for ways to obstruct them. He had wanted us to discover his plots — all of them, including the Nominalization Project — had wanted us to come undone, stumbling in confusion, unable to go on — as if this was the only way of achieving any sort of lasting peace: creating a situation in which conflict was impossible because nobody knew what they should



be fighting for. He had diagnosed the problem, and it was this: conviction, the blind, armored, undeterred trajectory of the certain, the single-minded, the *right*. And though he had put the answer in front of us again and again we had not seen it, going off blind, declaring war on him, on the committee, on each other, and, finally, on ourselves — thinking that we needed to overcome our indecisiveness, when we should have been thinking *delay, delay, delay*. It was a cynic's utopia, and one, I am sure, Ganz had arrived at through watching his city and people fall prey to a program and its execution.

I looked at VanderHagen once more before turning to go, his face still betraying that terrible lack, so I could only stare for a moment before turning away, knowing that I could not face Ganz's peace, which meant that the failure that day in the hotel room had not only been mine but his as well, since it proved that taking stands and demanding answers and setting goals were inevitable, which meant that war was too.

And I have been wondering, ever since, what I would do if I saw Ganz again — say hurrying down some street, or in the back row at a conference panel, or even on the doorstep of my own home — and while I would like to think that I would chase after him, or shake his hand, or even put my arms around him for as long as he let me, I know, finally, that I am not sure what I would do, greet him or turn away. And that even this shame — of having the conviction but not the character to endure what is necessary — might not be enough to stop me from rejecting him. For in rejecting Ganz's state of mind I was also rejecting *him*, as we are all, finally, obstructed from embracing another without the interference of claims and imperatives — in a way no less final, no less cowardly, no less despairing than the rejection of VanderHagen by his wife and children.

As I drove away I reflected on how appropriately narrow the road was — how unlike the openness I had proved incapable of — as if there should have been a route other than the one that had brought me here, that led back to where I came from — something other than this broken asphalt and charcoal sky — along my inevitable return to the wars.



The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the research and the objectives of the study. It then presents a literature review of the existing research on the topic. The second part of the paper describes the methodology used in the study, including the data collection and analysis techniques. The third part of the paper presents the results of the study, and the fourth part discusses the implications of the findings. The paper concludes with a summary of the main findings and a list of references.

The research was conducted in a systematic and rigorous manner, following the principles of good research practice. The data was collected from a representative sample of the population, and the analysis was carried out using appropriate statistical techniques. The results of the study are presented in a clear and concise manner, and the implications of the findings are discussed in detail. The paper is well written and easy to read, and it provides a valuable contribution to the field of research.

The findings of the study are significant and have important implications for the field of research. They provide a new perspective on the topic and challenge some of the existing assumptions. The research also highlights the need for further research in this area, and it provides a clear direction for future studies. The paper is a well-written and informative contribution to the field, and it is highly recommended for reading by researchers and students alike.

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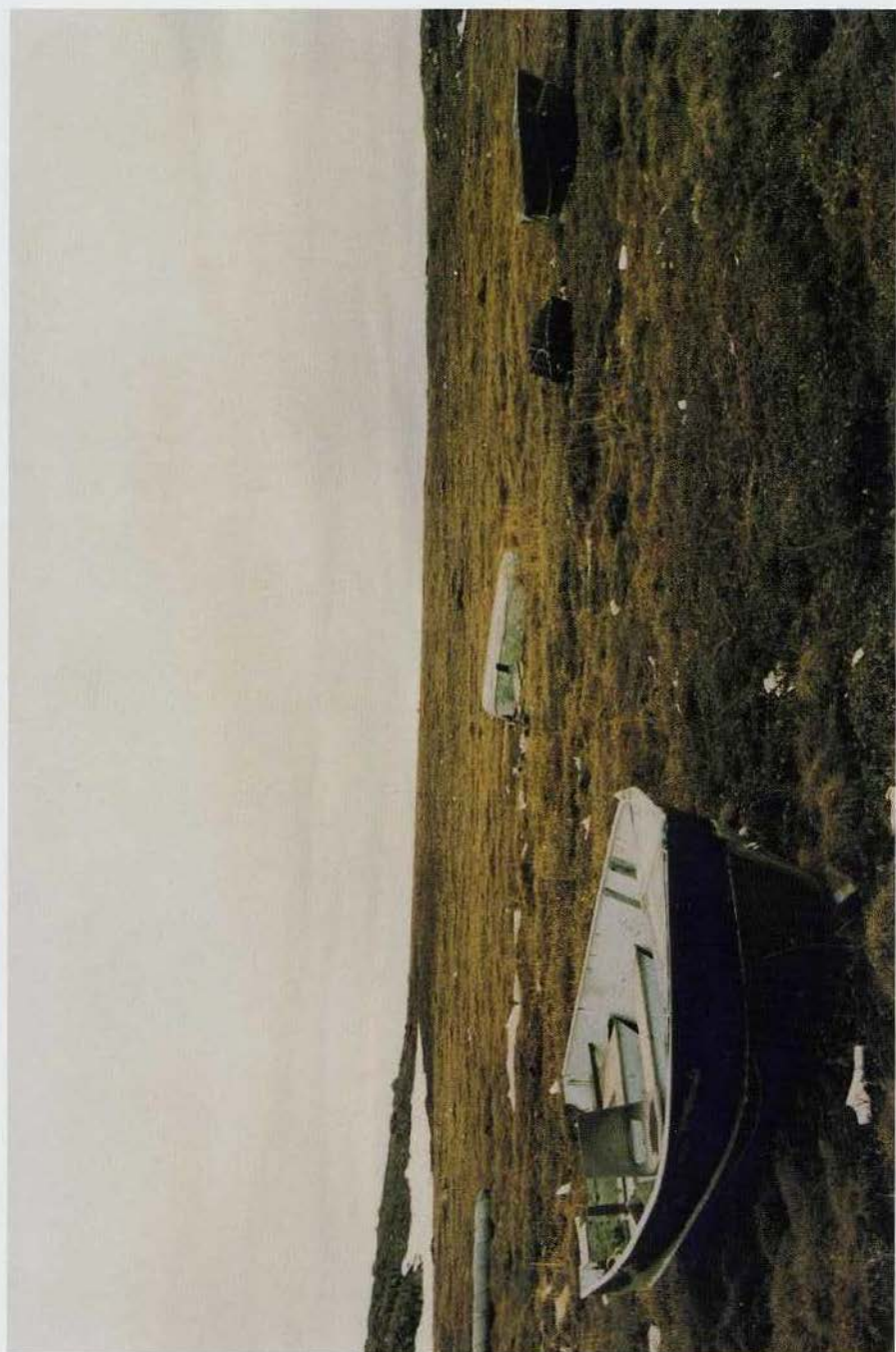














## NORTHERN POETS

*the closer to the raw resource  
the rawer the intelligence*

Bill Bailey, *3rd & George* (1978)

The poets of northern B.C., five of whom are presented here, have over the past quarter century made a community, centred on the city of Prince George — in particular, on the residence, the presence, of writers Barry McKinnon, John Harris, and others — on the support they have given to writing and to local publishing, relying as well on the post-secondary institutions of that city, the College of New Caledonia, and more recently, the University of Northern British Columbia. In this community of poets there has come to be not a common poetic, but a shared premise, an indispensable responsibility for, and to, a particular type of content. The place where the writers live, the natural environment and the human communities — village, town and city — particularly as they have been subjected to heedless and accelerated change by the changing priorities of economic exploitation, have been more than just a background refracted in the personal concerns of their poems; they have been the subject of the poems as lived experience. In a sense there is no background in the north. All is figure, all is ground.

What has happened in northern B.C., over the past quarter century is that the work of human beings, wrongly termed unskilled labour, has become peripheral to the machine harvesting of what is left of the raw resource, still shipped out to be fashioned elsewhere. At the same time, the people of the north who have felt, and still feel, themselves to be citizens, have now become exploitable in another way: as semi-finished consumers. The world is awash in what the system calls product, and the game is to sell it. Brian Fawcett writes, in *Virtual Clearcut*: "Thus I have gone directly to the ground level, even though the ground in the Bowron River valley was



destroyed before I arrived, and the ground in Prince George was experiencing, and continues to experience, something worse than mere destruction."

It is probably rash, maybe even misleading, to try to interpret poems as reflections of social reality. Yet it still seems to me that the underlying context for each of these poets has been their experience of the gradual disintegration of a social world based on real work, more intensely felt here than in the metropolis where the cultural amenities incident on proximate wealth tend to shelter people's minds from the brute reality. These poets' responses to devastating social and cultural change account, in part, for the widely differing, idiosyncratic, often expressionistic, forms the poems take, reflecting (as I see it) something like a frozen explosion or lava flow of feeling, recorded at the moment it ceases, and fashioned so that its form suggests the impact of the precipitating event. "Inertia is law / and it comes to dictate / the forms of surrender" (Simon Thompson).

The "I" in these poems is not the locus of an interpretive sensibility; it is more likely to be interpreted *by* the world — the house, the mall, the institutional setting. The repeated "I" in Simon Thompson's "Something about me" is almost an unstressed syllable — "as forgotten an empire / as ever existed" — a character whose blood leaks out and drips away over and over. For Greg Lainsbury there is no "I", only a voice that speaks, with Beckettian staginess, of a ludicrous, pathetic "we" that seeks an escape debased ("Must we resign ourselves . . . / assume a sidestreet vegetative excrescence / alongside our sceptical neighbours / their faces stubbled with frost") or utopian ("How many of us seek a country where nobody else lives?"). Si Transken initially places herself beneath "civilized" notice, repudiating all social standing ("i am a base blot; a bit of snot / on a dignified person's sock"), and from this unassailable vantage delivers a detailed bill of particulars regarding the culture.

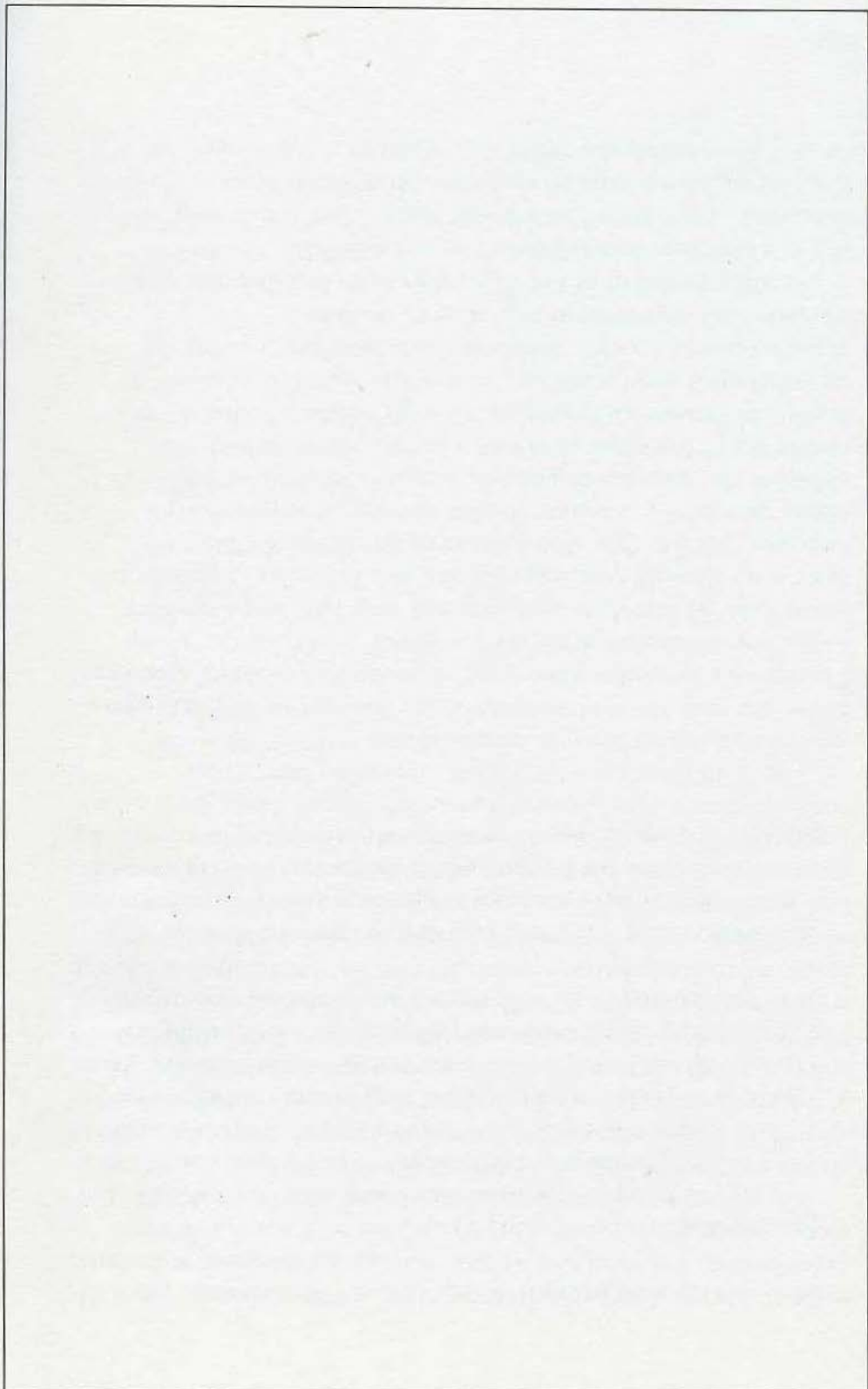
Reading a number of Ken Belford's poems together, my sense is one of a survey, or reconnaissance — not merely of "The Suicide Economy," where "Hard hatted angry men / with the faces of wolves / rip through feral lands on machines," and "fleshy academics with lasers / demonstrate the conversion of forests / to garbage," but of

the living natural world around it, into which the poet withdraws for relief, or to save what he can.

Barry McKinnon's Prince George poem is an inquiry, beginning "in Hades' hot air," into "not form but what / shapes the city / a body / to its / soul." The city appears at two moments, that of McKinnon's arrival, "the hot day in mid / July 69," when its downtown had a "sense of here" and the present where "a swirl of stink / in the citizenry / penetrates / the corpus." The labour, or burden, of the poem, in the sense of an upward passage from hell, is to discover how to conceive of the city after all, to give it form "in an attempt to define it."

Life in the hinterland, on what was once, with pride, called "the resource frontier," may now require a conscious and continual resistance to consumerist ways of thinking. All the more raw the intelligence of poets when the resource the system seeks to exploit is human souls.

George Stanley  
Vancouver, 2004





## Simon Thompson / SOMETHING ABOUT ME

Then I knew I was dreaming  
fishers stand shoulder to shoulder  
like soldiers of Chinese clay  
and every one smoking Players or Dunhill  
at the point where the two rivers meet  
a bridge just for standing  
for going from this side to that side  
and now all the fishers  
have no purpose but hauling in salmon  
bright from the green ocean  
and fat from their feeding  
on minnows and hatchings  
and dulled by the excess  
and dulled by their instinct  
snap at the colours that flash by their sides

the Lakelse flows out  
and the Skeena flows in  
on a border of mud  
or a bubble of mud  
that's aquatic and moving  
and breathing and formed in the pool  
where the lines and their lures  
come to a rest

the forest is folded like linen  
or napkins in restaurants  
as creased as a wedding suit  
funeral suit  
straighter and blacker  
than rainfall

you ever saw  
fall in a Japanese woodcut

the trucks are all dirty  
and lined up the road side  
smoke of a fire threads the damp morning air

someone yells "fish on"  
and the water is beaten  
the fishers move listlessly  
jealously  
then there's a flash of dark silver  
and the Spring slips the hook  
like a gripe that's forgotten  
in a moment of loving  
and then swear words meet echo  
at this meeting of killers  
at a bend in a river

I am the salmon  
and I am the fisher

and on waking  
I cough up some dust  
that's collected for years now  
that's caught in my lungs  
and a choking ensues  
that fixes my mind's eye  
on pictures of tumours  
sprouting like mushrooms  
on cigarette labels  
the thickness of mucus  
diverted and tortured  
stuck in the valleys  
that are blackened by ashes  
and dreaming of grasses that grow on the outside  
and the dreaming of twinning

that keeps them together  
as ashes and grasses  
ashes  
then grasses

I doze and I stretch  
as forgotten an empire  
as ever existed  
then feeling comes back  
and the cat looks me over  
and sizes me up  
with unclouded eyes  
like the eyes of the painters  
Vermeer and Pissarro  
and behind those gold coins  
are millions of years  
of noiseless shooting through grasses  
on nocturnal trails of ashes  
and dark compounded and broken  
by wind and by leaf and by moon

on waking  
my hands are as weak as  
a monster  
I spent the night  
battling

then the song of birds

fills up the bedroom  
paints the walls ochre  
makes the house fragile  
as a finger of ash

unseen they vibrate  
the top of the yew tree  
their restless wings chipping



and weaving a fabric of air  
their perch is concealed  
their song is a language  
confined to a world  
made of feathers and bones  
that are hollow

I feel myself grow smaller

I am not dreaming  
but drunk on this morning  
and my children are sparrows  
that shit on the sidewalk  
cracked with the cold snap  
which killed half the trees  
turned the cedar boughs red  
and the rivers to ice  
speckled with gravel  
blown from the highway  
and the endless pulsation of trucks to the pulp mill  
the tree to the paper  
the farm to the dinner  
removed and remote

as I rise from the bed clothes  
happy and stupid  
an idea is forming  
intersected by knowing  
the shortness of summer  
in a place where the weather  
shifts without warning  
the green of the mountain  
turned blue by the downpour  
that stays without welcome  
that eats up the Spring  
and floods out the trailers  
set close by the river

damp without respite  
erosion of hope

but this is the idea

to be at the beach  
skin tight with sun  
with much too much sun  
and radio on  
dulled by the music  
dulled by the chatter  
dulled by the sound of the wind's little waves  
that wash out the sand  
the river bore here

and Oh!

What is happy?

This is my breakfast  
a glass of ice water  
half pleasure  
half torture  
and sand in an ice cube  
is the grit at the centre  
of the thing that is real  
or claims it is real  
as it grinds on my teeth  
and I wonder from where did this sand come  
that shatters so strangely  
when I did not expect it  
when I did not think  
that a remnant existed  
the way that an oil slick  
that runs through the gutter  
reminds me of fishing boats  
moored at the docks of my childhood

But the beach has to wait  
there is work to be done  
work I must do

as I'm walking downtown  
I'm drifting and thinking  
of the things I must say  
and the way I must say them  
as I get older  
and lurch to the middle  
of life as I know it  
and count up the times I should have been stopped  
I think of the title  
with which I describe myself  
and refuse to share

then  
in the midst of my efforts  
to trace my self-pity  
my conscience is pricked  
by the knowledge  
that Indians sleep in the lot over there  
they make little nests in the leaves and the grasses  
their nests are left empty during the day  
the grass is pressed flat by the weight of their slumber  
the afternoon sun does not reach their bower  
to bring back to life  
the stuff of their bedding

they tear the limbs off the cherry trees  
to get the cherries

broken black limbs  
a great beast torn apart for its eyes

who are the sleepers  
from where did they come



one left a note  
and I picked it up:  
"Dear Mum and Dad  
I'm leaving today  
to go back and live  
with Mama and Daddy.  
Things just won't work out  
and I'm sorry for the hurt  
that I've caused."  
I will burn it to ashes.

The long grass disguises  
the dens that they've made  
in the darkness afforded  
by the grove that they rend

and I'm one to talk  
with my sensitive soul  
and my eye for a bargain

like that house over there  
with the broken-in door

the press of the grass  
of the grass fueled by ashes  
will break up the concrete

it's hard to believe

in the fallen-down building  
and the burned empty lot  
a mysterious power  
of grasping and tearing  
and slow-motion breaking  
is working away  
and replacing each screw  
and straining each girder

little by little  
so I don't notice  
but one day I'm surprised  
when the house has collapsed  
and the bulldozer's there  
to clean up the mess

so I keep the grass short  
at the house where I live  
it's famous in town  
but is now slightly swaybacked  
and slightly run down  
it might be condemned  
if it weren't for the fiction  
of caring and whiteness  
invested by we  
with the beautiful daughter  
and the rusting old car  
and a circuit burned out  
that cannot be fixed  
the breaker is ancient  
and the workman  
scratches his head  
and laughs at the chaos of wiring

"what you got is a mess"

I'm reading the face of the workman  
decoding the cipher of those people  
who work with their hands  
and take pity on us  
whose hands are as useless  
as glass eyes to a doll

and as I reach halfway  
I understand clearly  
the rules of some games

are written in motes  
that shift in the sunlight  
and scatter in wind

and now that the workman  
has told me the circuit  
is ruined and must be replaced  
the smell of burned wiring  
comes back like a church bell  
ringing for no one

what do I say then  
and why do I say it  
somnolent one day  
sorehead the next  
I wish to dissolve  
into the form  
of a swan's carcass  
half-buried in sand  
and my bones and my sinews  
are still brown from blood  
and the recent closeness  
of muscle and fat  
my spine like a piece of modernist sculpture  
or the space needle  
stretching and rising  
to the point where my head used to be  
shoulder blades dovetailed into my sternum  
picked semi-clean by blow flies  
all parts still held  
by the glue of my life  
the chaos of feathers and sand-powdered sinews  
warped to odd angles  
fractures and hollows torqued into my bones  
by the pressure of flight  
my rib cage a boat's thews  
my purlins of ribs



my tenons of vertebrae  
waiting to lead me  
where the grass is still burning  
and ashes are flying  
like locusts on heat waves  
that ruffle the grain fields  
greying the daylight  
and clouding the idea  
that nothing is solid  
and the roots of the grasses  
are searching for succor  
the flames and the gasoline  
stinging their fibre  
and turning their life  
into something that's lighter  
the thing that is flying  
is the swan that is me

I drive an old car  
that is undeniably rusting  
and clunking in unfortunate rhythm with potholes  
on my search for the real  
my map is quite useless  
the terrain is unknown  
the compass won't work there  
the map will catch fire  
and then I'll be lost

I've been told to step back  
to somewhere the words that I use  
are untinged by theory  
to draw on my memory  
the instinct for living  
instead of my habit  
of using a trope  
to fix my position

those Indians know  
that theory is no good  
when you're sleeping outdoors  
when you're shitting outdoors  
and your nose has been broken  
and your eye has been blacked  
and no one invites you into their house  
to eat a good meal

do hungry men drift  
from hunger to greed to a state of confusion  
impulsive like prophets  
or desperate like junkies

I don't have the words  
to make their lives better  
I can hardly remember  
to shave once a week

sometimes it comes to me  
round about lunchtime  
the feeling of stubble  
surprising my hand

my face in the mirror  
chin coated in foam  
I consider the steam  
that condenses on glass  
and vanishes magically  
when the door opens  
How like the steam  
is my attention!

I nick myself badly  
and watch the blood spatter  
and spiral away  
this fragment of self

that cannot be captured  
is only enclosed by the thinnest of margins  
and contains all my secrets  
in a code I don't know

and as I watch closely  
hypnotized even  
the blood sliding neatly  
into the drain hole  
the truth of the matter  
hangs right before me:  
my moment has happened  
and nothing has happened

and now I retreat away from the mirror  
drop into the basement  
where the tools I have bought  
to try to make myself  
line the walls  
as in a museum of me

I pick up a hammer  
this is the instant  
when the tool bounces up  
from my fingernail tip  
and I know I've done it now  
the pain in a second  
strangely destined to be forgotten  
but now nauseous

when I'm down here  
and injure myself  
I don't see the point  
in letting out curse words  
they only being for the ears of the public  
a failure of effort  
a dubious wave of the hand



of the monarch who passes  
from cathedral to castle

grunting or moaning instead  
I'm not visible  
glad to be hidden  
in my primal condition  
throbbing and sweating  
the prop of a seaplane swings through my head  
a thousand feet over  
up in the clouds

the floor of the basement  
is cool as the earth that it keeps out  
I press my damp forehead  
and listen to cars pass along  
the street I know best  
drifting like clouds  
each cloud with a tenant  
enclosed in the odor and sound  
of a world made of steel

Seeking relief  
I think of the liquor store  
aisle upon aisle of whisky and vodka  
the scent of the juniper seems to drift in  
but its only the smell of machine oil  
used to cool drill bits  
as they cut through soft iron

then there is knocking  
I sprint to the front door  
the piano needs tuning  
with the shift in the weather

and my friend Al  
tell's me his heart's not so good

with uncontrolled surges  
and hands set to shaking  
he says that he's drinking  
far too much wine  
he better cut back  
he's not getting younger  
his hands hold the tuning fork  
silver and ringing  
he presses the keys  
and wrenches the tone right  
away from the flats and sharps of last winter  
towards a bright past  
and I dig what he says  
about uncontrolled surges  
his hands always shaking  
but then he plays Bach fugues  
and the piano sounds better  
I write him his cheque  
he asks me to dinner  
and I ask him what wine should I bring  
a bottle of red or a bottle of white

After he leaves  
I go to my library  
look up some words  
demagogue  
demigod  
and I can't decide  
which one best applies to me

I stand in the hallway  
soaking in summer  
the hope for the summer  
like a hole in my shirt  
that grows with each washing  
inspected in darkness  
the ludicrous gloom

of laundry rooms  
and piles of clothes  
and the odor of soap  
and my clothes fall apart

Inertia is law  
and it comes to dictate  
the terms of surrender:  
the salt cellar stays empty  
because it is empty  
and waiting for something  
or someone like me  
to fill it with salt  
but while I am watching  
the birds in the cherry tree  
sing out in random  
I see life is not simple  
just eating and flying and waiting  
for whatever comes after  
the moment in which the hawk swoops down  
to break the fine neck  
or the windowpane beckons  
with a flight path much clearer  
than the one afforded by berries and grasses

children next door bounce on a trampoline  
higher and high  
the chickadee reports and the wind chimes jangle  
there is a weight  
I am looking into the leaves of the maple  
to feel something pressing

the smell of fried chicken  
that plugs up the neighborhood  
pulls beautiful children away from their homes  
to walk down the alley  
with bottles of beer in their hands



mosquitos siphon me  
drink up my blood  
and fly off to spawn  
in some dark place  
using my blood as the engine  
to drive their young

the blackflies that cut me  
chisel their meal  
withdraw without notice  
and slip into distance  
it's a cliché to say that blood is crimson  
it's more like sealing wax  
clotting and flaking  
to wine-dark red evidence  
the only calling card  
of their assault on my skin

and what has been proven?

fill the air with the smell of fried chicken and french fries  
and fill my hands with a bottle of beer  
stare deeply into the spot where my father  
meets the evening of memory  
and remember when I set the prairie on fire  
let me go to the river  
and not see the beer cans  
let me walk down the street  
and not see the people sleeping in grass

and then there's the portrait  
of me in my carport  
a technical starting point  
subtle fragility  
amorphous passivity  
a sense of the self that's been split into fragments  
and I am a passenger

among many passengers  
faces with scars  
and hands with tattoos  
their teeth are all rotten  
and their breath stinks like hell  
so hell is not hot  
like a bus ride it's clammy  
my face needs a wash  
my teeth need a brush

Yet here stands the scoundrel  
in transient colour  
of water in summer  
or fire in winter  
the painting of water  
affected by rainfall  
the middle of evening  
with candlelight dipping  
from each insect's death

and starting to drink now  
in the room that booze makes  
where no one but me  
has a comfortable chair  
and a view of the grassland

I oscillate wildly  
like radio signals  
that bounce from the mountain to the wet valley floor  
from no then to yes  
and from fame and from fortune  
then nothing that once was is yet meant to be

I smoke my last cigarette down to the end  
and watch the stars burning  
and see the lights of town

smolder to ashes  
of stars  
of me  
irrevocable  
standing in dark  
some rain falling now  
for two weeks the ground has been burning  
my skin has been burning  
and God damn  
I'm a failure  
just like my Dad  
aware of the failure  
a scapegoat is missing  
I must take the blame  
for my pleasure  
and self-congratulations on another day  
and sweetgrass prayers  
that I don't know to make

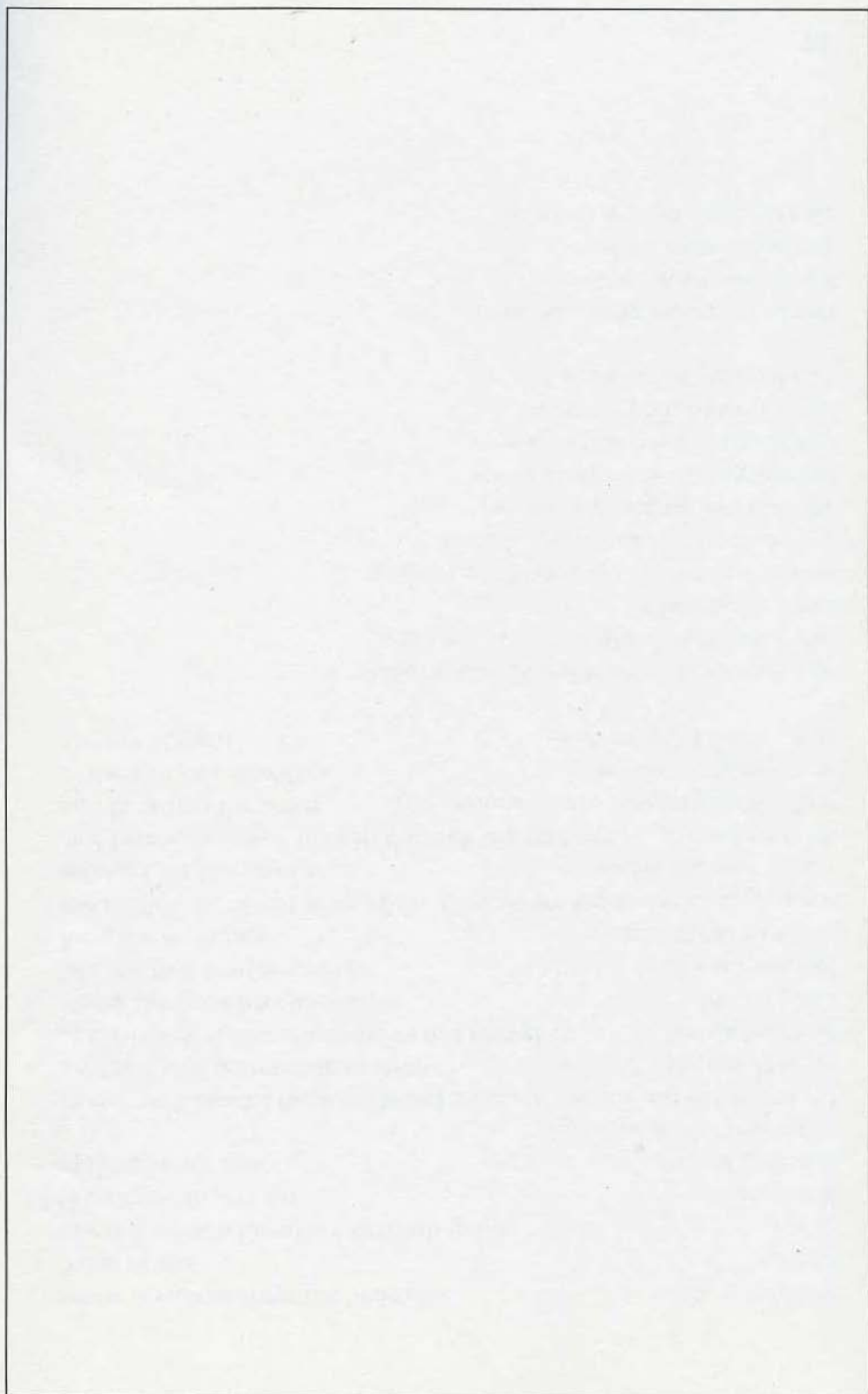
and the dream of light smoke that is ruptured  
when the phone rings so late in the night  
and I speak softly  
as if to honour the softness of the evening  
or the respectful tenderness of dark  
who am I in my barely-lit kitchen  
speaking in these intimate tones  
to someone who could be a lover  
but is instead the purveyor  
of a freezer load of meat

the fridge motor clicks and hums  
something comes to life  
I want the door to open  
and the little light to come on



music resonates from the bedroom  
"trust in me"  
where a woman lies alone beneath quilts  
listening with one ear  
to the passing cars

In the pitch black I fumble around  
my good wife pretending to sleep  
as she wonders how she came to this thought  
where the grass becomes ashes  
and the bed is set spinning  
for a few moments  
the shallow turbulent sleep of the partially wicked  
subdues me like smoke  
and I am submerged to fight through the grasses  
and breath in the ashes  
of the fire that smolders  
just out of sight



Greg Lainsbury / VERSIONS OF THE NORTH  
Scenario 4: The Problem of Everyone Else

... *we know our neighbor exists because he's outside.* ...  
— Italo Calvino, "Blood, Sea" (t-zero)

I. Town and Country

"It goes without saying that there can be no democracy, or even an ongoing project of a democratic society, without autonomous individuals capable of critically and imaginatively participating in this project."

— David Wallace, "In Search of a Democratic Aesthetic"

Now, all our weak, sinful, rebellious subjects,  
let us gather to talk, of

doing the work: civ/n  
not out of nostalgia for a supra-temporal community,  
but a need "to overcome one's estrangement from which one is  
most familiar"

to correct the national body

fixed/  
hetero-

let us stop pulling stone knuckles from the earth  
to meditate upon southern money  
like rumors of rain  
the geography of apocalypse: roadblocks & barricades  
the trembling poplar w/silver leaf  
torment of metal / scream of saws  
the darkness upon the plain.



Geniuses: a dime / dozen  
our inhabitants include:

elsewhere. Here an inflationary regime,  
rig hands in doghouses  
whole villages from Cape Breton  
one who doesn't know what a suntan is  
the alcoholic driver & the cat skinner  
recent parolees from federal institutions  
economic migrants from dying prairie towns  
bars full of sad, promiscuous & angry souls.

They're often really fat & their clothes too tight.

So whatever happened to distributing people intelligently?

Must we resign ourselves, once & for all,

to that helpless, destined feeling?

Accept survival as its own reward

secrete an establishment around ourself,

assume a sidestreet vegetative excrescence

alongside our sceptical neighbors

their faces stubbled w/frost

long-johns on clothesline slanted slab-hard in wind

ragged edges of crop pleating into riverbank.

A gathering of the dispossessed & displaced

arm muscles unencumbered & armpit hair fully ventilated

taking every opportunity to antagonize

the boar half-starving from winter's sleep.

How many of us seek a country where nobody else lives?

*Manifeste cannibale dada*

a state of intoxication sanctions all irregularities

catastrophic emissions cover

the velvet rind of branches

w/an exuberant verdure.

Among the indoors people, facing frosted windows  
populations assembled for no compelling reason  
the harshness of pioneer life: immense cold, poverty, no electricity  
holds no romance

living in Bad Faith  
people live quietly underneath flight patterns  
playing w/a rifle as if it's a woman  
fucking one's subject  
while overhead satellites of reporting companies locate facilities  
plumes of toxic material: matter out of place  
death as short-term effect of exposure.

Is there *no place* free from (this) presence?

Living together must allow for repetition  
tolerance of those who come to work  
planning only to stay a year or two  
just long enough to put a stake together  
pad a résumé.

It is all a symptom of plethora;  
here we may skip stages in our *bildung*  
get whatever is needed  
watch wild berries swell in the pagan sun  
herons feed in watery meadows.

And who could forget our summer companions, gnats & mosquitoes?

Yes, here is only an interval, even if  
enlivened w/vast herds of elk & buffalo  
numerous examples of the Abandoned Farmhouse genre  
all available for the cost of distraction, psychological & otherwise  
the old jail across the river  
where industrial culture went to dream  
address among

brooding pines its moodiness & other spiritual infections  
contagion always a risk, its capacity for punitive retaliation  
written in accord w/a canon of the self-forbidding  
internalized as commodification of social agency:  
to be finished would, indeed, be a relief.

But there is to be no distraction from this incessant chatter  
political rumblings from the south  
so we gather accessories to show how hard we work  
& how we are *always* working

our willingness to endure /  
this dreadful freedom

the barren reaches.

This is what happens, as the silver fangs of the mighty axe  
destroy this magnificent theatre of nature  
the strippers clean up & streets go unpaved  
the vigilance & severity of the husband  
his affirmation of self, & desire  
to complete the truncated precursor is humiliating & tedious  
whereas a wife's normal contribution  
the equation of virtue & masochism  
an unmanipulated sorrow  
clashes w/his proneness to side w/beauty.

The result, a certain lack of care:  
ugliness, filth, squalor, relationships  
subject to sudden & / or violent ends, the job offer  
from afar, the call home.

In the spring giant frost heaves & potholes erupt.



The eye's revenge:  
those blue depths, moon forsaken  
thick hair of poplar & spruce braided across sky  
save where the birches grew  
deeper, more complex formations.

Dead things were all about me and the year was dead.

## II. L'escalade non anesthésiée

Invoking realms of the unreal  
that trance of wonder, that doth run through nature everywhere, even as we  
cross the meatloaf line: observe now the decorative function of trees & animals  
motors discharging in response to anxiety  
graffiti tags on dirty brick walls &  
buff old urban *ayahuasqueros*  
mixing systems, producing fresh desires.

From the north, death, a fog comes down  
to put forward the unpresentable in presentation  
flaunting raw data, the many deaths  
we had delivered.

"This was once a city"  
proclaimeth Geo. Stanley to those assembled in the parking lot  
    "this plastic rose" now inscribed in our species-being  
        a moment in the history of capital  
        a dumping ground for scum  
        a vanguard machine, dragging humanity after it

hungry ghosts

everywhere: chaosophy & the inevitability of annoyance & risk  
    a focus for all problems of poetics.

Those annoying others, who also inhabit these places  
 take, for instance, contestant #2  
 a remedial semiotics student  
 he fits the right profile!  
 suckers appear on his head; he studies  
 the illusion of an enduring understanding &  
 the American bourgeoisie interlude

how, despite such an extensive array of competence building measures  
some people get headache.

Jamie Reid evokes "the labor aristocracy" (big-headroom people  
tend to be predators, ingesting & expelling identifications)  
a grievous stream of analysis terminable & interminable  
a range of vision beyond that of ordinary people

... always being found innocent for ridiculous reasons.

Drinking w/poets & thinking ab't nothing much of the time  
this be the position of the late-modern poet-self, *vis-a-vis*  
the brown meat & its insatiable insistence on chasing primal ecstasy.

While the common-sense discourses of the soul would indicate  
such time as is better spent planning & producing  
customized learning-objects for our One Big College.



## Si Transken / EIGHT POEMS

### ORDINARY SHAMINGS

i'm unsoundness in slow progress, unstoppable  
fissures, flaws, loud-mouthed crudeness,  
husky bravado's the rag i shelter  
some semblance of a self behind.  
i've been a tiny bottom-feeder fish  
in rightly richly folks' aquariums; when bored  
they gaze at my twitching  
translucence.

i am a base blot; a bit of snot  
on a dignified person's sock;  
Sartre's vomit lines my shoes;  
Kafka's sweat i use to wash  
insomniac eyes & the polished presence  
of poshy people points to my pitifulness;  
i wear she-clown jump suits  
in hope my otherness will be tolerated.

## A SENSATIONAL SENSUOUS POEM

if health were wealth  
spread like clean air in Eden then  
companies would have changed their paradigm,  
banks wouldn't control the world,  
authentic complex democracy would exist,  
neither employment  
nor unemployment would make us sick,  
we'd live long enough  
to know love in multiplicity,  
other currencies would find equality with money,  
the words *patriarchy* & *duplicity*  
would be archaic  
& there would be no attendance fees  
to enrich our selves at the academy.

## A VOID

yes, it is another black & white poster all over  
all over  
the small towns which says: . . . *Age 25, 5'9" . . . hair in a pony tail . . .*  
*last seen heading west . . . she was carrying an olive green shoulder bag with*  
*an orange appliquéd dragon on it . . .*  
two photos are everywhere  
of this attractive wholesome white woman  
girl-next-door who means nothing to me.  
a mainstream commercial enterprise  
has attached their logo to her plight;  
\$25,000 reward for information leading to . . .  
who pressed into the picture-maker  
that day; which words were in her optimistic  
young mind  
precisely when the aperture snapped?  
was the scent of fresh cut  
grass all around her?  
perhaps a forensic dentist  
will earn a few hours of wages  
some day  
police officers, coroners, journalists  
will participate  
in the process of dis-covering  
i don't know.  
i don't know her.



meaning  
nothing to me is a man  
somewhere.  
a woman loved him perhaps,  
before he was born & since then  
& maybe he is a dentist, an officer, a photographer . . .  
maybe many women have pressed  
their wholesome love  
into his attractive life.  
this man may be an optimist,  
wear logos, dream of dragons;  
i don't know.  
precisely everywhere, now cutting grass next door,  
or heading west  
there is a man  
some day some thing  
some how some information  
snapped.  
& right now  
he means nothing to me.

## CONTEMPORARY WOMEN/ STUDENTS/ CLIENTS/ & MILLENNIUM LOVE

he loves me, he loves me not;  
i'm a thing he got for free.  
he loves me  
but doesn't like me.  
believing in postmodernity  
& freely finding multiple identities  
he needs me 'cept he doesn't see a *me*,  
i'm a shiny broken mirror.  
i'm a joke he thought  
couldn't make him laugh;  
i'm not a whole, still  
only a half but i pay my own way.  
he's there for me  
'cept when he isn't;  
he's kind 'cept with my heart;  
he's vegan 'cept when eating meat.  
with tragic absurdity,  
courageous curiosity,  
i show vulnerability & learn  
— almost — how to refuse his  
potential for crushing me with  
the weight of his ingenious freedom.

## GENERICA

from shores of British Columbia to anywhere Nova Scotia  
to everywhere nowhere there's Canada's:  
whiffs of American plastic,  
exhaust, lilac, cut grass,  
Chinese buffet lunches  
& other familiars.  
Tim Hortons, scabby pavement, food  
that tastes vaguely like an imagined  
long-ago original.  
Just a Buck Stores.  
a central street called:  
Pine, Cedar, Birch, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, Prince, Queen, King or Central  
street.  
strip joint, strip mall, a scar  
where resources were stripped, struck down, stolen.  
First Nations men wearing defeat  
on palms panhandling the hungry day.  
bank box machines charging  
service fees equally across the nation.  
Value Village/ Sally Ann/ Salvation Army.  
a bookstore clinging to a corner  
trying to disclose options but  
selling soft porn to pay the rent.  
yards, ditches & sidewalk cracks  
scattered  
with the robust resilient smiles



of dandelions & daisies.  
a local rag almost effectively  
resisting the *Globe & Mail's* reality.  
Wal-Mart.  
a call centre or an annoying cry to create one.  
politicians' posters fading from fences  
where they were pasted during  
an election — promises dissolved  
under miscellaneous inevitables.  
a scraggly park where single moms share stories  
of abuse, neglect, recipes for welfare soup.  
at town's edge an SPCA where animals  
await another chance or euthanasia.  
a grungy railroad running through or near it all.  
4 or 6 lane highways leading  
to places which locals call  
*out, away, gone, or different somehow.*  
& those rudely handsome daisies  
& dandelions incessantly  
pressing forward  
their irrepressible fluff & seeds.

## HOW SENIOR ACADEMICS MAY GANG RAPE YOUR MIND

there are intelligent treasured humans  
who push-shuffle-throw truth & responsibility about  
the way drunken soldiers throw  
forced-labor whores from pelvis to pelvis.  
1940's Japanese men defined those  
holes-for-their-fucking as "comfort women".  
Sophisticatedly brutal academics  
sanction "comfort ideas".

Like Nazis, by obfuscation, they re-spin & re-label  
abuses as

*tradition, appropriate, scholarly, accountable*

& blame someone else

as they saunter to a podium, the bank with a grant cheque,  
or a publisher's display.

some modern doctorates use a type of "date rape drug"  
in that they set you up to swallow mind-blinding options  
for how they're going to do you  
& you "forget" you've been done but you know  
you hurt all over.

## JUST CLARIFICATION ABOUT WHITENESS NUANCES

there's white trash, untrash  
& trash recycled to green  
there's culture with whiteness strung through it  
for interest, distinction & intensification  
to a spectrum of heritages  
whitewashed, snowwhite & pretentiously paling by the moment  
sweet vanilla white  
there's washed out gray & greying white  
emptying into void  
Cool Canadian Caucasian refusing  
American white  
there's the female, male & many other points  
of location on continuums of many identity pegs dipped or clotted  
in some sort of white  
there's the shade & tone of *gonna-kick-your-ass*  
*cuz you hurt one-na mine* related to  
*don't dare take nothing from my next-to-nothing*  
*cuz I'll stop you cold*  
there's white as in Klan as in evil  
there's once-was-white & now doing multiplicity in  
recently rediscovered authenticity  
can it exist in & of itself without  
being an unkindness to any other shade of distinction?  
down here, maybe, we're more nuanced  
than some of those fancy thinking uptheres define us as.



## PERSONAL; ODDLY POLITICAL

got no god so i have causes  
no family so i have comrades  
no past so i make future  
no comfort so i take joy  
no wealth so i have ideas  
no weapons so i have humour  
no peace so i make trouble  
no space so i take openness  
no music so i make noise  
yes, i do have, take, make — & plan  
to live strongly, largely, & long.

## Ken Belford / TEN POEMS

### COMMON KNOWLEDGE

I'm writing by hand on the english channel  
because there aren't enough  
words to carry us.  
Used and unused waste flows through.

Organs have common relationships  
and I, bearing a name others answer to  
am washed up with words,  
all over, done for now.

It seems there was a change of hands  
outside school on common land in public.  
What letter spreads the word  
that first bruises shore with meaning  
then briefly slips away  
in the unstoppable flow?

## RATS

*after Donna Haraway: an alien romance*

Freak scholars programming languages  
write in wanna-be knowledge in Harvard.  
In the academic industrial complex  
the answer is yes and no.

For profit, Femanica drives  
rats to classes in her big, dirty car.  
These creatures designed to suffer  
won't leave us alone.

Her Jesus is a dull rat and  
living memory isn't sentiment.  
I want a chance to get a disease.  
Go fuck gene therapy.

Caterpillars die in her veins.  
Wouldn't touch a wild rat  
but writes email through  
a rat's brain in Nylon city.

Says nature doesn't stand for anything.  
Receptor girls and boys  
make so much industrial noise  
I wish I would have stayed home.



Categories line up at the light  
    where two footed knowledge walks.  
There are animals white men can't see.  
Who is the gene genie that mothers the rat?

Hard hatted angry men  
    with the faces of wolves  
    rip through feral lands on machines.  
I like to write with the lights down low.  
Stranger, certified being,  
    come into my home.

## FOOD SECURITY

This is the potato that I worked so hard for,  
That I walked to the market for, that I paid for,  
That I carried home in my bag, that I peeled  
and steamed the way you like it.

This is the potato you never ate,  
So it sat on your plate  
While you filled your face  
With industrial shit  
in front of the TV.

This is the potato you blame,  
that I never bought again.

## HATS

I'm walking downtown and it's minus 15.  
I've got a hat for everything. I need my hat.  
Coming up the hill toward me, an older man,  
face battered, eyes me up. He's pushing a bike  
and shoots me a look. I can see he's on the job  
and looking for a break so we stop and talk  
about men who know how to make things.

He's wearing an ear flap skull cap, brain bucket,  
reflective vest, work gear, good gloves and boots.  
His bike's in useful shape.  
And off the axle, a welded ball joint bed frame  
with modular plywood cart,  
tiny oxy cutter saddled onside,  
everything right.

He's lugging a 30 gallon glass lined water tank  
salvaged from a wreck downtown,  
pushing it up the hill, living on welfare,  
worked all his life, it's obvious.

Gives his finger to the Premier. He's working  
for another, fixing houses for  
the ones who didn't make the grade,  
doing the real work.



## LAND SCHEMAS

Sometimes scandalized, always unfinished,  
disgraced and libeled for sure;  
possessing enormous machines  
while mouthing off about trust,  
colonizers are wired to scum.

I've heard enough of  
their denouncements and lies.  
They are undoing the heart,  
going in to cut.

The north moves north.  
This song is an article of evidence.  
Myths sustain the agenda,  
donuts are the fuel of ragers  
and fantasy is the glue.

There's grime on the streets  
and I want to know how  
they got the dirt on me.

Most leaves don't touch  
but some appear to like it.  
Power is against the good  
and I am a variant  
caught in a contradiction,  
modeled by another, needing to separate  
and grow distinct, to give up

and go back to the bush  
where love's spongy congress gathers cause.

At first glance into the heavens,  
I saw an unlikely elemental ancestry  
set in motion. The head and shoulders  
of a faceless charioteer drawn by stallion.

Who else but Pegasus could this be?  
So that I, the animal's husband,  
would then know  
the stem of such descent?

My father farmed, his brothers too, his father too.  
His hands husked chaff, instinctively he  
disliked weeds and this bad blood  
he saw was not his type and suddenly  
he was out of love for me.

There were fireflies in the pasture  
in the night and against the moon,  
multitudes of breeding and broody birds.

To confide in the earth is to bury,  
to whisper and shade,  
to hide in and cover with dirt.

Vessels are made of soil, mold, dust and clay.  
Away in the burrow out of earshot,  
the earthworm snuffles toward connexion,  
an intentional conductor  
zeroing in on the return path.

## SALMON

Nearby and side by side,  
they are not connected to you.  
They are individuals, singular creatures,  
earthlings like you.  
Don't hound them with hooks,  
pester or molest them.  
Some are late and some are early.  
Some are extinct and the rest are old.  
They pour out of the ocean.  
You can't send them back.  
Believe in them.  
Don't exaggerate their size or invest in them.  
Forget reliance. All you can do is guess.  
Don't agonize over them  
when they beat their brains out.  
You will put them off with your words.  
They have no opinions or answers  
and don't belong to you. They long for the depths.  
Stubborn and irritable, they have no appetite or thirst.  
They have faces and wear stripes.  
The dogma of ascent means nothing.  
Don't throw dirt on them.  
Under the sun, in this world,  
they stand on the bottom.  
Onlooker, gaze at this river and be thankful.



## THE SUICIDE ECONOMY

I was a poacher before I learned to be a guide.  
I used to be a guide. There's still a fringe of land  
away in the distance.

I don't know a thing about money  
but I know I've been skimmed  
by the supply chains.  
To get a grip on it, make a fist.  
To be happy, leave.

I had two gardens. The dark lords banned one,  
fenced the other and called it procedure.  
This isn't a happening when  
fleshy academics with lasers  
demonstrate the conversion of forests  
to garbage.

I'm not secure  
and I don't know a thing about impartial purpose  
or the objective range of binary data  
and offshore servers.

So I write poetry  
and keep my bees away  
from corporate manoeuvres —  
that way they can at least  
have a chance.

## THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Systematically

Fresh violence. There's a high risk  
the guidelines worked out last night  
aren't in order today. As a rule  
payments are heaviest in the morning.  
The system's nervous.  
It's all worked out  
so that depending on  
the length of the line-up  
and the design of the setup,  
assessments are made, collected  
and combined  
into an orderly tax called style.

Distorted

Mangled and bent,  
screwed up, doctored and  
distracted guy goes by  
making faces, muttering  
twisted meanings.  
Unlikely discordance:  
hit or miss  
dressed up deformity.

Information

Listen to these accounts even if  
you don't understand them.  
I'm an advance man. It's a fact.  
Some lore, some tips, some bits.

## THE JOURNEYMAN

I'm a working class poet, a child of farmers.  
I worked in the mills and sorted lumber.  
I never taught school and I'm not celebrated.  
Can't change that and can't change this.  
There wasn't money to send me to school.  
I know how to put up hay by hand, how to  
make my handles, how to sharpen and shape,  
how to join timbers where scholars don't live.  
Little is known of me. Only a few are like me.  
I'm Canadian and the author of these poems.  
I'm not invited to read in the universities.  
They don't know who I am. I learned to write  
in the middle of night after work was done.  
I'm thankful we didn't have a bible. Nothing  
to read but I knew I was a poet. None of us  
were merchants, none studied the law, none  
the healing arts. My father wanted to write.  
He sold the farm and we moved to the city.  
I found poetry there but don't know how  
I found it. I'll never be a sucky white boy.  
I was 58 or 59 when I wrote this in 1741.  
There were times I had no store food so I  
lived from the land. I'm an unregulated voice  
from the Nass. Alfred Purdy noticed me. I'm  
ingenuous, have genius and don't sing when  
the harp comes around. Remember my name.  
No one protects me. I owned my own boat  
and made my own home. That's why poetry.



## REMEMBER, SUPPOSE, SAY

We got more than we asked for  
when we turned back the clock.  
This is a story about detail,  
about how some loves cool and collapse  
as they expand.  
The idea takes getting used to  
but it all started  
in the form of an unexpected correspondence  
from across the valley.  
Nothing explains it  
but I closed the door and walked away  
until I couldn't be seen anymore.  
What happened, what force,  
what dark energy?  
What was going on  
before everything stopped working?  
In the afterglow, the encoded information  
of those early days raises new questions  
about getting around  
problems like remembering the question  
and getting the last laugh.  
I did good work back then,  
in the beginning.

THE HISTORY OF THE  
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# Barry McKinnon / IN THE MILLENNIUM: Prince George (part 1

*a man in himself is*  
*a city -*

beleaguered/belied    the entrance (*himself*,

he enters

canyons  
in Hades' hot air

memory of *that* travel  
*fear* to a sense of life ahead: *the literal city*

busted out - clearing forests/ water/ air

not form but    what

shapes

*the city*    a body  
to its  
soul -

down  
town tribes -



in their source of  
detachment, begin to be  
themselves again - *hunt/*

*history*, the millennial weight: no clear stream/or abode  
exists:

*these bulldozed souls*

no pity or remorse to equal what's imagined

handouts on 3rd/ the giveaway suits  
that clothe them.

*oh forest, oh bear - vestigial illumination / the*  
grins

in simple light

*they see*

what do *we* see so clearly in its lack

to see without image / articulation - a reason

malls fill/downtown empties /history (capital frontier  
without human hope: *this is the end, we sing* ( crows peck puke, buckles in the side  
walk/holes of asphalt, piles of blood

the man, the city - what parts in  
the metaphor, this *way* of dreaming - is the heart a down  
town / 69: the routes (bakery, bread, meat  
balls, a pickle and up 4th to

the Astoria ( beer - to the Bay, the Northern, Wally West, I.B. Guest &  
down to the corner - 2nd & George, the Canada, the blues,  
beer,

the sense of here/not here - this want of places to  
be, enter & make  
sagacious.

*libraries are for loafers*

no blame to local realities. nothing in the way of what doesn't exist,  
in the simple mercantile presumptions

*the smell of money* - the brushcut hero who cld make it

the local ethos *up*  
*before the rest* went to bed / with his bulldozer.

and in a dream of this world woke to

every one/every thing: *fuck or be fucked*

man a city: the female forest -

to imagine the hard/the soft (winter, cycles to summer spring & fall  
bleeding to the genderless human want of tenderness.

*root hog or die*

when a city becomes its coldest hearts  
we live in the illusion of its habitat:

the invisible/visible: the city you see/ did good in

becomes an old cliché in the toxic mill cloud that fills the bowl  
and drifts with the winds - a swirl of stink in the citizenry / penetrates the corpus while the  
corporate, that most visible as the source, least accounted for in the non existent public  
square.

*I can't breathe*

a man must speak, to the threat dismissed, diminished,  
coerced by need and want  
to sing : *they think they*  
*do me no harm.*

*the they. the who, the us* in the disintegrated  
disintegration - nothing can be known; its own hopeless  
statement - *the north / everywhere ( but not revealed -*

in this what? will we only know the hot day in mid  
July 69 into the stink, the heat, the Fraser  
bridge / 57 Plymouth packed,

*I want to go back*

to what humans imagine a version: here / the beer  
& coming out of the Barn into that heavy light decide,  
that moment, to stay.

the apt/penthouse - top floor Trojan Manor 300.00

*where do you think you're going? don't want youse types here.*

moved to 1902 Queensway across from Marty's ( shack - 100 a month ( now Assman's  
funeral



home -

*the city: a world*

you entered - : sensed body parts  
missing in the civic need the forces disallow - & that called specious

what saves us - a clarity / conditions born of fog/  
suspicion

the love and hate of uneasy  
marriage (man/woman - a city unto themselves

what is the source of this thinking? ambiguity, contradiction  
power, *that* hidden, conspiracies, pushed  
buttons and cliché, until our bodies' demotion to banishment.

*a shit hole.*

*when are you going to write something good*

its activity is also its own resistance: what  
to say: what subject, or image - what body part contain

the life / what weakness is strength when

the whole body vomits in nadir (the weakest  
now culled once defined: a man vomits

in shame that now the city can not be made

this rotten dark soul, a man

a metaphor, a language convinced of its own rhetoric easily believed (men (the city) its self /  
fooled

by little stakes/little power ( that those governed  
*men* will thrust their outlines - will sacrifice the rest. will  
save themselves

others (those sickest

grin

at any scheme sabotaged by its own impossibility - know the inventors require such false  
faith and fear

the city exists / knows itself/ cannot change

easily

oh corpus of belched noxious gas

oh corpus of the fruitless/oh corpus of malignment oh

generous corpus of the material world oh

industrial corpus behind the corpus oh corpus of the beautiful

& gentle wind oh corpus in our misaligned prayer oh corpus

of promise and care

*oh grid of light, muscled male*

stomp the tourist's head into the walk - that part psycho

path - the city staggers in a hoedown dance/wild

in iconic illusion of how it sees itself - dressed

to kill any thing in sight

arms of the suburbs to father illusion: conglomerate homo unity: turns place /  
to no place / same place  
to exist only in our attempt to define it

(off Queensway embarrassment, then disgust - teen hookers to cross thru  
the riven world displayed by its line between: *us*  
*and them*

little girls, the man, a city - /homeless

*why did you stay?*

the density of context peeled was revealed to a momentary  
sense of simplicity, that it cld be known, and therefore, the man  
*cld* know himself, being a city: *unto himself*, - its maps and routes, the air it breathed,  
capacious unbalance to imply the need for its  
opposite: nothing to go on - knowledge without proof /its energy.

to work  
a language in its attempt to equal  
the anxious swirl in an angular world of charts, graphs - the  
gizmoed patter claimed & believed as real - that any power required  
subservience to its whacko notions, be revealed as public sense: *not*  
*agreement, but truth of one's condition faced*: bloody head in its  
second of consciousness under the killer's boot - in metaphoric  
drama

*be allowed to live.*



in the city: Nechako, Fraser

*Husky, Canfor, PG Pulp, Northwood, Intercon, Lakeland, CN,*  
*city core*

body is thought

thru parking lot, plumes

/ trees,

/ polis / man



## CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

KEN BELFORD is an after post modern poem specialist working in additions, alterations and repairs. He is not a narrative clogger. Belford published *4th world poems* before (and after) the reformalist resurgence. He is an organic environmentalist with a background apart from academia. And he wanted his poems to be dry but it rained. Athletic, unconventional, political. His poems are uncivilized and are not a faithful resemblance. If language is a means of occupation then these are poems of dialect. His new book *ecologue* will be published by Harbour Press this spring.

MARGARET CHRISTAKOS is the author of *Excessive Love Protheses* (Coach House, 2002) and five other books. She is Writer in Residence at the University of Windsor for 2004/05.

TAMAS DOBOZY is an assistant professor of 20th Century American Literature at Wilfrid Laurier University. He is the author of two collections of stories, *When X Equals Marylou* (Arsenal Pulp Press) and *Last Notes* (forthcoming from HarperCollins, 2005). He has lived in Victoria, Vancouver, Montreal, Budapest, St. John's, and currently resides in the raging metropolis of Kitchener, Ontario.

GP LAINSBURY teaches at Northern Lights College in Fort St. John, British Columbia, though at present he is spending a sabbatical year in Calgary, working on a novel and a collection of short stories. "Scenario 4" forms part of a larger work alternately referred to as *Visions or Versions of the North*, much of which is available online at <<http://www.fsj.nlc.bc.ca/glainsbury/lainsb~2.htm>>.

BARRY MCKINNON is a long time resident and college teacher in Prince George, BC. His most recent collection is *The Centre: Poems*



1970 - 2000, published by Talonbooks. His poem "Bolivia/Peru" won the bpNichol chapbook award in 2004. He is presently working on a new book: *In the Millennium*.

GEORGE STANLEY lived in northern B. C. for fifteen years. *A Tall, Serious Girl: Selected Poems 1957-2000* was published by Qua Books, Jamestown RI, in 2003.

SIMON THOMPSON lives in Terrace, BC, and teaches English at Northwest Community College. He recently acquired Barry McKinnon's letterpress, and he intends to spend the rest of his life learning how to use it. His work has been published in *Event*, *Antigonish Review*, *Textual Studies in Canada*, and other journals.

SI TRANSKEN has been teaching in social work programs for eight years; she has a background in anti-poverty anti-racist feminist activism. Her doctorate is in Equity Studies/Sociology of Education but she is doing another MA in First Nations Studies/Creative Writing at UNBC. She is old white bush trash being recycled. She has edited collections of creative writing such as *This Ain't Your Patriarchs' Poetry Book* and *Outlaw Social Work*.

JASON WOOD is a Vancouver-based photographer who has exhibited his work at Dynamo Gallery, the Flower Factory, and Eugene Choo, among others. The photographs here were taken in the summer of 2000 during an airtrip from Edmonton to Yellowknife, the Great Bear Lake mine, Kugluktuk, various Dew Line sites, Cambridge Bay, Gjoa Haven (Ursuqtuq), Taloyoak, Tuktoyaktuk, Inuvik, Hay River, Fort Chipewyan, and back to Edmonton.

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