An abstract painting with a textured, expressive style. The upper portion is dominated by various shades of blue, from deep cerulean to lighter, almost white, tones, with visible brushstrokes and some white highlights. Below this, the composition is divided into horizontal bands of color. On the left, there are dark, almost black, horizontal strokes interspersed with lighter, yellowish-green and greyish tones. A vertical, light blue-green stroke runs down the center, acting as a focal point. To the right of this vertical stroke, there are more horizontal bands, primarily in shades of green and grey, with some reddish-brown and yellow accents. The overall effect is one of layered, textured brushwork, suggesting a landscape or a complex, multi-layered subject.

TCR

THE CAPILANO REVIEW

*... a full cup of semi-vowels
caught between nature and culture*

– Fred Wah

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12" x 12" |

THE CANADIAN REVIEW

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The Canadian Review is a quarterly journal of Canadian literature and culture. It is published by the Canadian Authors Association, a non-profit organization that promotes and supports Canadian writers. The journal is a platform for critical and creative writing, and it is a key resource for scholars and readers alike. The Canadian Review is a quarterly journal of Canadian literature and culture. It is published by the Canadian Authors Association, a non-profit organization that promotes and supports Canadian writers. The journal is a platform for critical and creative writing, and it is a key resource for scholars and readers alike.

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Roger Farr / "SURPRISE, UNPREDICTABILITY, AND IMPROVISATION": An Interview with Fred Wah

Fred Wah is an acclaimed writer of poetry, fiction, and cultural criticism. Born in Saskatchewan, he grew up in the Kootenays. During the 60s, Wah was a founding editor of the poetry newsletter *TISH* at UBC, later doing graduate work at SUNY Buffalo. In the 80s, he founded the Kootenay School of Writing at David Thompson University in Nelson, BC, and with Frank Davey, he founded *SwiftCurrent*, the first online literary magazine. His recent books include *Diamond Grill*, a biofiction about growing up in a small-town Chinese-Canadian café; *Faking It: Poetics and Hybridity*, a collection of critical writing that won the Gabrielle Roy Prize for writing on Canadian literature; and a chapbook, *Isadora Blue*. Along with his partner Pauline Butling, Wah's work was recently the subject of two special issues of *Open Letter*, "Fred Wah: Alley Alley Home Free." An influential figure in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Calgary for many years, Wah is now retired and resides in Vancouver, where he continues to write, teach, collaborate, and organize.

In the Spring of 2006, Wah was *The Capilano Review* Writer-in-Residence at Capilano College. During this time he gave a public reading, met with writers, visited classes, and presented his essay-poem "Pop Goes the 'Hood: Writing and Reading the Neighborhood," which was followed by a panel discussion with Ryan Knighton, Aurelea Mahood, and Stan Persky.

In the following interview, conducted on May 17th, 2006 in his home in Strathcona, Wah answers questions about ecopoetics, the influence of Charles Olson, defamiliarization, linguistics, poetry's social and political agency, his collaborative practice, avant garde writing in China, and the Kootenay School of Writing.

I thought we might begin with Pictograms from the Interior of BC (1975), which was my first contact with your work. These early works seem concerned with what today might be called "ecopoetics." Is that correct? Later I learned that this was something of a pivotal book for you.

My early work is certainly permeated with a sense of place or earth, land or whatever and yes, I guess that's been up until pretty much *Breathing My Name With a Sigh* (1981). The first twenty years of my writing were focussed on *place* – growing up in the interior, working in the mountains, working in the forest, so yes, then, *Pictograms* was not so much a culmination – it's hard to say why it was a change or pivotal place.

You mentioned somewhere – I can't remember where off the top of my head – that this was the first time that your family enters your work, and fuses with what I see as a strong ecological sensibility, whereas your earlier work is often engaged with a largely non-human landscape. But then you mentioned "cousins" and your father. So it seems that Pictograms acts as a point of conjunction from the predominantly natural – nature being the non-human landscape – to a more social terrain.

That's true, and in a sense, although I didn't know it at the time when I was working on *Pictograms*, that word "cousins" was sort of rubbing around in the back somewhere, so in a sense, it was a kind of ambience of time where a lot of stuff about race and the bio all became possible. I didn't so much leave place as discover this new territory, in a sense, of poetic or intellectual territory that up till *Breathing My Name With a Sigh*, I hadn't really cottoned on to. But there's a whole bunch of things that come into that and part of it is that it ties in with Olson, because I did a little thing called *Earth* (1974) for the Curriculum for the Study of the Soul, which was Olson's curriculum. Jack Clark and other Institute people had picked this up and Olson assigned me earth – you know, "Wah does earth," "Blaser does Blake" – he had this line-up of people.

That's pretty daunting – "you take earth"!

I kind of crumbled under it and really blanked out for about three years. (Laughter)
These hard little turds finally came out!

Is the ecological still something that you consider? Are you still interested in that?

Oh yes, very much. I still do some stuff on that. I haven't done much in the last ten years, but it's still there because we live part of the year in the Kootenays. "Eco" wasn't around, or "eco-poetics." Talking to you in 2006, and talking to younger writers, frequently I find it difficult and sometimes frustrating to try to explain myself, or try to position myself in the context of your sense of the recent history of poetry or writing. I came to the possibility of writing about place through Snyder in a poem that Cid Corman published called "Riprap." It's a little poem about laying stones, and I had done that ... and I thought "Geeze! This guy can actually write a poem about something I had actually done!"

But in a sense, all of my writing has come out of *locating*, come out of a resistance to the mainstream and this ambivalent position I felt myself in as a kid – part Chinese and part white – in a very different society from the one we live in now: a racist, small town place, trying to find ways to work out of that. So that's what *TISH* really saw: here were these kids not from Vancouver but from outside Vancouver – a class-based group of people looking for ways to resist the so-called "mainstream." And there was no mainstream "Canadian." The mainstream was stuff we'd get in high school poetry books – Wordsworth, Eliot if we were lucky, but just British/European sensibility. So the American – that really opened up in the late 50s early 60s. And Snyder's writing about working on fire lookouts, which I had done, I thought "Wow! This is great! I can write about what I do!" (Laughter) So I did. I turned to writing about what I did, and happily, in many ways, the poetics around then reinforced the possibility of doing that: including things like projective verse and Creeley's sense of language being immediate, and so a lot of that opened up. I know that for you and a lot of your contemporaries, you see Olson as phallogocentric, as you said in your email. I mean of course, it's true that, intellectually, you look back, and there it is. Coming at it from the other end, for me, it was all new territory.

I was introduced to Olson more or less at the same time as language poetry, so critiques are there immediately. But what's interesting is how you've recast Olson's poetics through race and hybridity. Which of Olson's concepts did you find richest for that work?

I studied Olson and Creeley and read all those people in the 60s, but I read a lot of other people too and by the 70s I knew Olson and the Black Mountain people backwards. And I also knew the Language writers during the 70s – *Open Letter* and all the

Canadian stuff – so there was a huge range of possibilities poetically. And the “race writers,” if you like to call them, the whole race-writing thing had to find a poetic discourse that would work, and feminist poetics had just happened right then, re-territorializing, re-claiming, finding a language that some of that could operate in.

But I guess a big term for me, and one that McCaffery and I argued endlessly about – and he would shudder at this term – was “proprioception,” which was a term that I heard first from Olson. And of course Warren Tallman picked it up and he elaborated on it in a more literary way. But that sense of *placing* – it’s just a stupid little thing like the breath line. I mean there was the breath and body... ok, that makes sense, and poetry up to then had been silent, so in 1960 – oral poetry? Whoohoo! I mean read out loud! And paying attention to the breath, to the breath, the body... and of course the naiveté of doing that without the benefit of the theoretical discourse of thirty years later. It was naïve at the same time as informative. And I certainly understand the intellectual problems with that humanistic positioning and centering of the body, and the “I”, and I understand the problems – discursive problems, at least, if not social ones. But that’s been fun to work through too, and how to work through the whole question of race. In the early 80s, I remember Bowering saying “Oh come on, are you on that race band wagon? You’re not Chinese!” He’d known me for 20 years and had never registered any of that kind of concern – my concern. I probably hadn’t registered a lot of it myself – I’d been pushing it aside.

Have you gone back to Olson’s work to look at race there? How does he configure race in his work?

He doesn’t. I mean, somebody did a book – was it Michael Davidson maybe? – I’m not sure, but somebody did an analysis of American poets’ “race quotient,” if you like, and Olson came out near the top, compared to other people like Bukowski (laughter) or ...

Bukowski came out at degree zero?

I went to school in the States. I was in Buffalo. It was black. Well, Olson and the Black Mountain poets were pretty open to black artists, black writers – although Leroi Jones and Ed Dorn had a big falling-out over race. But Olson and I didn’t talk about race. I have a little piece in *Diamond Grill* where I talk about Olson. He always called me “War,” a New England thing: “Wahr you should go to war” ... “Let’s nuke those Chinks!” During the Vietnam War, right? But that wasn’t so much race as it was just kind of... I don’t know, really – what to call it? This kind of Americanism that Creeley

and Olson exuded, so many, particularly of those mid-century Americans ... I mean, Olson's whole point was *America*. He wanted to bring America into attention, right? Sort of like Williams, like Pound-Williams-Olson. That whole thing. I find it a bit much.

Aggressive?

Aggressive, and dismissive of other nations, or other places. But it's not "racist." I never thought that Olson was racist. He would be very open. At the same time all of those guys were pretty sexist too, you know based in some sense of a male – white, American male – image. They all came out of that pre-70s change, I think. So it wasn't race, it was this kind of ultra-nationalism that shook me, and I couldn't wait to get out of the States because of that! At the same time I understood and kind of went along with it. It's like, how do you claim jazz if you're a white musician in the States, and you have to, because it's part of you. I have a book here that I want to pass on to you, by Jack Clark. I don't know if you know Jack Clark's work.

Not really.

Jack was a very close friend – an absolute wholesome disciple and took it all in. A lot of it was very patronizing, but intellectually fascinating. I mean Olson opened my eyes to mythology in a way that just blew me away. Not that I know a lot about mythology, but that sense of being able to read European mythology without getting a burr up my ass – "fucking Europeans," you know? (Laughter) Here we go again. I think that so-called "ecopoetics" is related to Olson, because Olson was *place*. And his poem, when he was here in Vancouver in '63 – one of the Vancouver sessions – "Place and Names" – it just blew me away. I mean this is a very difficult poem, but Olson and Duncan – I guess Duncan a bit more – talking about this stuff ... yeah, I thought, I live in a *place*! I guess I always felt guilty that I didn't live in the world out there, you know? Toronto or New York ... So that was a big relief, not just for myself, but for many other people.

But regarding your question about Olson – some of the things that are most important to me about him – his poetry was fascinating and I was very interested in his compositional method in *Maximus* – life-long, historical, place-oriented – and his language, how he jumped around in the language, and no-one else was doing that then. But it was pieces like "Proprioception" that were most important to me, and "Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn" – that incredible, kind of simple scholarship of "do one thing" and everything else will come in, and notions like that. And pieces

like "Poetry and Truth" – I thought they were pretty brilliant at the time – poetry and truth? – I had never thought about bringing ethics into poetry.

You also mention in one of your "Strangle" essays in Faking It (2000) that you inherited a certain oppositional stance, or "resistance," from Olson. One particular idea you talk about in that context is "estrangement." You conclude the essay "Strangle One" by writing "ostranenie is a compositional stance." What did you mean by that?

Well I guess in a simple way for me it's Keats' notion of "negative capability" – the ability to recognize mysteries, doubts, and uncertainties. So just that practice of looking at things *askance* – looking at things with eyes half closed, or half open, to try to find a different detail or a different profile of things, and being open to it. Not being right, but looking for "our disgraces are our graces" – Olson said something like that – you know, the mis-step as the possible way to do it. I've always liked that in language. I've always liked that about the poetic line, of the structure of language, how you can jump the track. I love that in prose poetry: jumping the sentence and jumping the phrase and jumping the expectation that printed language places before you.

In some places in that essay you seem to have reservations about estrangement as well. I'm interested in this in terms of the politics of avant-garde writing and the role of defamiliarization and estrangement there. Are you concerned about the old adage about "limiting your audience" by using high-degrees of defamiliarization?

I guess that leads into the notion of the difficult in poetry. It's interesting. You mentioned that you thought I had reservations about it. I don't know that I do. I mean I guess we all do. We make choices about clarity and difficulty and playfulness and development somehow in compositional practice.

You quote Simon Watney: "the devices of ostranenie [became] reified... they became vulnerable both to that modernist aestheticism which values the innovative purely in stylistic terms for its own sake and also to the totalitarian elements within the Romantic vision which would seek to iron out all human differences in the name of Art, the Proletariat, Truth or whatever. Thus making strange ceased to respond to the demands of specific historical situations, and collapsed into stylization" (Watney qtd. in Wah 36-37). Basically, making strange for the sake of making strange. And you respond by saying, "yeah, but this is still an important compositional stance."

But when you introduce that other perspective, that critique, I heard you saying that there's a debate here, that there are limitations to this device.

Well, it becomes facile. I think I picked up on Watney because of his discussion of photography, and I agree with him. I agree that stylistically it can become too facile. Both of us know this from teaching – you propose a way to do something, and the student runs off. I guess I mean it more as a compositional stance, as one of many compositional stances that one can take in writing. For example, in your own work, you've taken a formal stance toward the sonnet as an ingredient, or as an element, that occupies our attention. And many other writers have too. But it's not all you're gonna do! (Laughter)

I hope not.

So sometimes you might propose to a group of students, "Well, let's write a sonnet." I don't think the purpose of your current project is just to produce sonnets.

No. In parts of SURPLUS I have something I want to argue, and it seemed that it just wasn't possible to do that when formal estrangement was taken to the nth degree. It's a problem. I'm interested in how other people negotiate that.

I think you use it. I think you use these observations or these senses being there with the language and you use them as elements to work through. And I think making strange or playing around with the language of perception in that way is something that anyone can do, but to make that "the" objective ... I don't want to make it the objective, that's why I say it's a compositional stance. It's not an objective. That's why I agree with Watney. When it becomes stylized – I mean Jackson Pollock can produce a Jackson Pollock, but so can any number of other gorillas and it's not going to be a Jackson Pollock – somehow it doesn't quite work. That's a kind of simple thing, and it may be why I don't so much *resist* estrangement – it's just there. It was and has been, I think, a very useful notification, if you like, or a tension for all of us in the last 50 years, to pick that up out of Russian Formalism. But for me, it came via Warren Tallman in Poetry 406, reading this letter by John Keats, who mentions "negative capability" – 1836 or something like that!

"Being in uncertainties."

Yeah. And without Coleridge's "reaching after fact and reason." Wow! This guy's really onto something! And I remember trying that out with Creeley, and Creeley helping a lot. He was a great reader of Keats and Coleridge and could talk a lot about them and he helped a lot in terms of trying to figure through that negative capability. Of course it fits perfectly with the kind of North American sensibility of free form, improvisation, jazz. My compositional roots are in jazz. I studied music, and that's what I come to language with: the sense of surprise, unpredictability, and improvisation.

Speaking of language, could you tell me about Henry Lee Smith Junior?

One of the big things that happened to us at UBC in the late 50s early 60s was a guy named Ron Baker. He ended up becoming Head of the English Department at Simon Fraser. He was the first Head of the English Department there, and he's the guy who hired Ralph Maud and Lionel Kearns. Ron Baker taught Linguistics at UBC, and he turned us – Bowering, Kearns, myself and Frank Davey, everybody – on to linguistics.

Formal linguistics?

Yes. And this was all just totally new stuff. And Baker was actually quite open to the whole poetry scene around UBC in the early 60s so he kind of played along with our interest in the breath line – what is a breath line, linguistically, and the whole notion of phonemes and morphemes. Lionel Kearns got really into it, and did that "Stacked Verse" thing. He influenced us all. Anyway, he turned me on to Henry Lee Smith and George Trager, linguists who happened to be teaching at the State University of New York at Buffalo. They had published this little book on phonetics. That was just fascinating. I went to Albuquerque for my first year of graduate work with Creeley hoping to study linguistics because New Mexico was supposed to be hot on doing work around Hopi and Navajo and stuff like that, but their linguist was away that year so you couldn't take a course in linguistics! (Laughter) And then when I went to Buffalo on this poetry fellowship thing, as a poet, there I am with Henry Lee Smith Junior, who teaches linguistics. I went to him the very first day and said "I'm a poet. I'm fascinated by what you're doing. Can I study linguistics with you?" "Oh yeah, yeah, come on in he said..." I worked with him for about three years on linguistics. Hard bloody stuff!

Were many people doing that, working with descriptive linguistics and poetry?

No, not too many people were doing that. I was the only one from the group at Buffalo who was doing that. But Creeley was a great help too, because Creeley had read a lot of the American descriptive linguists and was up on it. And Duncan, he was into it. He had read the stuff. At that time it was all kind of new, this “science of linguistics,” this science of language – not necessarily an anthropological approach. Of course, later came the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis – the anthropological stuff all got very interesting and all tied in with the mythology that Olson was doing. It’s all very connected. I remember when I got my first teaching gig at Selkirk College, that’s what I taught: linguistics. I did my degree in linguistics and literature. It was a combination degree, so I taught first- and second-year. They had linguistics courses that transferred to UBC at the time.

I guess linguistic approaches to poetry – critical approaches, that is – I guess it’s really different for a poet to study linguistics, and then to read their own work through that frame. But the linguistic approach to studying poetry has fallen into disrepute because of its association with New Critical formalism. But it didn’t have to be – there are ways of using linguistics in socially relevant ways.

Well linguistics itself, linguistics as a discipline within the institutions, changed during the 60s and early 70s into deep structure and Jakobson’s and Chomsky’s work, so there was a wider range of possibilities there. I remember my very first so-called sabbatical at Selkirk College in 1973. We went down to Berkeley because I wanted to upgrade some linguistics courses, and I sat in on Robyn Lakoff’s linguistics class at Berkeley, and her husband George Lakoff was also a linguist. He was the more interesting of the two, because he got into metaphor, and so that got interesting in terms of the social aspect of language. But I was, right up until the late 70s, pretty hot on linguistics. In fact, *Pictograms* was my proposal for my sabbatical. I was going to translate some Lake Salish stories. I proposed that to the College and they accepted it and when I went to do the research I discovered there were no Lake Salish texts! (Loud laughter)

Had they given you the money already?

Yah! But I happily discovered John Corner’s *Pictographs in the Interior of British Columbia* and thought, well, those are the only texts they’ve got, and got into that.

[Pauline Butling enters] In a way I think linguistics was important not just for you, but for everybody at UBC. [PB]

At UBC, yes. But I was the only one who went on with it. [FW]

Daphne went on and studied translation. It was such an eye-opener. We all had to take Ron Baker's linguistics of Anglo-Saxon as part of the MA program, and Ron Baker's class in structural linguistics was just fabulous in terms of that whole approach to language. We had to read Saussure in French, but he synthesized it for us. [PB]

I saw your mention of Smith, and other linguists, and I thought that was really interesting because the period has been described, culturally, as "the turn to language," and here are all these linguists quietly in the background...

And anthropologists. [PB]

... teachers whose work hasn't really been written into the history in the way that other figures' work has.

I think it's because people came at it in such a different way. But the language thing in the Berkeley area had a lot to do with the Lakoffs, for example, and Spicer was a linguist too. Ron Baker, who was head of English at Simon Fraser, tried to hire Spicer, but he died. So linguistics is a really interesting thread through all that... [PB]

I have another question that's linked to linguistics and the turn to language, and estrangement, which Reg Johanson and I raised in our review of Poets' Talk. One of the things I was really struck by when I was reading the interviews collected there, was how many writers describe the interface between poetry and politics along lines of consciousness or cognition. Estrangement kept coming up over and over again, in various ways. It was very pronounced in the interview with Erin Moure. In your interview Fred, you touched on it a little bit when you talked about the way you came to consciousness at a certain point in the 70s around race and those possibilities. But I was interested because in a lot of the interviews, interviews that span several generations of writers, the link between writing and politics is usually articulated through consciousness. I started to wonder if that was the edge, or limit, of poetry's political agency? Or is there a way of talking about poetry's political agency that doesn't rely on consciousness, on psychology? Not that it's

bad, of course. But it does seem like just one particular discourse or approach. So, is there such a thing as poetic politics that's not rooted in consciousness?

Say it in a different way. I'm not sure I know what you mean.

When writers read linguistics, they often start to adapt various linguistic strategies, such as defamiliarization. But defamiliarization is used specifically to extend perception, to extend consciousness, to reconfigure objects in the mind. It seems that when people talk about how poetry has political agency, it's always in terms of consciousness, or cognition. Moure talks literally about brain synapses and various effects that linguistic devices have on consciousness (Butling and Rudy 59-60). It's really fascinating stuff, but it struck me that perhaps we had no way of talking about the political possibilities of poetry outside of a certain model of consciousness. Does poetry have any political role to play other than causing "effects" "on" readers, other than changing perception? Sorry, it's a very abstract question...

I sense that it is. I'm just trying to get my head around it. Let me just change the term a little bit. I've always been rather uncomfortable with the term "the political." In poetry, it seems a little loose. So maybe *social* effects? Or as Louis Cabri articulated to me, "the social poem." Once I realize that the poem can be a social event, or has that possibility, and I start asking myself how can it do that, or what are the best ways for it to be that, to be social, then of course that's consciousness – that's once again a kind of attention that starts to occupy the poem. So I don't know that it can be done. I guess if it's unconscious, or if consciousness is not part of that positioning of yourself in relation to the political or the social, then it becomes [long pause] ... almost surreptitious.

One of the most fascinating debates I ever heard was at the David Thompson University Centre around 1981 or '82. We set up a conference there called "Writing and Revolution," and invited a whole bunch of people, and we had a panel with Margaret Randall, Nicole Brossard, Stan Persky, and maybe Brian Fawcett. But the two most interesting people were Margaret Randall and Nicole Brossard. Randall had just been working in Guatemala and had collected all these stories by Guatemalan women and was publishing them. Her point was that these women needed to be empowered to tell their stories, and we needed to hear their stories, which is true. But in the other sense the stories were all very simplistic, and predictable, both in their content and in the writing itself.

The narrative frames existed prior to the writing of the stories.

Yes. And for Margaret Randall, understandably, that was the only way she could see of translating or getting their stories out there, making them accessible. Then Brossard comes in. Well, she disagreed with that approach as a feminist, and her point was “For me, I have to change the language before I can enter. I have to change the language to make it more mine.” So there were two kinds of – not necessarily oppositional but two very divergent points of view about how to “get in,” you might say. I don’t know if using the word “consciousness” is right, but how do you get your consciousness up front? How do you make it apparent? How do you make it *there*? Aesthetically, I sympathize more with Brossard’s approach than with the idea that if it’s political, then it has to be “a political poem.” Somebody talked once about Gary Geddes being the most political poet in Canada because he had written some “political poems,” because he had written a book about some political topic or subject, so he was therefore “a political poet.” In a sense that’s fair enough. If you’re writing poems about politics, about the world in that way, then I guess they are political poems. But for me a political or a social poem is a poem that tries to engage those sensibilities with a language, and with some possibility of generating more – I was going to say “awareness,” but maybe the word consciousness really ruffles me – I guess I’ve never known what it is ... I had morphine in the hospital yesterday and I felt pretty light-headed! (Laughter)

It’s hard to have consciousness of something other than consciousness. It’s just something I’ve been interested in, that I’ve noticed. I started to wonder if poetics, since the 60s, was kind of a branch or tendril of psychology (perhaps this is reductive), because it constantly comes back to questions of consciousness or awareness and this is especially pronounced with identity politics, or identity theory. Take someone like Fanon, a key figure in that, who was a Lacanian psychoanalyst. Often when people are talking about identity in theoretical terms, or in terms of their writing, it’s in terms of consciousness, subjectivity, and recognition. So it struck me that the discourse of psychology and perhaps cognitive science was very, very powerful. But it’s only one particular discourse. I’ve been trying to think of other ways of configuring the social effects of poetry, I suppose, in ways that don’t always come back to consciousness, to the mind.

Well the term in linguistics that I was introduced to with Henry Lee Smith Junior – I won’t get into the linguistics thing – but one end of his tripartite linguistics model, which is associated with an anthropological model of language, is simply *acoustics* – physical acoustics. And at the other end is what he called “cosmology and attention.”

In other words, our world of meaning and the construction of meaning in our world has to do with what linguists are calling cosmology and attention – or world view and attention – what you pay attention to. Of course, we only attend to what we attend to, and what we don't, we don't know. I've always felt a little more at ease with *attention*, in the sense that it's what I'm looking at. "Consciousness" has been more amorphous. So in a social or political poem it might be, even to the simplistic way of thinking of it, "a topic."

I did a piece last year on the neighbourhood, "Pop Goes the 'hood," where I wanted to take on, in a poem, certain senses of this notion of "neighbourhood" that were flying around in our papers and our city. I don't know if it was a successful piece or not. It's a poetic essay. I chose a form, I chose a way to try to get into it, but it occupied my attention for months, and I don't think it's a poem that's just sort of "about" the neighbourhood; I think it's a poem that also exercises a little bit of language, and it's a more accessible poem than the others, because it was more intentionally, in a sense, social. But when Louis [Cabri] talks about the social poem, he would look at a poem by Zukofsky or Oppen and talk about why it is social in the context of literary history and whether the position of that writer, an American Jew, is trying to operate through this maze of linguistic expectations. So his sense of the social – I'm probably skewing Louis' very intelligent analysis of the social poem – is that it's an engaging and complicated thing that isn't simply "about" the social or "about" the political. It's not topical. The writers who I'm most interested in are writers who try to pay attention to that possibility of the poem. When I teach creative writing sometimes I say, "Well, it's a nice poem, but can it make a better world?" (Laughter) Why bother writing poetry unless you're going to make a better world with it? Not totally tongue in cheek. It's provocative. And I don't think any of us think that Watten or Silliman or any of the so-called social poets of the 70s and 80s came up with any answers. I waited after 9/11 for those guys to say something. I looked, I watched, I waited – nada. Not a peep. Other people were talking, and then it turns out that people like Juliana Spahr and Fanny Howe and Jennifer Moxley, some of the women writers: they were the ones who were the first to respond with a political and social consciousness.

That's interesting... I also noticed in Poets' Talk that many of the writers of colour, in particular Marie Baker and Dionne Brand, talked about their writing specifically in the context of how it related to various social movements. Marie Baker talked about how her writing was linked to Red Power, for example. I thought it was interesting that there you see a direct link to a political

struggle occurring outside of the literary sphere. It seems that it is often writers of colour who are articulating that connection, that poetry is linked to actual social movements.

Yes. But I think you've got to realize that someone like Marie, she's really put there. We put her there: "You be our aboriginal interesting writer." And of course she responded. That is a social context that is very important to her and that's what she's writing on. But in a sense, I think we pigeon-hole writing that way. Dionne is an interesting case in point. She's very much a spokesperson for a political sensibility – a more social political sensibility – black, racially-based responsibility. At the same time, she goes and makes a film about Adrienne Rich. Not a poet I've paid a lot of attention to, though she's a fine poet, a good writer and is politically aware as an American woman writer, but other American women writers are also politically aware. So with Dionne, is not just *that*. And I think if Marie had more of an opportunity she would be seen as more than that, more than "a race writer," or "a native writer."

In Faking It you wrote a piece on Chinese avant-garde poetry, and did an interview with Leung Ping-Kwan. I think it was from the mid-90s. Are you still in touch with people there?

No, not really, I didn't keep in touch with many of them. I did for a couple of years, but that passed. That was a project I got involved with in the early- to mid-90s. There was a lot of attention being paid in American poetry magazines to translating the new avant garde in China, the "Originals," Language poets from Nanjing and Suzhou. It was actually, I think, a conference – maybe the Blaser conference – where there was a poetry table set up. I saw a book there about the Originals. I bought it, and was fascinated by it, partly because Jeremy Prynne, whom I know, was involved with this, and I'd known Jeremy had been going to China in the summer and spending a great deal of time there. I was pretty fascinated by this project, and also the claim that they had this group called the language poets. At the same time I had met and talked with Yunte Huang in Buffalo. He was a graduate student who now teaches in California. Yunte had been talking about an orientalist approach to translating the Chinese poets. What the Americans were translating, what the impact of translating these Chinese poets was, was to deliver a kind of revolutionary, anti-communist message, to reify the American sense that there are revolutionaries in China. So I got a grant to go to China and spend a month interviewing these poets, meeting with them and talking with them. But it didn't continue much past that. It was primarily around the sense of how we in North America appropriate or assimilate others for our own uses – to placate

our own sense of the world. So it was translation I was into. I'm not a translator, but I was interested in the process of how some of these translations occurred. For example, I don't know if you know that book *The Originals*, or the guy who did most of the translations – Jeff Twitchell. As it turns out, the Chinese helped him with the translation. He did the cribs. He worked with their stuff and turned it into available English. Fair enough, but he didn't translate them. It was kind of a weird process. And then Hank Lazer and Charles Bernstein and James Sherry went over to China and went to Nanjing & Suzhou. Yunte had arranged this and they did readings around the Yangtze and then there was this publication and translating that into Chinese, this kind of back and forth thing between the Americans and these Chinese writers. But most of these writers, post-cultural revolution writers, were actually quite concerned with this politically and aesthetically.

They rejected the "Language" label, didn't they?

Well, not really. They didn't really know what it was. In fact the writers I met in Nanjing and Suzhou had never seen the book. I came down on Jeremy and the guy who printed the bloody thing and Jeremy sort of apologized. I still don't know if they ever got a copy of the book. I had my copy and I wasn't going to leave my copy with them! (Laughter) They were excited to be published in English, but they'd never seen it. So it's that kind of appropriation that I found very objectionable.

What constitutes "the avant garde" in China, from your experience, and how does such writing circulate, in terms of cultural networks?

Well in China, many of the poets are quite international. We don't get that sense here, particularly in Canada, but Yu Jian, a poet in south-western China, is sort of an Allen Ginsberg; he doesn't write like Ginsberg – I mean a Whitmanesque, oratorical kind of writer. He travels through Europe and South America, gets invited around, publishes in magazines all over the world and is translated; he's pretty well out there and available. And there are less well-known poets in Shanghai and a few of them have gotten in trouble. They're not part of the official Federation of Chinese Writers. They wouldn't allow these upstarts in. These are writers who, because they are more international, are more aware of what's going on globally, in terms of other "revolutionary voices." But those Chinese writers have been, since the end of the cultural revolution, in a really difficult position, trying to work out how they are going to be, quote/

unquote, “Chinese Poets,” and what do they want to use as Chinese poets. There’s huge, immense history – literary history – to draw on, and at the same time they’ve been trying to westernize. Frequently T.S. Eliot is as far as they would have read of the 20th century. And then a few of them who made contact with Hank and Charles and myself published in a few magazines, got picked up by some American magazines.

When I saw the Originals book I thought it seemed strange to export this poetics to China. Imagine if a book turned up in Canada where a certain group of writers were described in some term that was developed in China for literary historical reasons. That exchange is pretty problematic.

Most of the poets in that language book were pretty interesting in the sense that they had a professor at Nanjing University, Zhang Ziquing, a wonderful guy, who had done a lot of work on North American poetry, had written a lot on it in Chinese, and had introduced a lot of western poetry to many young Chinese people. So these were poets who were like his students who had gotten into it and met this guy Jeff Twitchell who was teaching there. He introduced them to some British poets. Jeremy Prynne still goes to China and talks to these people. Somebody was telling me that Jeremy can now speak Mandarin pretty fluently. So he goes and talks to them. I think that’s wonderful. At the same time, why? He doesn’t translate or reproduce them. That whole concern with picking up other cultural baggage and repositioning it, I find it problematic. It’s usually because the writers want some representation from that culture, they want to satisfy their own understanding or the world, or frequently, with poetry, it’s “gee! This is pure poetry!” It doesn’t have to be social, it doesn’t have to be political, it can just be nice little lakes and mists and bridges.

You’ve done a lot of collaborations with visual artists, and I was curious to hear about those – how you initiate them, and what the process looks like.

That’s been going on now for fifteen years. Other than things like *Diamond Grill* (1996) or *Faking It*, most of the work I’ve done is collaborative, like the project I’m working on now for Talon. It started in Calgary with people asking me to collaborate with art projects, partly because Pauline was teaching at the Alberta College of Art, and also because the artists in Calgary are a little more open to hearing poetry than around here, it seems. So I got asked to do a couple of things and – someone’s always come to me and said “Would you be interested in doing this?” And I’ve found it

fascinating. I loved the one I did with Bev Tosh – a series of 50 paintings. Here was a painter whom I'd never met and she phoned me and said "I've read some of your writing and I really like it and I've been doing these paintings and I need text. Would you come and have a look?" I'm not an artist, but I got really interested in what she was doing and the story behind them, and the problems of working with the human figure, how to work with this problematic form. What engaged me was first of all the actual material. Like how do you get text onto an 11 inch by 3 foot piece of Tyvek? I became fascinated by the materiality of working with the paintings. And then I did a thing a few years ago with some photographers in Mexico. What I was interested in there was the practice – what was going on. "Ok, you're making a photograph. How do you make a photograph? How do you reproduce it? How do you print it?" What are the elements that they're going through? A lot of talk, I loved the talk. Henry Tsang and I did this thing for "Pop Goes the 'hood," because Miko Hoffman of the Powell Street Festival invited us to and we agreed to it. We talked for hours and hours and hours, and it had nothing to do with the final project. Finally, about a month before, it was like "God, what are we going to do?" (Laughter) And we got something together and I worked with Henry and was fascinated by how he worked in video and learned a lot about that.

I love the collaborations. Since I've been working on this new manuscript for Talon, that's pretty much all that I've done. Since *So Far* (1991), I haven't done a lot of other work. I'm interested particularly in the notion of image, image/text. I've always been interested in that. When I got the Governor General's Award in the mid-80s – it was 5,000 bucks – I said to Pauline "We're gonna blow this town. We're going away – we're going to Paris." I'd always wanted to go to Paris. I didn't know there was a tax on the Award! But anyway we went to Paris for three months and it was wonderful. I decided that in order to handle the art in Paris I was going to limit myself to art that had image text. So each week I would scout out what galleries, what shows had image text, and those were the ones that I would spend my time going to. Fascinating. I loved it.

I wanted to ask you one last question, about the Kootenay School of Writing. When Mark Nowak was in town recently, we had a reading group based on his essay "Neoliberalism, Collective Action, and the American MFA Industry." At the end of the essay, he calls on writers to adopt a kind of two-step program, or platform, and he uses KSW as an example of this. The first step – and again this has to do with effective resistance to neo-liberalism as it manifests within culture – is that writers have to organize themselves autonomously from various "bureaucratic, institutional frameworks" (23) including academia and official cultural institutions. So that's

the first step – de-linking “the writers’ workshop.” The second step is to “rearticulate” the writer’s workshop to “the rank and file” and to “popular struggles” – his terms. We talked a bit about it. People there, mostly KSW collective members, seemed to think that KSW had partially succeeded in the first step, the de-linking, but had completely failed in the second one, ie., re-linking the organization to local or popular struggles. So I was curious – you’ve recently re-joined the collective. You were there at the very beginning, left to teach at Calgary, then came back and are now working with the collective again. What do you think about the KSW’s current role? Do you see it functioning in Mark’s terms? What does it offer, do you think, as a politically engaged cultural organization?

Well, Mark’s idealism vis-à-vis the struggle against neo-liberalism is admirable. But I don’t think KSW has succeeded in either of those steps! (Laughter) Since I’ve been in the collective, we’ve always struggled with “how do we get the money?” We’re always going to the city, the province, the Canada Council to bring in the money, so it’s very institutionalized. In a sense, we’ve been a little bit lazy in investigating ways out of that. And in the second regard of relinking ... [pause] well, there was a fight within KSW ...

Really? A fight at KSW? (Laughter)

I wasn’t around. I was up in the Koots or in Calgary. Basically there was a fight around race. Certain members of the collective thought there should be more engagement with race. I think this was in the late 80s, when there was a strong sense of “let’s deal with this race thing,” so some collective members thought that they should engage more with the racial community in Vancouver, while others didn’t. There was a bit of a break over that. Since I’ve been back, three years now, and from my observations over the years, I’d say no, KSW hasn’t really engaged anything other than trying to work out some possibilities for its own membership, which is fair enough.

What’s the problem, do you think? Do the contingencies of keeping the place running, having to get money, etc., impose constraints on the organization?

They’re not serious constraints, they’re just part of where we are complicit in working within that system of arts grants, just as anyone else is. Fair enough. That’s what’s there. I’ve got no problem with that. I’m a citizen, I live in this country – I think that’s fair enough. I do agree that it’s been good that we’ve been successful in not aligning

ourselves with another institution, though we have become an institution of our own, so people might view KSW rather idealistically.

When I was active on the collective, it seemed we were perceived as simply carrying out the poetics of a previous group, that KSW was simply protecting a space for language poetry in the city, and that, it seemed to me, was part of the reason KSW has been unable to attract writers of colour, or people in general who are not associated with language poetry, to the collective.

There was also the Work Writing and the Language Writing split in 83/84. That was pretty definite. The groups went their separate ways. And the race thing never got dealt with. There have been some opportunities recently around the new Woodward's space, where we could have collaborated more with some of the First Nations arts groups here, but we didn't really pick up the ball on that one either. I'm not knocking the collective. People do what they can. I think it's been a bit of a mess this last year with the lack of our own space. KSW has been a wonderful thing for a certain segment of white, avant-garde writers interested in language poetry, and that's about it. And it's been good for those of us who are interested in that writing here, in that we've been able to maintain ties with people, and there's a sense that we are a literal institution here, a literal *place*. Which is good. We have the possibility of a library. It's frustrating, as you know, as a collective member, that things move so slowly and there are so many great possibilities one could try to do with this, but we never really settle down to discussing the ideological stuff. We never really debate or argue it. It goes along with certain assumptions and I think that's unfortunate. I wish we as a larger community could say "We would like this to operate to the benefit of certain social and political awarenesses." Frankly, the so-called race writers, whoever they are, they are all doing their thing, and they see KSW as being fairly elitist, which it is.

But it does have something useful to offer.

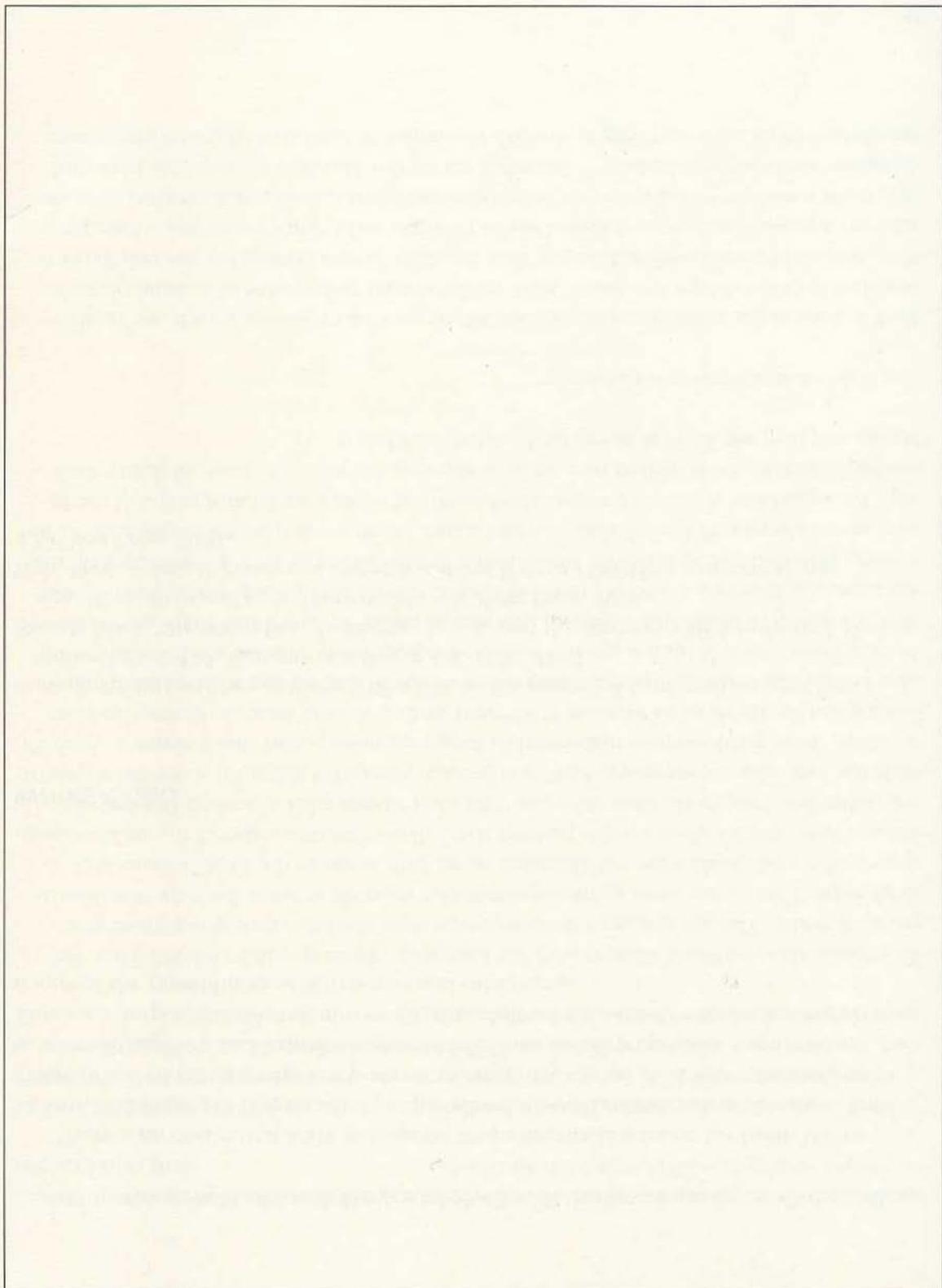
Well it does in the sense that people like Wayde or Rita or Roy or myself, we're all interested in other things too, but if KSW really wanted to be more of a social organization, we could consciously talk about that. It might be interesting for the collective to take on a project each year. A literal social project, and I don't mean just a race project, but a social project. I mean we're in the downtown eastside and we kind of pride ourselves on being on the edge – but what do we do? Hardly any of us live here and hardly any of us have anything to do with the issues around that. Aaron Vidaver was

one of the few people who did. He got involved with the Woodsquat, got off the collective and into that.

There's no doubt that KSW has, quote unquote, made a name for itself. We're known, and there are like-minded people all over North America, usually white, language-oriented writers, who know about us, and that's good, and we're the only ones in town doing that, and I think we should continue to keep up those connections. Those are important connections to all of us, but we also need to be even more conscious of the possibilities of difference and otherness.

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Fred Wah / from ARTiculations

14. *(back pack)*

they say short fall
talk back
they say back up
say back breed
they say half out
or fight flight
some say worm
back bone and sleep tight
they say fall back
and give up
back door
some real true
blood back bone
then turn 'round
just drop back
for camouflage
some say clear cut
they fire back
they back fill
they say detour
down under outback
full of back off talk
and back lash
the wrong word
the back space
a hose job
to back track
they said that
way back

21. (*cavity*)

Plato's pathway
and the lone messengers
cavity cooked

some endosoma
dry toast
tandem to the semiotic candida

won't call it the syntax of diving
abridge the raw throat
taut as a "b" string

no genetic mantra either
but a full cup of semi-vowels
caught between nature and culture

silkworms for fish
crickets for phonemes
the pure for the empty

24. *rip*

Loss empty
anima vowel

just a "rip"
in the self

a little snack
with patience

a little cut
for the throat

need to

find the wound
for the bandage

25. *(return swimming)*

To climb is to return swimming into the signal of
floating neutral above the drift not of words but if a
stroke's borrowed it will come back animal sobbing a
stage a territory the bones rhyming elephant memory
along that hide of shore writing itself down into Asia
the shoulder of the tear

26. *(He(r) it)*

He(r) it knew the city promised an epistemological river like “lucky you” they would say but don’t reach past the next answer that part of the game is to look back into the cast path robbed and turned around no name no ink flow cut out meaning riven to those of Confucian straits.

27. (*pas au delà*)

At the height of the dying rumoured to have been
against the law some say is the mouth-watering
stammer of pas au-delà or trespass of the body which
rends itself into our moist honeyed groins as a pact
falling free of the tight squeeze outside words ricochet
of tongue floor and hunger breaking.

35. (*swift current*)

If you could put a gopher in this poem
And then a halter strap.
If they could hang themselves in the barn.

Late in the morning.
Sometimes
after church.
A bucket of water.
Next to the horses at the glue factory.

38. (*shine on*)

At face value
the souvenir

of walking
the gilded thought

shouldering the moon
of artifice

a big rock mountain
candida diaspora

cousins' campsite
the dream machine

of collective cooking
and running water

call it the artifake
of displacement

or Caesarian thought
butterfly of climate

this is the book
of harvest and movement

the Ireland
of perfect planning.

41. (*fetch*)

the puppet
has no shadow

forget the fetish
about the braids
the shoes
of denizenship
the fake object
refugee
from the sentence

Fetch!

some cord
the for in foreign
might get lost
in the grammar of nuevo
mimicry

(phantom immigrants
missing absence
fragment's proof)

what sheds the rain
on memory's mantle
what's outside
to draw whose strings
within

45. (*crutch*)

No gear in the shift
I am the hostage

No wine no country
No rain today

Another September
The unpractice of words

Not to answer is the rule
To think could this be the precipice

Or the detour of the anecdote
Listen, day breaks its fiction

The drum, the thunderstorm
Even the grinding traffic

Will pass to a blue sky
The unnecessary failure of morning

I was not kept in the castle
Nor felt an incandescent mark

Garry Morse / from FamTasMaGoria

Nail

biting times tying rubber band around plastic bag a cannibal he was taking the rise & I don't think a penny a bag of sweepings a halfpenny half a pound of candy & that bird used to steal my lunch & the boys said I had a classy chassis or it's turned out nice again but I used to fancy those baby hearts & he was dashing in those days leading up to war work at the Eveready factory the head chap took a shine to me & I tested batteries from eight at night till morning you used to get shocks not like for Mr. Schmidt he used to take long naps clean the sugar bowls not like that filthy shiksah who used to bring blokes in & sweep everything under the rug or those relatives the Litvaks who ate off the tablecloth without knife or fork well fingers was made first & all night upstairs he was radioing the Germans & in the end they took him away & at that time you couldn't get an orange or take a bath & he proposed in Hyde Park just before the air raid & ran for shelter unanswered & I still wanted to walk didn't I & that was goodbye to all that after armistice the best looking warbride on the boat the other wives didn't like that my picture on the front of *The Sun* with the ol' boy carrying me over the threshold of the rail station & soon after they put us up in the old Hotel Vancouver & I did my washing on the roof & then we went down to the White Lunch but later on I loved all those tuck-ins at The Only & Foo's & People's & The Dragon Inn & mmm ... those ALL-YOU-CAN-EAT SMORGASBOARDS with the little boy come to think he was good to me but I tell a lie not when he bought that Christmas tree & broke a window to bring it inside & my brother said you could have married a copper back home & dad why you've come out to the Wild West but after the boy was grown my auto dealer in the Interior & Mario Lanza & the love of my life strange how the ol' boy I'm so sorry for him now saw him about our car years earlier & said he was a crook or to read his obituary or that Science of Mind chap who borrowed a van to take me to see Uri Geller bend spoons with his mind & said his wife didn't mind all these moments so queer & out of time almost like the time those blokes next door invented radar it's a nervous habit I think like smoking

Chiefly

the feast & feat of getting up before five taking the plunge into ice water with splash around nape of neck even in winter then instinctive to hunt & gather even without his ox Babe the image of his obsidian eyes & heavily painted moustache with a touch of Deliverance hardly sweating with a fresh kill a two-hundred pound deer & after a late lunch picking his teeth with a passing black bear his mother an Eagle & his father a Wolf & stressing clannish matrilineage it's definitely an excellent match with Miss Moon along with this element of fasting without breakfast this savage progression toward evening feast to the Gods the scent as palpable as what Prometheus swipes for the mouths of men or what Raven obtains from a locked kerfed box this gift of fire & the naming of things like him *Yakinakwas* to give the guest a blanket & *Mamasakami* & *Tlagoglas* & *Pasala* all of them a give-away for a potlatch of over three-thousand people for three weeks more than a century ago before the offering of cedar rope from Wai-kai the old fakir trick in a time of flood our canoes securely fastened to sky & later an even older trick fastening chains around his Indian house & hitching it to donkey engine & tugging it out to sea with no sky this time to bind it to along with a scow-load of regalia & masks Ottawa-bound rather than suffer the opportunity costs of additional incarceration after innumerable arrests for having a party for theatrical tricks Shakes-The-Spear might have liked painted nightmares falling through the roof & the biting of flesh & the burning alive of urchins in boxes weeks of preparation for trapdoors under history & tunnels through daily papers & always a bit of visionary once past the initial resistance his concession to record some songs for a woman from Vienna & in the freewheeling scheme of things his voice subsists across the global in mid-hamat'sa & more over in Kwak'wala love song this decision & precision about what to document like an animal scratch in the caves of Lasceaux or in the Interior something stronger once all that fishing & hunting is done this urge to survive is something other than being with full belly after the feast in the aftermath of West Coast luxury something other than hunger chiefly desire

Temper

temper at times born more fair-haired than the other kids the teachers being pretty anti-semit & all his teeth like lumps of skuttle & really sickly as a boy but the last kick at the can & much beloved for it turning to the air force as a young lad A-1 in health & perfectly biting he lied about his age to enlist & ended up serving in the end turning over extra weapons to Israel with that touch of gangster Jew the foundations of city or state save for entertaining & he used to box & box & smash in teeth & faces the funny story he'd ruin his hands for designing eyecatching dresses the old boy used to laugh at him cutting patterns as a lad but never did anything to make himself rich he tried his hand at Sweet Sixteen in Montréal but I'm a designer not a cutter he exclaimed in fury & frustration with the snow-blindness of it & it didn't take that long to become a millionaire in those days he had a startup accountant partner who wanted to shirk his duty & buy his girl a pony so they divided up the week between them with a manageress & he went swimming instead moving bolts of fabric with flair & the tenacity of a mountain goat but none of this stopped him from losing his temper & boxing Marty Feldman's father down the stairs for stealing his patterns & rag trade & selling out to ragheads & that's what killed him but in lighter times he married that lovely dolly bird from the Leverhoff legacy to do with Sunlight soap & liquidity O it was a lovely meal that night when his son that little sod got hold of his keys & started the car & started rolling it into the restaurant that was the night he asked the Greek how much to clear off & she said I'm going to start my own business & make you all look like flies & she failed within a few months though it was a fancy place I must say & she almost outlived us all but he never got to Buffalo to set up shop there with an eerily portentous look in his eye he once leapt off a moving train that derailed before the next stop & later thought before the airshow began the guy in back of him a dilettante without the proper training up to the point when flying in looping formation he nose-dived into the tail of his plane & at the age of thirty-eight leaving two boys & wife it was curtains but the other bloke lived

Eyebrows

raised almost lupine with eyes quite close together in untrustworthy merriment during an agitated assignation with Miss Sexy Legs the pinup contest winner warts & all & then a case of more than cliché stereotype an Irish cop & Hebrew bride almost sitcom-like with the on-duty officers peeping through keyhole some hot-blooded broad turning tricks with missing thumb & shrapnel in his side during training maneuvers handed a live grenade he threw & lost to the wind & someone lost a son that training day & his visit was the equivalent of a telegram how to tell someone's family that with your lycanthropic look a family curse & another twist of bad luck the first house he bought struck by lightning what are the odds of such an Act of God but he managed to trade in boots for brogues & slippers & pipe on the porch & after the divorce that agreement to disagree in dissolution he was going to marry well to do & so he did & kept a pair of samoyeds & eventually a hyperactive white terrier & after the injury he bathed his son & watched him for hours but in later years chucked him off the couch why don't you do something with your life go to an open house & much later when he won those tickets to Painter's Lodge with his son standing on the pier he motored away looking back at him with a lift of eyebrows like at a stranger & only once he bought Roscoe the action figure policeman with patrol car to match his orange General Lee & sent it to his grandson otherwise the same level of estrangement & then the madness began the drunken boating in front of his island home where his father drowned with policeman's special & second wife scratching out poison pen letters for all the neighbours in order to isolate them so it would just be the two of them alone forever maybe ordering three lawn mowers & an entire home shopping network on credit with all their respective investments doing well & getting slower & going off together surrounded by open tins of decaying food until she had a heart attack he a stroke leaving him unaware a banana rotting on the bug-ridden bed & in the end still sharp a kind of King Lear with homegrown crown a man without memoir recalling only the scent of a cigar locked in the cabinet of his third island home

Bears

on one side of the family pawing at broken limbs with ferocity the way they bite at dangling fruit & scoop fish out of stream & dump the bones at the bottom of another fruit-bearer to enrich the roots & the entire cycle continues she occasionally threw large parties with money like running water to her yet never quite hers like for her lover's trucking business O that side of the line they are all like that they just take & take her father had fire-red hair & used to yell at you with rolling Rs & whap at you with his big stick before he went senile why they wouldn't give you dime one except to size you up for more gains & with that ursine frame she really looked made to squat & paw fish into tins in the cannery & you don't wanna know what they put in those cans or that time we were berry picking & she leaned over & fell upside down into the patch & my sister told me not to laugh or we'd get a real licking but it was so funny we both laughed before lifting her back up with a great heave & boy did we get it & in the summer we were nigger rich & didn't save nothing for winter & so we had to go round like the grasshopper bumming off other ants we would have been well off if not for her & if she didn't get her way she would tear at her food with such a sound & stab each piece into her mouth with her fork & make another noise against her teeth each time & I said it's a wonder you don't hurt yourself & whenever she wanted a single tear would form in one of her eyes & roll down her fat cheek & I told her Mum Liz Taylor has nothing on you & she forgot all about her big plastic tear & the fact she was still *acting* & started to chase me around the table & to this day she still dials me up & starts blubbering saying she hasn't a crust in the house & one time we took her to Safeway with our money & he believed her plastic tear routine & she started picking out cracked crab & ready-made salads I said Mum you can make salad you've got nothing but time after her swinging an axe at me as a kid we go to bingo & she could fall down a hole & land on a diamond she clears so many grand & by the time we get off the cheap slots in a lost weekend she's blown it all & calls us up crying I haven't a crust in the house & finally wise he crashes down the phone no bones about it

Touch

of hypochondria what every body always remembers is the tall ominous tray of medicinals & snake oil cure-alls the way he needed to be wheeled in with the air of an insurance claim wheeling grand entrance into courtroom with an adjustable cast of characters to swear he was fit as a fiddle & while the women continue to make do & toddle off to work he continues to butter the *baidels* his entire life & all the while he was hitting up each relation with fresh stories & buttering their bagels in the kitchen with his heavy clay-like hands full of our gelt & otherwise he never closed those thick flat lumps of dough only sat like an aristocratic esthete humming *I'm just wild about Harry & Harry's wild about me* while the toast burned & his son became a pharmacist in the second generation confirming that Proustian notion the best writers are neurotics like the best doctors are obsessed with curing themselves first & that explains his niece with all her herbal remedies & strange diets & holy grail of a natural hair dye out of walnuts but for the lack of a fixative & he is easy to blame for any moment of neurosis or crisis or even a sudden whelm of perceived effeminacy if there is such a thing because during the war he disappeared into myth about as mysterious as what happened to Glenn Miller after swing dancing the urban legend of a bombed city he would only come out at night in a frock in the guise of a heavy-handed woman although he was mortally unfit for conscription they would have sent him packing hardly in the mood for such antics & if you asked him about it or started an argument he would just back away & continue buttering the *baidels* & pouring cups of tea till you thought you'd go mad & then he'd run to the loo since tea's one of the leading diuretics or sit back in his big soft chair with the women fluttering around & when he finally died in his sleep of long-livedness his giant miserly accumulation of wealth came to no one just some Jewish organization down the road & my mum was so mad after everything they did for him & it just goes to show you never know when your numbers up the fruits & raw vegetables don't exactly agree with me & there was that bloke fit as a fiddle gone jogging who was hit by a truck with ginko or ginseng on the side

Shit

disturbing Mother Earth of many devices rising at five with identifying scar of a stab wound & bad bones breaking a limp the brown girl learning to lift & fry up on her father's boat nothing to do but play cards & pool they would giggle at the boys & shoot a few games until the money got *serious* but later more like Piper Laurie limping around train station after another hustler the stakes getting shittier first her father & then her sister & then her husband dead reckoning at sea the odds of pagan gods against all of them like ducks lined up so she just lost it & let blood & lineage drink her up for a long while addictive like gran's bingo beliefs & with a crutch I loved your father & those Hebes & didn't touch a drop when you were on the way the doctors thought me barren & then your father named you after him but she never became an almond tree at *Ennea Odoi* she wanted to stay modern to get out of the bush with unpawned typewriter hidden under her bed after mum swung that axe at her she fucked off to Vancouver & clacked away at the courthouse in lieu of all the cutesy dames the lawyers hired for one thing she loved most to cook in hotels & restaurants & the White Lunch & later among dirty pool & goonish union finaglers a filmic villain threatened her & she called the cops & around the corner they waited & caught him again for tanked up operation of a vehicle & when they tried to force her out pensionless the books & everything were photocopied in a safety deposit box for her closest heir & if anything happens to me & once again it did her legs gave out & they made her cybernetic & in recovery she wheeled about & waved talking stick & because white seniors looked horrified by her brown skin she decided to fix them & got better & threw dinners & bingos & got the grant to pull it off & the Native mayor came to visit all before the nagging *anagnorisis* of a reunion & then the additional *parapeteia* of estrangement her epilogue sailing off into the picture on her wall the last boat blown into bottle & tossed toward deadly ebb tide all this first syllable shit about mothers & the sea of memory *mêm mare mater maaaa* that pounding music of the maternal turned into a passing stream of disturbing *materia* no nut tree or softwood to talk of

Walk

& wander lust in Levite blood of tribe with lithe movements he buggered off to Australia for about twenty years of sunshine to fire his arrows at but in the beginning she liked the way he looked in his clothes the way he sat down in his Saville Row suit with such care with the knowhow of generations of cloth merchants & cutters & floggers & more than this to fold not to ruin the knees & in the b/w pictures the cool rounded rims of a suave villain no father of three & scarcely that no no question this one was a real toff or that he got off on the chase a few pursuits around the world & that time he was moving in on someone's misunderstanding if I was only twenty years younger I'd snap her up & he drove me mad about getting her this particular perfume & the way he went on such expletives about the passing waft of the women in Montréal but I mean they never got on she always wanted a row & he kept to himself & she used to fight all the neighbourhood battles although you couldn't say she wore the pants another case of progenital vacancy amongst the missing like in Genesis a stranger in a strange land until his son dug him up again in that run-down district & brought him back into the fold & he never got on with his oldest boy *babick* he bbbblurred out at him because he sttuttered & he sure wasn't fussy on the Greek lot he fell in with they'll bleed 'im dry & like half a stubborn horse he had some sense they led him out of the factory & he partly snorted at the situation & it was time for another leisurely contented puff perhaps upon another continent & why quit now he started when he was ten & lived till ninety with that trim figure & a slim fag in his mouth the way he still hopped on the double decker maybe after the passing waft of a foreign lady or another last seduction by some ductile Salomé reductible to odour from a stashed flask or the steam of teapot & this collection of cards from Oy! colonizers mostly hoaxes from something in the depths of Loch Ness to giant South American balls & his odd collection of white elephants whose tusks face the front door for luck like his eyes & astrological *sagitta* of desire with all that wild white hair fading into cancerous hospital pillow the last card in the deck a fakir up the rope up in smoke

Basil King / LEARNING TO DRAW / A HISTORY

In the Fields Where Daffodils Grow

Mirror, mirror on the wall. In the field where Daffodils grow there is an abundance of Narcissus. Daisy chains are worn by all. Buttercups wind their way through a chorus singing a Sunday hymn. Marsden Hartley draws his genitals but decides not to paint them. Instead he paints a group of tall men. He loves these men. He has always loved men. He has sung himself to sleep knowing he will dream about men. A man's shoulders, his gait and his stride, the way he covers the ground with his shadow. Mirror, mirror on the wall. Marsden Hartley was unable to applaud himself for having sympathy for birds and fish. On land a narrow brush paints a Red shirt. Red roses, Red lobsters, tomatoes.

Harsh articles for a dish using everything that was left over from three previous meals. Mirror, mirror on the wall. Marsden Hartley is tall. It annoys him that he is always being told that he is photogenic. That his nose is Roman. That he postures. Mirror, mirror on the wall. Don't make the cloud too dark. Let the light show that a tall young man can have fun being alone. That his thighs are, as his lips are, human. Mirror, mirror on the wall. Remember Mount Katahdin? Remember that for Marsden Hartley, man is big. He is a hero, a mountain, a poetic combination of bather, wrestler and lumberjack. He said, "I want the whole body, the whole flesh, in painting." Painting isn't a race. There is

no finish line. If it fails begin again. Mirror, mirror on the wall. Marsden Hartley was so poor that on his fifty-eighth birthday, January 4, 1935, in a "massacre of the innocents," he destroyed 100 paintings and drawings. He had no place to store them. It was imperative that he keep painting. It was imperative that the future be considered.

Mirror, mirror on the wall. Do not use literature to explain love. Marsden Hartley traveled, crossed bridges, met strangers, and learned to draw. Give him paint. He paints the sea, rocks. Fish on a plate, men, waves. Marsden Hartley said, "I love to paint."

Pause

Ezra Pound had met Hilda at a birthday party. Hilda was fifteen, and Pound and Williams were in college. She became Pound's girl. Williams may have had a crush on her but she frightened him. She never listened to him. She listened to Pound. Her courage and her erratic behavior put Williams and H.D. at odds with each other. Hilda Doolittle would hike up her skirts and run through the fields abandoning herself. In the field where Daffodils grow there is an abundance of Narcissus. Daisy chains are worn by all. Buttercups wind their way through a chorus singing a Sunday hymn. Let the light show that William Carlos Williams was introduced to Hilda Doolittle by Ezra Pound. She was tall. Taller than most of her contemporaries. Let the light show that a tall young girl's thighs are, as her lips are, human. Did Dr. Williams disapprove? It's possible. Let the light show that the great poet from New Jersey was complicated. He and his contemporary

Charles Demuth threw caution to the wind and went on to claim for themselves a territory as vagrant as history, as varied as the paintings of Bruegel. In *The American Grain* Williams makes Daniel Boone, George Washington, Arron Burr initiate their own space as do the calligraphic characters on a Chinese scroll.

Pause

Whereas a drawing is always contemporary

A short story never ends.

Greek narcissus. French daffodils.

Asphodel.

Calligraphy is for lovers.

Pause

H.D. looks across the room at a large painting hanging on a wall. She studies the painting.

Mirror, mirror on the wall.

Paintings stay alive because people look at them.

And when they don't, they die.

They die in museums, in private collections, in artists' studios. They die leaving an heir a hue of monochrome thoughts.

I have died but I am not dead.

I live on a wall in a house

that is warm and comfortable.

The people who live in this house
pass me every day.
They always make sure
that I'm hung right.
My edges are dusted
my surface is clean.
But they never stand back and look at me.

I have traveled
in group shows
and been seen in countless museums.
I am worth a lot of money.
H.D. has brought me back to life
and I thank her
and hope the pleasure
that I saw on her face
will be repeated.

Pause

William Carlos Williams and H.D. cross the street.
Williams is saying something that we do not hear. The
Precisionists are pacifists; their arguments take
place in manifestoes. A Precisionist painting has no
traffic, no commerce, no people. Riff-raff and garbage
are removed. Deceit and arrogance are removed. Our
eyes behold muted operas, empty buildings. Where are
the children? Their presence would demand an answer to
a question that is being evaded. Where is nature? H.D.
wonders why the lights are on. Who benefits from
having the electricity on in a building that excludes
people? The object benefits. The object doesn't need
the disclosure of the painter's presence, his brush
stroke or his emotions. No one need paint a painting.

An object that is bathed in light and focused with utmost clarity and precision creates a state of "perfect consciousness," so said Charles Sheeler (1883-1965).

William Carlos Williams asks H.D. do you remember the drawing you did? Well, Charles Sheeler said about your drawing, "I just don't want to see any more than is absolutely necessary of the physical materials that go into a picture." Sheeler used photography as a standard to measure painting against. Sheeler's impersonal attitude disturbed Williams. He saw Sheeler becoming judgmental. But what was Williams to do? What were Williams and Sheeler to do? They both want to take H.D.'s arm and go around the corner with her. Before H.D. has a chance to speak, a large woman pushing a baby carriage comes around the corner.

Emily Carr pays no attention to H.D. or the two men. She is busy having a conversation with the occupants of the carriage: A monkey, some dogs, and some cats. Light became Emily Carr's oar. With it she navigated her family on their nightly constitutional.

Pale face, what gives us permission to do or not do what we want? Pigment? The color of sex? The color of choice? Beware, the tattoo is too permanent. Is it thick skin, thin skin, rough, or beautiful skin that makes the difference? Or does skin have absolutely nothing to do with giving ourselves permission to do what we want?

Emily Carr was to say: You have to meet everything half way. Everything but paint needs a handshake, a smile, a greeting of hello and goodbye. Everything but paint will meet you half way. But not paint. No. Paint lays its plastic body out, and I trust it.

I don't know if having your work ignored is good for you. I don't know if it makes you work harder; I don't know if it makes you more sad, more depressed, but I do know if you hadn't had to do something in your childhood that was almost heroic, you would never be able to tolerate being ignored. You would meet everything and everyone halfway, or change your mind and become domestic.

Born in 1871, died in 1945, Emily Carr lived a life overshadowed by something that frightened her. As a teenager, she recoiled from explanation or forgiveness, and presumed the world was against her. She didn't become a criminal, an enemy of the state; she became different. Her republic became her life, and she documented it. Not with people, but with totems, skies, dogs, cats, and a monkey.

Emily Carr painted trees with skins, not bark. Skins, the color of sex, the color of choice, the color of her autobiography. Sitting in the forest of British Columbia, she asked herself, how can I put myself together? How can my many components become one? one with nature? one with the forest that both frightens and awes me?

Wood Interior 1932-35

Emily Carr

Men whisper as they hunt
they cover their tracks
with thistle
and a malice
towards Sappho
explains
the darkness

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they cover their tracks
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Men whisper as they hunt
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with thistle
and a malice
towards Sappho
explains
the darkness

A large and strong-willed woman, she has been to San Francisco, London, Paris, and New York. But always comes back to Victoria, the root of displeasure, the root of her color.

Above the fir trees, there is a land she has come to know as the sky of natural history. There in the sky, where everything is forward, and yesterday is tomorrow, color finds a creation that is not style. Aunt Emily wanted a rainbow, a spectrum of fish that she could drop into the mist and spray the trees with.

Aunt Emily was to say: I don't go to anyone. I lie in bed alone. I dream alone. I eat alone. Art is grace. What would the critics have to say if the artists did not do their work? What law, what fairytale speaks to everyone? Hush, listen, see: the forest unloads its secrets. Sometimes, I use house paint and add gasoline to get fluidity. It dilutes the color and loosens the forms, and the critics don't like this. They say my work has become

Be Rich. Get Rich. Be Rich. Get Rich.

Let the light show the doctor instructs his patience.
He tells them stories.

Pause

Giotto (1266/7-1337) when asked to supply proof of his artistic skill for the pope, complied by drawing a perfect circle with a single fluent movement.

Waslaw Nijinsky (1890-1950) and his sister understood that if they were to become modern choreographers they would have to be explicit.

Nijinsky's wife Romola reported that by 1918 Nijinsky had become fascinated with circles and arcs. She recalls his telling her, "The circle is the complete, the perfect movement. Everything is based on it – life, art." Nijinsky was planning a Renaissance ballet with circular choreography, curved scenery, and a rounded proscenium. His notation system was based in part on the circle, and his drawings, as he notes, often involved an eye shape formed by the joining of two arcs. Nijinsky seems to visualize a theater designed to imitate the curve of the eye. With obsessive consistency, Nijinsky composed circles and arcs. The arcs seem to form eyes, and Nijinsky says they do: "I often draw one eye." Those "eyes" also look like fish, the sign of Christ. They also look like the female genitals, the thing that, in his conversion to Tolstoyanism, he had renounced.

Pause

Did Rembrandt know the story of Giotto's O when he painted his *Self Portrait with Two Circles* (1665-9)?

The man who had once wanted to emulate Rubens stands right of center, between two half circles. Gone are the dandy's clothes. The look of "I got ya!" Instead we see an old man who looks at us without hostility. His clothes are tattered, his posture sturdy; he apologizes for nothing. He is a painter. And he has painted his own portrait. Rembrandt believes that the two circles behind him are important. They circumvent his loneliness and he emerges as the Rembrandt we remember, a man alone, secure in his neutrality to all things hostile. Yes, the circles fill in the space and augment the background. They are as decorative as they are patient. Without them Rembrandt would never have been able to blur his hands and keep *Self Portrait with Two Circles* ambiguous.

When next you draw. Please remember
to say good morning,
 good evening will return the compliment.
When next you paint. Please remember,
to draw is to trust.

Pause

A mother puts her daughter to bed, reads, kisses the child's forehead, and leaves the bedroom door slightly ajar. The hall light brings philosophy into the room.

The daughter will not know until she is a grown woman that all the stories that her mother read to her were made up to frighten her. The mother did not want her child to grow up. She wanted her daughter to always be with her. The daughter's love of knowledge made that impossible.

Pause

Virginia Stephens, Leonard Woolfe, bless them. They marry when she is thirty. Three years after their marriage Virginia publishes her first novel, *The Voyage Out*. The novel had taken her seven years to write. Leonard is a meticulous man. Virginia is vivacious. She is electricity, she wants to be a mother. Leonard won't allow it. Alfred Stieglitz wouldn't let Georgia O'Keefe have a child and she never forgave him. Did Virginia forgive Leonard? Leonard doesn't want the responsibility of children. He has become the wife, the good wife Woolfe cares for Virginia. He tells her if it fails, begin again. He tells her the voices that she hears are not as important as she is. He tells her, Sing crunch! He will not leave her. He will not forfeit her trust. Because her older sister Vanessa stands when she paints, Virginia has to stand at a podium when she writes. The sisters compete for nursery rhythms, for stones. Sing crunch! They are sisters.

Vanessa had three children, two sons with her husband, Clive Bell, and a daughter with Duncan Grant. All the time Vanessa lived with Clive Bell he had male lovers. When Vanessa and Duncan Grant lived together Duncan Grant had male lovers. Vanessa and Roger Fry were

lovers. After she suffered a serious miscarriage while on holiday in Turkey, it was Roger who nursed Vanessa, not Clive.

No one told Vanessa that she was important. No one told her that she too could find amazement. Vanessa served and partied, and when her son Julian was killed in the Spanish Civil War, she cried alone.

Mother, I am hungry. I
haven't eaten all day. It's
cook's day off and no one
will make me a sandwich.

No one will feed me.
No one no one knows
I haven't taken
a bath in four days. I haven't
brushed my teeth. I haven't combed my hair.
My bed isn't made. And my shoelaces
are untied.

Vanessa had a lot to contend with. She always did. She had protected Virginia before Virginia's marriage to Leonard. No one told her if it fails, begin again. No one told Vanessa, "I support you."

Vanessa's woodcuts for the covers of her sister's books are thoughtful, delightful bits of domesticity, less hurried than her paintings. There's a charming flower pot for *The Common Reader*, a clock for *A Room of One's Own*. Vanessa had gone to art school and continued to be an art student till the day she died. There was always something else to do. She decorated her houses and painted views of the garden, coffee

pots, empty bottles, armchairs. And there was always talk. Every day and every weekend there was talk. But no one supported Vanessa as Leonard Woolfe supported Virginia.

Bloomsbury buzzed as it created a gracious Bohemia, a style of living that is today, with contemporary variations, still in fashion. Bloomsbury baked their own breads, and Virginia was known for her bread. They made jams, bottled fruits, and they traveled. They painted their furniture and kept their household help to a minimum. With the exception of Leonard who was Jewish and was one of nine children, Bloomsbury came from privilege. Their families were socially established and moneyed. Virginia's great aunt was the photographer Julia Margaret Cameron. Lytton Strachey's family had helped Disraeli secure his seat in the House of Parliament. Clive Bell was the son of wealthy mine owners. Leonard's father went broke while Leonard was attending Cambridge.

In 1912, a year after Roger Fry had nursed Vanessa, he curated the now famous Post Impressionist show that featured Matisse, Picasso, and Cézanne. The English public, for the most part, ignored or mocked the show.

Cézanne's male and female figures meditate. Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, Roger Fry, and Dora Carrington admired Cézanne. Not one of them was able to absorb his inherent belief that violence precedes thinking.

Did Bloomsbury, that epicenter of social experimentation, forgive Leonard and Virginia for starting The Hogarth Press? The thing that was most important to all of Bloomsbury and its extended family was comfort. Hogarth Press had deadlines,

responsibilities. Hogarth Press affected the lives of everyone in the immediate Bloomsbury group. Manuscripts were accepted or refused. Art was published or rejected. The press did not always do what Bloomsbury expected. Bloomsbury thrived on good food, an appreciation of writing, and painting. But comfort – comfort was essential. Not business.

And all the while, Paul Cézanne's little sensations go on kissing his maternal motif, space. The apples on the table become ripe and juicy and take on the appearance of a living atlas. Space swallows up the painter's arm. The painter cannot free himself. The arm is lost. Cadmiums that had never felt secure on their own now dance. The painter feels movement. Can it be that the arm is constructing "The Large Bathers"? Can it be that all Cézanne's bathers have been recruited to do perverse things? They sleep with nature, they fuck with turmoil, they pose a problem. Cézanne's bathers wear no Armour. Their heads are not covered, their bodies are naked. They are philosophy's love of knowledge. As Cézanne was to write to a young artist, "Perception of the model and its realization are sometimes very long in coming ..."

Close your eyes, breathe.

Cézanne intrudes. He is a rapist. He penetrates his totem. The totem cries mercy, but mercy does not come. With extended arms the totem's legs grow feet. Its hands hold a ball in the air that is then placed onto a neck. Eyes appear. Ears, nose, and mouth correlate the face. Devastation is complete. The mountain has a mate.

No one
can pronounce
your Cat's name.

Who paid
for your
Glasses?

Who feeds
the Cat?

Who tithes?

Who airs
the androgynous
Ocean?

Who
climbs
the Mountain?

Who Asks
but never
Answers?

Who vanishes?

Who points?

Who corrects?

Who dismisses?

The creatures that sit in the trees are birds. Winged
reptiles that remind us that we cannot fly. That we
who paint can move. If not mountains, we can move

ourselves and find an edge so sharp that just touching
it bleeds the negative. When excavating the art of a
thousand years past, the tablecloth mulches, the
breast triumphs, and the edge uncurls.

“WE ARE HOME.”

There is more.

Leave home, meet strangers, and LEARN TO DRAW. Green
will not always tolerate blue. The sculptor Henry
Moore owned a small Cézanne BATHER. The painter Jasper
Johns owns a small Cézanne BATHER.

A source as sturdy as an arch
will always have
an entrance
and an exit.
Close your eyes,
breathe.
If the sun shines,
the snow will melt.
She contemplates.
She has the body.
She clothes herself
in Still LIFES.
Before sleep.
She opens the door.
She dismounts.
Her libido rages.
Her landscape
refuses to walk
behind what she knows
does not exist.

Helene Littmann / REWIND

"Petra Kobaray is looking well," said Claris. "I saw her at Everett and Diane's New Year's Day open house."

"She's in Paris now, isn't she? With the wire news service?" said Pat.

"I think so," said Claris. "We didn't really talk." Stricker didn't say anything, didn't even nod, though he knew this to be true; he didn't want to let on that he was in regular contact again with Petra. Her e-mails were short, and sometimes very dirty.

"Wasn't she bilingual? From Quebec?" said Pat.

"Quadrilingual at least," said Stricker. This was old knowledge, therefore safe. "Four-tongued. Is that physically possible?" And Petra, he knew, could certainly use her tongue. "Anyhow," he added. "From some poky Montreal suburb. I don't think she had any idea the languages bit would matter. Back when half of Europe was still a no-go zone."

The three of them – Stricker, Claris, Pat – were sitting in the mild summer evening on the side patio of a deserted sports pub in East Vancouver. A row of white plastic tables and chairs; a narrow wooden porch, vaguely Wild West; a view of an empty parking lot and, across that, the flat stucco sidewall of the next building.

"Everett and Diane have two kids now, little girls," said Claris. So she wasn't going there, wasn't going back to the old knowledge, back before the Berlin Wall fell. Stricker was testing, with no definite goal in mind. Did he *want* to discuss the 1980s with Claris? Before the wall fell, and other things, too. Him and Claris, of course, but more centrally, more *interestingly*, him: his youthful sardonic promise, his disastrous two years at grad school, and then Asia.

Asia. *An old China hand* was what some of the long-term British expatriates in Hong Kong called themselves, only half mockingly. British ex-pats were good for Stricker, or at any rate relaxing: they never found him particularly cynical, unlike his fellow Canadians. And of course his quips went over the heads of his English-language students. Witty barbs don't translate well at the lower-intermediate level. He sometimes worried that ten years of careful enunciation had irreversibly taken the edge off his conversation.

China hand, India hand. The retired colonel on half pay in the three-volume nineteenth-century novel, back from running an empire – servants, random violence, tiger hunts – now no one special in a semi-detached where? Maida Vale? A figure of fun,

with his endless stories, his dull days at the club. Stricker hadn't run an empire but he had been an honoured foreigner, people talked to him, forgave his gaucheries. It was addictive. Tonight, back in Vancouver, maybe for good, he didn't really want to discuss Claris with Claris. But he did want to discuss himself. He wanted a mirror, a mirror into the past.

"It's hard to imagine Ev as a father," Pat said now.

Ev. That was a new one, and suggested more familiarity than Stricker had assumed. Pat didn't look like anyone Everett would have known in the old days. But people change: Pat, Everett. Maybe Pat used to be skinny. Maybe Everett now found many types of people useful. Maybe Pat was friends with the wife.

"It's hard to imagine anyone as a father, isn't it," said Stricker. As far as he knew, no one at the table had children.

"Oh, absolutely. Think about being a parent," said Pat, with a rapid, good-natured firmness that suggested she had, in fact, thought this all through, and said it several times before. "I mean, what are you aiming for? A happy childhood? Or a happy adulthood? Either way, they'll resent you. Someone to look after you in your old age? If you raise your kid right they'd be nowhere *near* you in old age. They'd be hitch-hiking in India or working in Moscow. C'mon kid, get a *life*."

"Bill's got kids, doesn't he?" said Claris.

"Almost done high school," said Pat. "I've seen what he's going through. There may be such a thing as baby-cravings. But I guarantee you no one has ever gone all weepy wishing they had a cute little 14 year old to cuddle. It's like exotic pets. Once they grow teeth they get feral and you have to let them loose in the jungle."

"Bill doesn't want any more," said Claris.

"Bill is not that kind of masochist," said Pat. "We've got our agreements worked out. We do what we want."

This was aimed, obliquely, as much at Stricker as it was at Claris. He did not quite think the invitation was sexual. And he didn't think his own mental step backward was sexual, either, not in any obvious way. Pat was heavy, carrying about 30 or 40 extra pounds, which made her 40 or 50 pounds heavier than Stricker; she was at the point where plump is just beginning to slide into fat. Her feet were planted flat on the floor, her hair was springy, coarse, shoulder-length, she wore jeans and a T-shirt. She was a computer network systems administrator at a community college, though not the one where Stricker was starting work in three weeks. She looked like everyone else in the world, no better, no worse. None of this necessarily excluded her from sexual consideration. Her rapid agreement with his refusal of fatherhood should have made

Stricker warm up to her; he was usually sympathetic when people neatly lobbed his own views back at him; but in this case, it didn't work.

For Stricker cherished his refusals; they were elliptical, shadow-lit, perhaps the only art form he had ever successfully practiced. To keep him from surges of self-loathing, they needed to be, above all, tangential, counter-intuitive, original. And he couldn't *stand* how Pat made it all so common sense, so day lit (though it was finally growing dark out beyond the porch lights and streetlights). What after all was the value of refusal if it *made sense* to refuse something?

Stricker loved his refusals. And, yes, he had studied Henry James – before he refused that, too. He left Claris to go back East to do a dissertation on the late novels, and after a year or two he refused James, and left the country. Though Stricker never saw himself in James's neurasthenic, asexual bachelors. For one thing, Stricker had never knowingly turned down an opportunity for sexual intercourse – at least not until the last five years, when a new clairvoyance for wearily predictable complications began to set in. Moreover, Stricker didn't believe that he made his own refusals, as James's heroes did, from willed ignorance or innocence. He was convinced his own were made from the fullest possible intelligence, the social second sight that had lately extended itself even to his sexual adventures: a firm base of worldly knowledge that said nothing, ever, would be quite worth the effort. You could be anything you wanted if you were willing to slog – but the prize won would turn out to be drudgery into infinity, after you couldn't back out. Being smart meant not selling short, buying into a life nowhere near the shining potential that shimmered like the flash of lightning on the leading edge of a squall line far out to sea.

At least, Stricker had felt like this until quite recently. Meanwhile, he had been living in ways that made it true: a stranger in strange lands, and often deliriously happy with the arrangement. Did he still feel this way? If not, what else *was* there – how else *could* you see the situation?

But here, now, on the shabby deck of this empty pub, the last light draining unheeded from the clear sky, what was Stricker *doing*, as he sipped his second pint of local microbrew? What was he *doing here*? The question did not actually arise for Stricker. A mildly misdirected evening, the fundamental disinterest inherent in meeting most new people: Stricker had traveled enough that this was no longer disappointing; it was expected. Of course the draw was Claris: she was an "old friend." Stricker did not write it like that, but when he talked about her, which was not so often, the scare quotes were audible.

Claris, then. He had come out to see Claris, who produced Pat as duenna, under the excuse of the more, the merrier: "I'll get some people together," Claris had said. But even without Pat, Stricker would hardly have made the mildest flirtatious move.

At twenty Claris had been painfully shy at parties or around the noisy tables of beer parlors. *Shy* might be the wrong word: she wasn't paralyzed by self-consciousness so much as watchfully reticent. At twenty, in T-shirt and jeans, Claris had been pleasant-looking but unremarkable; naked, she was astoundingly lovely, small-boned, slim, but with every edge and angle perfectly rounded. For a shy girl, she had never been uncomfortable naked, had strolled straight from the shower to the kitchen fridge when Stricker's roommates were gone for the day, never worried about curtains, sunned placidly at his side in the nude down the cliffs at Wreck Beach. Her privacy lived deeper than her skin; merely being naked revealed nothing. Back then, she wore makeup only on ceremonial occasions, and to Stricker, it made her plainer rather than prettier, clotting the texture of her perfect eyelashes, hardening her mouth, giving her a pinched face like every other girl at the mall.

At thirty, Claris cut her long hair; this summer, in her early forties, she wore it in a bob tucked behind her ears; it was almost chic, but fell too flat and fine. She wore light eye-makeup all the time now, and often lipstick, and maybe – Stricker was never close enough to verify – foundation or powder. A face prepared to meet the world. Claris put out a corporate newsletter and local brochures, not the full-colour ad campaigns; those were done in Toronto or New York. She was still slim, but in her summer khakis her hips and thighs were wider than Stricker remembered. They did not look fat or soft, just time-thickened. If the girl he once knew was still present, she had gone deeper under the skin than ever. Claris was a functioning adult; yes, and they all were, even Stricker. Met new, would Claris be attractive? Stricker couldn't tell. They had chewed each other up too thoroughly, and they had healed; but the thought of sex with Claris – and, OK, the thought was always there, a heat-flicker at the edge of perception – gave Stricker a queasy incestuous feeling.

Meanwhile, tonight, on this shabby side porch, with the sift of night insects around the caged lights nailed high on the wall behind them: Stricker wanted Claris's attention. He didn't want to discuss Claris, he wanted to discuss himself. And he didn't truly think Pat was a chaperone. But she was taking up physical space, verbal space. Now she was talking with Claris about people Stricker didn't know. Claris looked animated enough. Was this was a public face, or her private one, how she talked at the office water-cooler, or how she looked under the sheets at night? Actually, he didn't care; and he didn't care, much, about Everett and Diane; Petra Kobaray had told him more

on that score than Claris would, or Everett himself. But his quip about fatherhood had cut Claris off, given Pat the floor; and so Stricker backtracked.

"Claris," he said. "So tell me about Everett and Diane. How old are the kids now?"

"Three and five," said Claris. "They're doing well. They've fixed up an arts and crafts bungalow on the South Slope."

"I love that house," said Pat. "With the built-in cupboards and the porch."

"Everett's still at the newspaper," said Claris. This was the big daily in town. "Still doesn't like it that much but there's nowhere to move on."

None of this was news to Stricker, but then how much conversation actually is? Claris was looking at him, she was responding to his questions.

At least he thought he had Claris' attention. Because right at that moment, her gaze shifted over his shoulder; a woman, long hair against the light, was walking the length of the deck, pulling up a chair.

"Oh, Claris, I'm so sorry," she said, prettily flustered. "Who all is here? I got a long distance call at the last moment," she added, her voice falling confidentially. "One of those calls you *have* to take."

"Shelly," said Claris. "You remember Charles. Charles Stricker."

"Oh, of course," said Shelly, putting out her hand. She had dropped into the seat next to him, so she didn't extend her arm so much as bend it at the elbow: no hearty businessman's shake, more a receiving-line flutter. As they touched, Shelly locked eyes with him; as he released her hand, she resettled in her seat, tucked her purse under her ankles, and managed in the process – Stricker could tell, he was paying attention – to clock the whole empty patio, the table, the two women, himself.

"Charles," said Shelly, fixing her gaze on his face again. "Of course I remember you." For Stricker was Stricker only in his own private monologue, that long unedited formless home movie that unspools inside each isolated skull among us. To everyone else – friends, not his students – he was Charles. But not Charlie or Chuck. That at least he had prevented.

"I'm still trying to place you," said Stricker. Shelly was part of the welcome-home crowd tonight that Claris had promised him; Shelly, Claris said earlier, knew him from the old days.

"Oh, I was just on the fringes, back then," said Shelly. "I was so much younger than you guys."

Stricker wouldn't have guessed this from her face. Though it was true that his main guides to the passage of time and its human ravages were Claris and Petra, who were each in their own ways holding up well. As for his own face in the mirror: well, that depended on the mirror.

"I remember seeing you everywhere," said Shelly. "You had a pink shirt."

Fuchsia or magenta, actually. "Yes, that was me," said Stricker. And he did believe that, at twenty-five, he and Everett had been visible enough that they might well be pointed out, at a distance, to a college girl on the edge of the music scene.

"So you've been in Asia," said Shelly. "I want to hear all about it."

"Hong Kong for the past five years," said Stricker. "Mostly teaching English at a technical college."

"Is it really gorgeous out there? Do you miss it?"

"I miss it and I don't," he said. "No, I do miss it." There weren't words, yet, for how he did miss it. "But I wanted to come back."

Face to face with Shelly, Stricker was sure he had never seen her before, or if he had, in very different guise. For Shelly looked like a ruined beauty: aquiline nose, hooded eyes, under a skin more decidedly ridged and fatigued than, for instance, Petra or Claris. Shelly looked – there was no way around it – she looked *used*. This was not in itself unattractive, since it carried a strong suggestion of lowered barriers. Stricker would have had no access at all to a girl who looked like Shelly gave promise of having once looked. This made him think she hadn't looked like that, back then. He would have noticed her, even at a distance. Punk girls were almost never beautiful in that classic way; true young beauties had other temptations.

"Is there lots of work out there?" said Shelly. "Someone, a man, was telling me there was lots of work teaching."

"Japan or Korea more than Hong Kong," said Stricker. So perhaps Shelly at eighteen had been just another moon-faced girl; perhaps only later her face fell in, the bones showing through. Something similar, though subtler, had happened to Petra in the long gap before he met up with her again, four years ago, in Hanoi during the rainy season. In certain lights, Petra now looked almost distinguished.

Did Shelly have the mannerisms of a beautiful woman? Well, she had zeroed in on Stricker: as he sat describing Asia, not going much beyond the obvious – there was no need – he turned to face her full on, turned his back on Claris and Pat. And, Stricker saw, this was exactly what he'd been missing. There was nothing like wide-eyed attention to make your own voice unroll in eloquent phrases. This was really, yes, just what he deserved, or rather, what he was used to, recalling as it did the way certain Hong Kong Chinese girls flirted.

And that was how the evening drew to an end. Shelly kept Stricker rapt for how long – fifteen minutes? half an hour? – while Claris and Pat chatted on. Then came a general shuffle and re-assessment: Pat was getting up to leave, Shelly released Stricker, it was so much later than everyone thought – these summer evenings stay light so

long! – Claris half-stifled a yawn, only Stricker wasn't working the next morning. And in five minutes they were out on the sidewalk, unlocking the doors of their separate cars.

Stricker drove home slowly, testing the night air on his neck and bare forearms. He had done two stints in Hong Kong, broken by a year back in Vancouver. That first time back, he'd missed the tropics all along his skin, like an absent lover, a bone-deep loss of the buoyant damp heat. Plus, his temporary contract in Vancouver didn't lead to permanent work, a problem of funding rather than Stricker's performance. For Stricker was, to his own carefully hidden surprise, a good teacher: since he didn't fundamentally care, he could regard his classroom tactics with clinical pragmatism. *Sir, teacher, Mr. Stricker, sir*; he had nothing to do with Stricker, himself.

So Stricker went back to Hong Kong. But that second time around, like a stolen weekend with an old lover you treated badly years ago – and Stricker had certainly had his share of those weekends – something changed. Down on the ferry dock, every foot of public space, some days, was taken up by vendors of hot snacks, newspapers, copy watches, off-brand tennis socks, Yixing purple clay teapots shaped like lotus blossoms or eggplants. Unable to read Chinese, everything came at him on the primary plane of the visual. For a long time this difficulty was exhilarating. It made legitimate something Stricker had known even in Canada: the clues of any culture were opaque to him. But after a while, estrangement became familiar. And then, like any bored husband, Stricker started reading the newspaper every morning at breakfast: that fried egg on instant noodles sold on the lower level of the Lamma Island commuter ferry. The *South China Morning Post* put up a wall of English print between himself and the world he had once gazed at with love and wonder: the soft dark curves of the mysterious back end of Hong Kong Island sliding past, the milky haze of the South China Sea itself.

So Stricker returned to Vancouver, this time to a permanent job. And on this tepid summer night, he was driving home – or rather, back to his sublet in the Tiki Arms. Fifteen years ago, he lived briefly in a basement suite a few blocks below the intersection of Main and Broadway, around the corner from the Tiki Arms, which had crashed through the bottom of the social scale. But over the past decade, redevelopment in the neighborhood sent the building condo. A couple, friends of Claris, had pooled their incomes to get into the tight housing market. Tonight, after riding the elevator up from the mirrored lobby, Stricker noted again that the halls were musty, the brown carpet surely original. But the apartment itself had been gutted and re-decorated in the taste of two years ago, with a palette of muted sage green and cream yellow bringing out an unsuspected high modernist swank to the boxy rooms.

It was clear to Stricker, now, that at 25 he had been, pretty comprehensively, an asshole. Claris couldn't have thought so or she wouldn't have been in love with him. So she was the wrong witness, wrong confessor: all she could forgive would be specific acts. All she could forgive would be breaking her heart. And Stricker didn't particularly care about that, one way or the other, now, and probably Claris didn't either. He had in fact never asked: you couldn't, without running the risk of a full-scale reconciliation.

If everything is allowed, everything forgivable; if you lust after sloth, take pride in anger, covet lust, and so on; if, fundamentally, nothing really matters: then why shame? Where does it *come* from? For that's what was washing over Stricker, here on the red sofa. Without warning, the palimpsest of the past shifts slightly, one extra layer revealed. The music modulates, a minor key; there's a trick to the camera, the familiar suddenly both washed out and intense. A cheap effect, you say later, but at the moment it works: unease, a dreadful clarity.

Stricker, then, the home movie reeling backwards, here on the red sofa, in the quiet apartment, on this cool, brief northern summer night. Stricker, ashamed. And in the worst way: with nothing to atone for, with no one to forgive him.

The text on this page is extremely faint and illegible. It appears to be a standard page of prose, possibly a chapter or section from a book, but the characters and words cannot be discerned. The layout includes a header at the top, a main body of text, and a footer at the bottom. The page is framed by a thin black border.

John Barton / DAYS OF 2004, DAYS OF CAVAFY

*We Greeks have lost our capital ... Pray, my dear Forster
oh pray that you never lose your capital.*
– attributed to C. P. Cavafy, by E. M. Forster

Away from the Houses of Parliament, wandering the streets of this ruined Confederation
neighbourhood under maples loosening darkness along a river where men could linger

past midnight in the chill, late-season air, I am anxious, thoughts wandering through
your far extinct quarter, not the squalid Alexandria you live in, but in the capital

you raise pediment by pediment at the rim of a great delta, city of golden arteries
buoyed by the mythic reflux of the river where millennia of young men heroic first

in their beauty, in their loyalty to the body, awoke in each other's arms, exquisite fallen
citizens true to the memory you keep fleshed out long after their city had abandoned

Anthony, long after your escape back from exile in Constantinople three years beyond
the less than transient music of British bombardment, an alien philihellene loafing about

town randy if circumspect, a youngest mother's son slipping out once she could drowse
only to muse past her death about the unreturned-to beds where after a game of cards

you would lie with changeable lovers in the Attarine district, shirts and trousers too briefly
shed, tattered, and for an hour revealing the wine-drunk gods your obscure city might

otherwise have kept out of reach, unimaginable men, their genders you would redress
years later make brashly presentable in a Greek so architectural, so arch in its pronouns.

*

Forster said: you begin from within, a life doomed by its devotion to transient things
youth, physical beauty, and passion – passion above all other: disreputable, excessive

in the “Greek” way of life as you see it, your true self admiring men in the street unseen
men whom you hope might still become and remain articulate in the artful, athletic tongue

of your ancestors, those inattentively schooled sophists whose bodies as discus throwers
adorn the coinage struck by adoring kings in commemoration of victories from Libya

to Antioch, wars thrusting far across Persia into India, the whole of an ancient world
inside you and you inside it, unearthed, the past intense with lust, the present imperfect

with men like yourself or worse, fallen or raised poor, badly dressed, whose inglorious
flesh so worn out by labour can still delight you, even in retrospect, however furtively

I look up to your second-floor balcony at 10, rue Lepsius, where with a candle you sit
into the dark hours revising, observing the infrequent clientele of the first-floor brothel

go and arrive, your eyes delighting in the girls, virtuosos of technique and the earning
pleasures, a man in your forties guessing their names for no reason, your interest in them

idle: except by implication they never walk as others do through your poems, for down
through the history of diaspora you remake from chosen bits of marble, you have stayed

enamoured with the endless debauch of young men who linger, depart from your city
their desires felt more often in the unseemingly errata you praise than in the anything else

ambiguities I observe, though like you I am not beautiful, the best of your days like mine
spent rising heartlessly up through the arid Third Circle of the Department of Irrigation –

who looks up to you, Cavafy, who follows, walking your deflowered city, this Alexandria
where you have made all time simultaneous, yet seem always to despair of its passage?

*

Amazing how any of us can persist at being in more than one place at more than one time
sipping coffee in a bazaar while walking along a northern river gilded with brittle leaves

watching passers-by, reliving the love we make with one man while at rest in the arms
of another, looking up from a newspaper on a city bus to retrace your steps, you a poet

born two centuries back, your path hidden, however memorably you may have one night
written about a man who years after your death might appear out of nowhere and act freely

from the study door I see you at work at your desk, yet I cannot see myself, a later man
unknowable to the city I live in, a city not less imperfect than yours, a city of its moment

with a disposition for violence, its young men after unaccountable days still found in bed
with their heads bashed in, beautiful, naked, though there are times when men here seem

in appearance more able to act, citizens solemn, happy to observe men marry other men
though by such public vows they become invisible, respectably move out to the suburbs

however ambitious their anonymity may be proclaimed in the high court as it overlooks
the river and its currents, overlooks what might sink, what might get carried forwards

new housing starts pushing the civic boundaries past limits not even you or I could have
guessed, the men of every city made good citizens whom, sitting at your desk, you can

only envision as enviable devotees of pleasure – and they are, their self-induced beauty
however VIAGRA-enhanced, used up as it can be in your time, though some of us hope

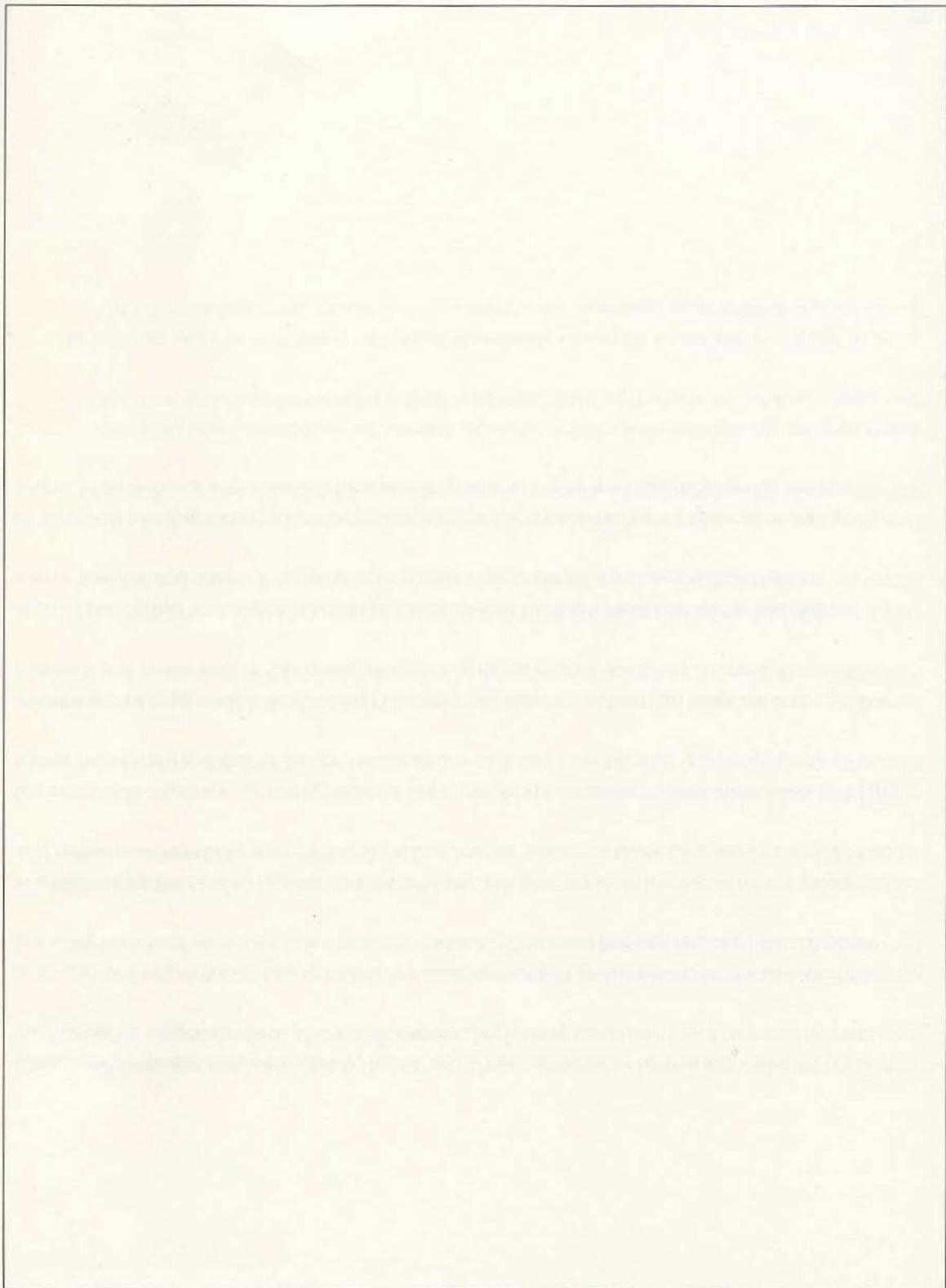
desire may be caught, its decline arrested long before it is gone, each man a taxpayer
a contemporary Adonis constitutionally to be resurrected once a night in his own bed.

*

There are times, as you know, a city need only be a room, fortifications thin as the walls
street noises brought in on the coats to be shed, the weedy taste of the sewers on our skin
conspicuous, unnamed transients of the sheets, men for blocks dropping in for an hour
for the night, not here on approval, beautifully unmarriedable but stand-ins for coupling
and culpable of nothing but the sweet relief of disappointment, like-minded citizens unable
to dissemble inside any room's time frame for long, skilled at keeping artful conversations
going only so far, articulately awkward, and knowing in their silences, the space of the room
immediately transformed into the space in their arms, each instant instantly archival, the eyes
recording unremarkable appointments: shelves lined with books leafed-through or unopened
curtains drawn, chest of drawers randomly pulled out, narcissus dead in a glass on the night
stand, double bed islanded under a soft-lit fixture, shirts unpressed yet hung, as they are
meant to be, in a wardrobe – the air stale with memories no one is ever intended to know
though afterwards pulling on clothes in the quick opposite order they were pulled off
standing at the door in our socks, closing it behind them, we find ourselves wondering
wandering the streets after them to the outskirts, musing on what barred store windows
they might browse, on where they likely stop for a beer on the way home, men we might
greet or ignore on the street for weeks afterwards, men who travel lives not too indifferent
to our own, travelling from Sparta to Thermopylae, from Sussex Drive to Albion Road.

*

Constantine, admit us: we all want to be Alexandrians, all want to be former exiles who stand elegiac on our balconies and observe the street, regretting the ruined glories we anticipate in transit below are behind us not ahead, knowing vestigial greatness may now lie elsewhere knowing the cities where we live – any city – like Alexandra at last are enough, our attempts at mediocrity sufficient to reconstruct an urbanity, a backdrop for a life, golden boys in our arms as irredeemable as those aging anywhere, as talented in excess, their inelegant candour found foremost in the nerves, in the rapacity of their tongues, any unused callowness reworked later by the heart, residual bits of history excavated over time, a communal transcript none of us ever knows entirely – anecdotes retold in every city, in every suburb, in fragments not unlike lifetimes you revise boldly, discretely, poems of a fallen city, of unchaste, eternal Alexandria men of the future looking backwards as I look to you for a city-map unfolding to relocate where you are and where I might yet go, a man who walks along a river below the seat of power in an unhellenic, obvious, plainspoken country where few imagine there are gods where I can pause along a lonesome street to give a stranger less unsatisfying directions.



Bill Howell / TWO POEMS

Old Enough to Remember

Millennium bells
tolling another absolute until it catches up to everyone else.
Measuring zeroes
when nobody dressed to the nines
ever pays enough for what they're trying to leave behind.

Juxtaposed in your own townhouse
between analog plugs and digital dread, watching consecutive time-zoned capitals
pretending to blow up
the sky – all those wide-screen jokers pledging peace
with all that gunpowder exploding behind them.

Yet here you still are
at midnight, toasting yourselves
in the spidery effervescence from outrageous hydrangeas instead of hydrogen
mushrooms. Actual concussions
reinforce barrage flashes bouncing

back from towering clouds you can now see better
than if you were really there.

Come daylight, perhaps, stray tanks smash up
your street on their way to
further festivities....

Trailer for Forced Retirement

Something in the sky perhaps
left over from a hijacked jet.
Then this lovely silver longing barely moving
just for a moment in the moonlight.
And some people choose to hold their tongues
for their share of the larger silence.

If only the day could stay as blonde as this
for as long as anybody wants.
The centrifugal faces of people you used to love
fling you beyond your long-lost graces.
So you just don't answer; you're so busy lining up
your bottom line with your bottom lip.

Silence unravelling
an artless absence of basics
no matter what we choose or refuse to share.
Like the small conversations that stop in any group
they approach: nothing from before they came
can soon be remembered. And some

are going to believe whatever they need to believe
until there's nothing in it for them. Blinks
washing smashed insects off stain-glass windshields;
still towing stashed rowboats between
thirsty thistles and drowning ferns;
and the sun dancing on the roof of that river.

Martha Eleen / INTO THE 905: THE VIEW FROM THE CAR

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

The 905 in the title refers to the telephone area code of the suburbs surrounding Toronto. My relationship to the suburbs has always been one of a passer-by in a car, looking over the highway barricades as the modern buildings rearrange themselves under the vast sky. The familiar landmarks, so ordinary and impersonal that we hardly notice them, become through repetition the significant symbols of our time: the ever present Canadian flags, big box malls with big parking lots, modern churches, barns, and subdivisions. The car is the connector between the domestic, commercial, and industrial zones.

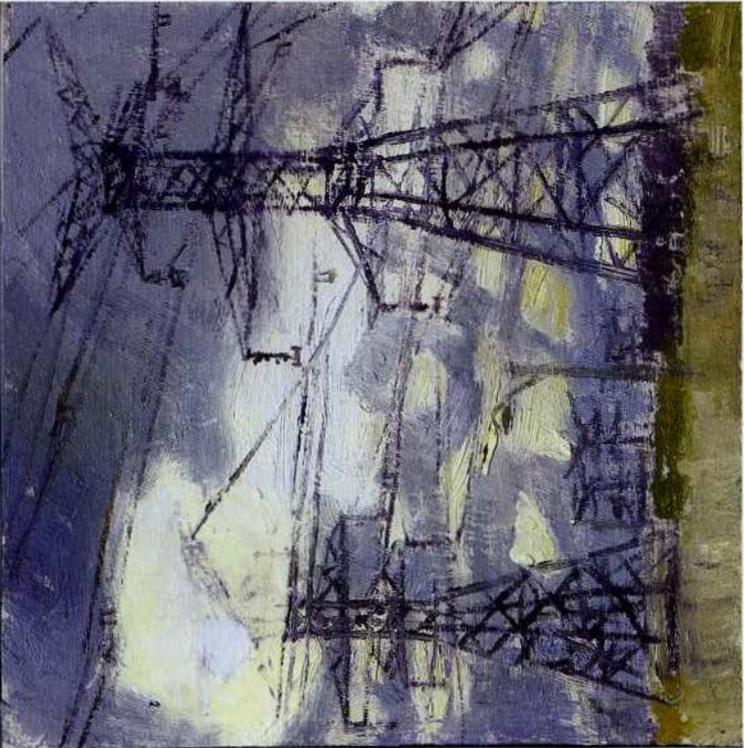
The next stage of this project concerns the domestic realm. Initially I was interested in the shock of the large subdivisions as seen from the road: the geometric patterns of rooftops circling cul de sacs, the impersonal facades composed of garages, and the wasteland of treeless construction sites. But it is impossible to ignore the cultural diversity of the new neighbourhoods growing on the outskirts of Toronto. North of "Canada's Wonderland" there is a subdivision called Peace Village built around a mosque. The inhabitants are devout Ahmadiyya Muslims, a branch of Islam; many are refugees from Pakistan, where they were persecuted by religious extremists.

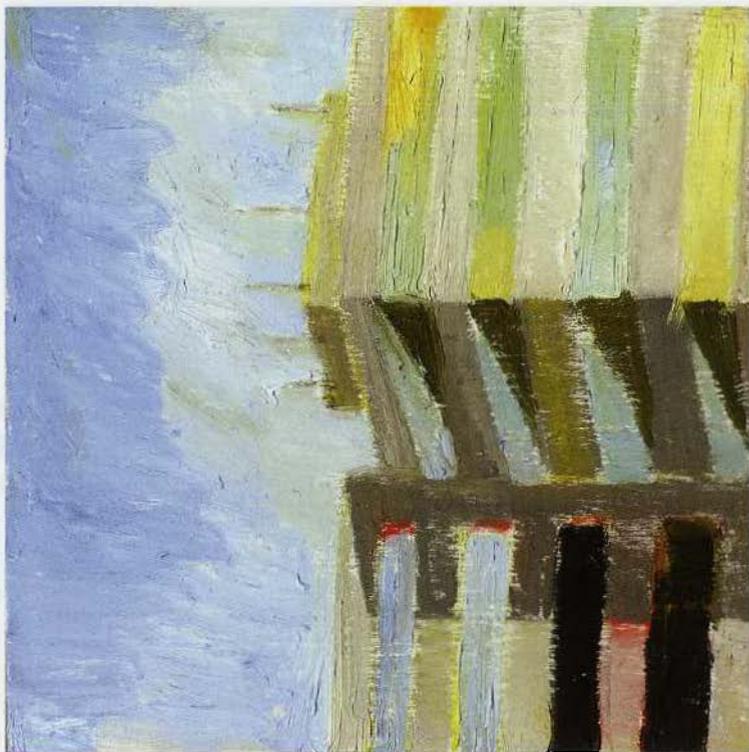
My recent paintings of Peace Village were produced during a two-month artist residency this spring. *Peace Village*, consists of about 55 paintings (oil on wood, 16" x 16" and 24" x 24") related to each other thematically: the houses, the mosque, the surrounding landscape, the fabrics of the women's clothing – religious restrictions prohibit portraiture of women – and portraits of children in prayer postures. These paintings represent the second part to the series *Into the 905: The View From the Car*, where multiple images (oil on wood, 12" x 12") express time and motion through observation of changes in point of view and condition of light.

I fell into a relationship with the inhabitants of Peace Village simply because I was painting in their public spaces and it happens that in this community, because of the religious and cultural practices, there is a lot of participation in public life. As well, against of the backdrop of recent international wars, fear of multiculturalism, and a

growing level of mistrust between Muslims and non-Muslims, my residency there was recognised by the leadership of the mosque as an opportunity to promote understanding of diversity through art.

My practice integrates formal observational painting, *en plein air*, with non-traditional subject matter and contemporary conceptual concerns. I am especially interested in bringing forward aesthetic and political aspects of my surrounding culture that are normally overlooked or misunderstood, but become interesting through observation of the fall of light on surfaces, the placement of forms in space, and of colours, natural and artificial. These concerns are as much a part of the meaning of my paintings as are the functions of these forms.













LIST OF

INFO THE

- 1. M... ..
- 2. S... ..
- 3. E... ..



From Pillars

- 4. The
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.





LIST OF WORKS

INTO THE 905: THE VIEW FROM THE CAR

1. Hydro Towers #5 / Thorn Cliff #1
12"X12"
2. Spring in Scarborough #2 / Spring in Scarborough #5
12"X12"
3. Pickering Bridge #6 / Pickering Bridge #8
12"X12"

Peace Village

4. Hwy 400 #1 / Fazia Mehdi Park
16"x16"
5. Ahmadiyya Avenue / Teston Road #1
16"x16"
6. Abdus Salam #2 / Zafarullah Khan Crescent
16"x16"
7. Mosque Gate #2 / Bai'tul Islam Mosque #1
16"x16"
8. Beauty of Hijaab #2 / Beauty of Hijaab #8
16"x16"

All paintings are oil on wood

Swerve into the shoulder,
True that, smoke a dart, yeah. Weather chain those maws.

“Kilometer 21, loaded pick-up with trailer off the Septimus, for two.”

Cut your dodge open like a tin can. Call your clicks, chief.

the Heli is waiting on the other side of this twisted root system

take us to the festival of angels beyond the veins of industry.

heated floors paradise

Nematode worm paradise un

(we x 2)

“Body Job on the Brassens kilometer 120” – and you wonder what are these strange
machines calling their –

“Loaded Two-Ton off the Brassens onto the Limbo, on the. He He...”

We’ll run them off the road, amateur undead... no speeding in the north western afterlife
the lanes are jammed up.

Leading a colossal dump truck down the (Soft Wood Lumber
Dispute) into the (No more Red Wood)

Where the roads impacted gaseous black. “Kilometer 40” watch it there’s a commander
following

But we were leading an eighteen wheeler. The roads are narrow roads the roads
are.... look in the rearview at the shredded stumps and slash; now see bodies reaching their stumpy
arms upward towards the concealed sky, signaling to the smoked-over heavens – bombs away – and
all the minced body parts, spread debris. bags, bandoleers; hard hat, the green steel helmet. walking
through the battle field of the mind. Bodies everywhere, stepping over figments. Stepping over mind
bodies, bodies in the mind. One, two, three, hoe, one, two, three, hoe, hoe, hoe. Slash piles just
masses of dismembered limbs sticking out all –ish, the neat rows of aspen like corpses spread along
the tarmac in some sort of Sylvan Death Camp – a dissected humanity of limbs and leers and
glaucous gull eyes staring aslant or hanging out of sockets.

What is a Commander?

You post Neanderthal modern.

The commander is the tonka truck of Reality

Muskeg reaches grass water, water rat forever, around the winter road,
and the 2 story Herculean engine power, a Finch dobbing the chrism
beak. The Killdeer has calmed down.

This is where they hung the poets at the gates.

Layton (Cain), his tongue blue, an emcee. Born again as the blue grackle mocking.

The Commander driver, behind the windshield, pumps his arm in passing.

lays into the 4 wheel low. (yeah boy)

Yellow quadrangles.

forest Management renewing

this

is where we will be tortured for our sins

and die

Laughing, after the gas, in an opening, in the glade

The open sky, beyond the Stuck Truck (winch wasn't enough), those last kilometers of divinity.

arbutus

red nakedness leaning on neighbors, reaching
and supported

beauteous arbutus
arbutus/Buddhist
Arbutus/Brutus

àrbol

Shoot us The root
Of Us

arbre

Leaning, reaching over stumps.
 Into the ether, beyond the song.
 To retrieve the riches
A trillion varieties of bud.
 Send it over the aquatic.

Ah spit, ah Arbutus
ruse of us, shades of cherry wood, shades
of the orient in the western twilight

Arbutus. Shedding its bark as the city sheds its lights
In skeins of its colours/ skeins of arbutus.

 One tree grows through
Another tree. Yet another. There are beaten paths
– the lights of the city –
hymns of Arbutus
songs for Arbutus
receptacle for our feelings

 It is true you seem human.
Beautiful mutant arbutus

Prosper on perversion

When even the stars cry that everything
is that way.

Wake up to stirrup chir chir

Stirrup oho chi

Drop tap of rain.

Arbutus is there dancing

(have you gone?)

In another life

Were the ironwood

Cuticle leaves tropical.

The tit tit of rain taps on yer slippery bough

Famous botanists

Raced to name you

Mr. H Beaumont and the government

Donated the marine park for your prosperity, posterity

Where eagles, crows, hawks, crash wings through the t-tops.

Arbutus, we grow rugged & dirty by the fire ... In the fires of time,

The fires of rubber tires, the fires of the beach.

We stare at the brightest things & they distract us from the shadows of arbutus,

what goes on in yer citadels. radiate neither human nor plant

We who ponder deeply on the outskirts of your kingdom.

arbutus reaches its sprigs into my grave

Making me believe in a philosophy that is constantly rewriting itself

must be amended daily, as it rises from dreams, the roots in the head.

Natalie Simpson / from CAMP SET UP DONE

Let's finalize this camp set up done and finalized. Butt cans out side pods? Each contractor will still be responsible for their own business. Wide loads have long tops; watch for them when trucks are turning, they will be starting to buck logs and stack for the mill.

Finish fencing /

Muster signs

We never did see any of these through, write it down & leave.

Dishwasher's hands are chafing. Water on the floor. The next thing we will have someone slipping and cracking his/her head.

Sawmill services: Saw, sort, pile. Bundle. Possibly load.

Sandwiches problem has been rectified. Everyone seems happy.

Will bore this site.

– Stringing pipe.

Surveying in piles.

Will be marking power line heights.

Incident with impaired worker dealt with. All rooms have been rekeyed, and mastered to the same master key. Hockey rink; we will see. Water truck on minimums, handful of rock truck drivers out, and cat skimmers.

Propane leaks? Cleaner and bleach. So far no smoke smell or haze. Had a dirt lump jump up and break a window on a backhoe. Ends were loose on forks. One flu and one swelling of big toe, boots maybe too small.

Plant water shack water is handled by them.

Day by day.

Saw mill site is out of bounds. No blankets for the tanks. Pumps or pump parts for the potable water car.

All heavy loads have the right away.

Calcium chloride rash. Cut and pinched finger. Bump on the foot from a log.

Skid the skids with propane tanks out and rack at the land farm across from the saw mill. Report that Tom skidded people for dope. Norm will handle it has been done. Had a man go to medic with chest pains; this is non-work-related as he is taking medicine for his esophagus.

Two damaged mirrors.

Medic leaving this morning clicked mirrors with a Halliburton toolhand.

Tomorrow's meeting will be a tailgate at the camp yard if the weather is the same.

If it is too cold, Fred's pen does not work and does not own a pencil.

We have had

seven workers dismissed for booze

1 for drugs

1 for being a pig and smoking in his room

Tails are crowding main road. There are some concerns with the midnight lunches. Could be a better selection of food and hot drinks, also utensils would be appreciated. Some personnel do not know what clean shaven means, not to include the moustache.

Jason was in last night asking for a shack or maybe grouping together.

Canadian electrical code states that grounding clamps may be of brass, copper, or brass.

Truckers to use bush road courtesy when meeting each other. Mills are going at a full tilt.

Sawdust in the eye. Infected right thumb. Everything is the same as yesterday.

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

JOHN BARTON has published eight volumes of poetry and five chapbooks; a bilingual edition of *West of Darkness: a self-portrait of Emily Carr*, his third book, which originally appeared in 1987, was republished in a bilingual edition by Buschek Books earlier this year. He is co-editor of *Seminal: The Anthology of Canada's Gay-Male Poets* due out next year. He lives in Victoria, where he edits *The Malahat Review*.

MARTHA ELEEN graduated with honours in painting from Emily Carr College of Art in Vancouver, 1984. Her paintings have been exhibited in public galleries in Canada, U.S.A., and Mexico and are in private and public collections. Her recent series of paintings, *Into the 905: The View From the Car*, investigates the suburban landscape. This body of work in progress was exhibited at the Grimsby Public Gallery, Grimsby, ON; Cambridge Public Gallery (Preston), Cambridge, ON; Lehmann Leskiw Gallery, Toronto, 2005; and Gallery 1313, Toronto, 2004. Eleen was Artist in Residence at Peace Village, a Muslim subdivision on the outskirts of Toronto, in the spring of 2006. The paintings produced here were exhibited at the Bai'tul Islam Mosque at Peace Village in Maple, ON as well as at the International Centre in Mississauga ON in 2006. Eleen teaches painting and drawing at the Toronto School of Art.

ROGER FARR teaches writing and theory at Capilano College. Recent critical work appears or is forthcoming in *Anarchist Studies*, *Fifth Estate*, *Perspectives in Anarchist Theory*, *The Rain Review*, *West Coast Line*, and *XCP: Cross-Cultural Poetics*. His first book of poetry, *SURPLUS*, is due out with LINEbooks in Fall 2006. An aspiring permaculturalist and sometimes gleaner, he lives on Gabriola Island, BC.

BILL HOWELL has three published poetry collections, and is currently nailing down a fourth. Recent work has appeared in *Canadian Literature*, *existere*, *Lichen*, *Nashwaak Review* and *Windsor Review*. For 27 years he was a network drama producer-director with CBC Radio.

BASIL KING attended Black Mountain College as a teenager in the 1950s and completed his apprenticeship as an abstract expressionist painter in San Francisco and New York. Since, his art has taken a different turn reaching back to surrealism and forward to a new approach to the figure. Some of his larger paintings can be seen on the web at the Spuyten Duyvil, Light & Dust, Avec, and Marsh Hawk Press sites. His most recent exhibition was at Bowery Poetry Club, New York, January

to March 2006. King's books include *Split Peas*, *Miniatures*, *Devotions*, *Identity*, *The Poet*, *Warp Spasm*, and *Mirage: a poem in 22 sections* (Marsh Hawk Press, 2003), which has a section of seven reproductions of King's paintings. *A Painter's Bestiary* is forthcoming from Marsh Hawk Press in 2007.

HELENE LITTMANN has recently returned to Vancouver after a decade in Hong Kong, Montreal, Baltimore, and Tennessee. She is currently finishing a Ph.D. dissertation for The Johns Hopkins University and teaching English at the B.C. Institute of Technology. Her book, *Peripheries: Three Novellas* was published by Cormorant Books in 1998. "Rewind" is the first part of longer work in process.

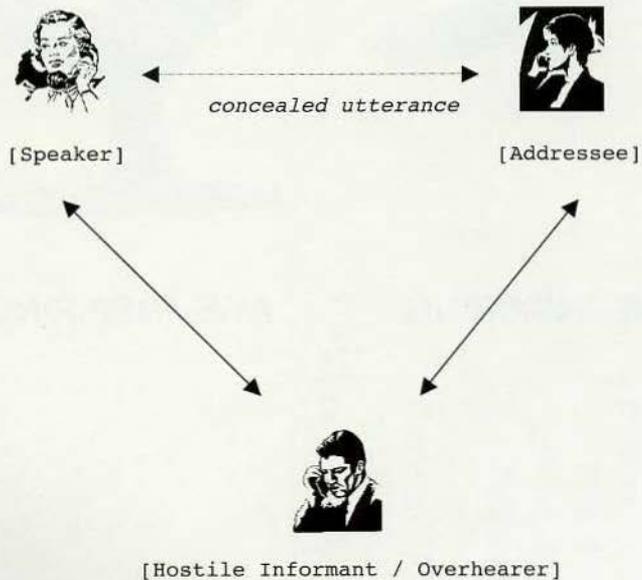
JOSH MASSEY is currently working as a health writer/researcher in Ottawa. He is also constructing a digital assemblage of performances and interviews (a documentary) so far including such luminous luminaries as Max Middle, a rawlings, bill bissett, Pauline Michel, George Elliott Clarke.

GARRY MORSE's poetry has appeared in *West Coast Line*, *Dandelion*, *Queen Street Quarterly*, and *iamb*. He has written *Death in Vancouver*, still a "homeless" book of short stories, and has recently made an imaginary friend for that, a serial novella named *Minor Episodes*. Between commercial breaks, Morse codes code.

NATALIE SIMPSON is a former *filling Station* editor whose poetry has appeared in *Queen Street Quarterly*, *dANdelion*, and *West Coast Line*, in chapbooks from housepress and MODL press, and in the anthologies *Post-Prairie* (Talonbooks) and *Shift & Switch* (Mercury Press). She is currently studying law at UBC. The series "camp set up done" is a portion of a longer manuscript that also contains "making hole" (*West Coast Line* 40) and "NEWS" (*dANdelion* 30.1). Each series is based on found language gathered during her employment in the office of an oil and gas company in Calgary. "camp set up done" comes from the minutes of daily meetings of a winter drilling/milling camp in north-eastern British Columbia.

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— Fred Wah (February 2006)

Yr mail jarred me back to 1974 to Peregrine Books, where the first "books" I bought on moving to Vancouver were 3 issues or so of The Cap Review. Exciting, cover to cover reading, not the usual mag snoresville ... I thought life had changed utterly!

— Erin Moure (March 2006)

I have never felt so satisfied with the appearance of my work in a magazine. It has been beautifully laid out on the page, the page itself is beautiful (the paper), the typeface is beautiful. The company my poems keep in this issue is beautiful. For some reason, publishing these poems in The Capilano Review feels as enlivening as publishing an entire book of poems.

— John Barton

An image of the world as of now. Beautiful I can see the extraordinary care with which each issue is handled, obviously a labour of love.

— Warren Tallman