

Public Works:  
Weekly Essays

# Public Works: Weekly Essays

Edited by Bess Lovejoy, Joni Murphy, Aaron Peck  
and Anne Lesley Selcer

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*(upon which, once upon a time, four editors irritatedly waited for brunch)*

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## Introduction: Why Experimentation?

Bess Lovejoy

There exists a tendency to devalue experimentation: it is not serious enough, the argument goes; it is immature or does not produce enough concrete results. But experimentation is key not only to innovation, it is key to raising public expectations of what is possible.

If you talk about media a lot to people, you run into the argument that basically, the media gives people what they want. While there is undoubtedly some truth to this, the argument ignores the economic context in which most media is created and produced. The media is sponsored by advertisers who seek to reach readers: the more, the better. The best way to create media that will reach the most readers, the story goes, is to appeal to the lowest common denominator.

If you find all this horrific, as I do, yet you have some ridiculous commitment to writing in the very public realm, the first step is to find and exploit opportunities to question what the reader wants. The best way to do this is to ignore the construction of the “reader” at all. This is the radical opportunity *Terminal City* briefly provided: with virtually no money or prestige to offer, all we could give writers was a chance to experiment, to put their work out there, and to write through (or into) their own questions about the work that interested them.

What I found was that people were very excited by this openness and sense of possibility. And in this space, what opened was a chance to consider cultural production seriously. Not as decoration, not as the latest thrill, not as a cheap date, but for—the horror!—the way art and writing relate to our intellectual, social, and moral development.<sup>1</sup> What also happened was a new attention being paid to the quality and the texture of the writing itself. In the midst of a fight with my Books Editor, Aaron Peck, over one of his articles (the Liz Magor piece), he said, “I think journalism has to start considering the pleasure of the reading experience; that has to be one of its priorities.” He was right, of course, and one of the interesting things about the work in this book is how pleasurable to read much of the writing is, the way it uses poetic and fictional devices to explore its subjects.

Though I make it seem like strategy now, these results were born of the exigencies of little time and little capital. What happened in the space of this experimentation, I hoped, was to show people what can be possible within the spaces of an alt weekly.

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<sup>1</sup> When Christopher Brayshaw writes that, “[Rodney] Graham’s work pleases me... [because] its humor, wide-ranging sources, and quirky formal qualities compel me to spend time with it, and that time, in turn, opens up space to reflect on things—my own behavior, say, or my relationship to nature—which the late capitalist culture I live in would prefer me to ignore,” he highlights perfectly both the subversive powers of art and the reasons why more serious considerations of culture are so absent from most publications.

## Born-again Virgin For Genny O, it's always the first time

Joni Murphy

*"Sex is one of the nine reasons for reincarnation, the other eight are unimportant"*  
– Henry Miller

**G**enny O wakes from an unsettling wet dream only to realize she's overslept. She has a quick shower and cup of coffee before rushing out the door to get to her gallery on time. While crossing the street she's run down by a speeding semi.

*Heartways: The Exploits of Genny O* exists somewhere on the cultural spectrum between Madonna's radio hits and Nietzsche's eternal return, Danielle Steel and the Dali Lama, Jeff Koons' Puppy and Thomas Kinkade's paintings of light. It's the only novel I've read in which the main character dies in two chapters and loses her virginity in every other.

Contradictory as this may sound, the conceptual structure makes Genny's continual reinvention understandable. Edited by artists Rita McBride and Erin Cosgrove, *Heartways* is an artist's book genre novel, the first of four in a series. Like the best-selling literary hoax of the 60s *Naked Came the Stranger*, each chapter is by a different author, and we never know who wrote what. The most unexpected and conceptually satisfying contributor is that international "ambassador of romance" Fabio, but the list also includes Vancouver writers Douglas Copeland and Michael Turner, plus artist John Baldessari.

*The next day, Genny begins a love affair with her handsome neighbor (a sculptor!) who she's lusted after for months. Genny lives in New York. She goes to Rome. She lives in LA. She has a Romanian family and a boring office job. At every turn in her life she meets handsome artists who have designs on her virginity. She's deflowered as often as a suburban rose bush.*

If you're hung up on development, continuity, or stylistic consistency, this isn't the book for you. With playful references to *The Arabian Nights* and *The Story of O*, each chapter reintroduces the reader to Genny, who confronts the twists and turns of her artistic and sexual journey with a kind of Zen amnesia. It's possible this is all a dream, or that each moment is indeed her opportunity to be reborn, or maybe Genny O is dead, and her recurrent virginity is an eternal punishment or reward. Or perhaps it's all pulp fun and games, and there is no bigger meaning.

The structural openness of the narrative makes any number of readings possible. Many of the chapters focus on sexual encounters both turgid and absurd, jumbling together tropes from romance novels and the art world. Disappointingly, not all the chapters find the right balance between staying true to the genre and subverting it.

One chapter that successfully walks the tightrope is “O Apprenticed To X”. The author blends the fervent styles of performance art and classic erotica with a quick wit. In this incarnation, Genny is an aspiring artist who lives a monastic existence while studying the cultural intricacies of sex. “With young women” her mentor tells her, “it is necessary for them to develop a distinct sense of their sexual power and to clarify their desire openly. This is how they will develop the strength to support their artistic integrity.” The chapter mocks whipped-up intensity by using refined writing, while still managing to surprise. It even ends with an earthquake: “Violent, the building’s structure was damaged enough to create a believable distraction.” Of course, Genny manages to escape her dire situation and live another day.

As far as writing goes, the book is uneven. But as an artwork, this is a little pink treasure of foxy, sophisticated guilty pleasure—a good gift to impress your haughty art-star crush or curator lover.

*Despite all the excitement in her life Genny O decides to commit suicide. She’s “seen it all and then some. She might as well jump out the window and splatter on the ground. Now that would be different.” Later on that night, she has a dream about the a stranger with flowing locks . . .*

## Compton Wants

### New poems on the denied desires of BC's blacks

Charles Mudede

Since first uttered by Franz Fanon in 1952, the most important question regarding the matter of the racial identity of blacks in Africa, Europe, North America, and the Caribbean has been this: "What does the black man want?"

Does he or she want more money, more recognition or more political power? And are all the things that he or she wants in the hands of white people? And if these wants were attained, what would he or she do next? Would they finally relax and say, "Ah, this is just what I wanted?" Would the black man or woman be genuinely, deeply and eternally happy if they were no longer wanting?

Wayde Compton's latest book, *Performance Bond*, is a collection of poems, prose poems, raps, and oral histories that express several wants. The most that local poet and historian Compton wants is to preserve for all time the stories of those whose economic, social, sexual and political desires were systematically and sometimes brutally denied by North American's complex of racism.

Desire drives this work, but it's not simply a matter of naming and getting something directly. Many of the needs of those who populate Compton's book are not stable or fixed. Black desires, like all life desires, are in a state of flux, riddled with multiple-meanings that can be read in several different ways.

"British Columbia," Compton writes, "whose motto *Splendor Sine Occasu*, with pretence rendered in Latin / can be translated myriad ways. / Here I will say: 'Scintillation Without Perimeter.'"

*Performance Bond* has four chapters. The first, "Stations," deals primarily with the globalisation of Vancouver. Compton discusses the poor who arrived in the city "the belly of a rusting imagination," and those who came with a "West Indian way of looking." This chapter contains a wonderful poem about the first international black film star, Sidney Poitier, who "took the weight, of their fear of a black planet, on [his] shoulders."

The following chapter, "(Bottle) (Poems)," contains poems that are more aesthetic than historical. Here, language itself dominates. Compton's words, sentences and punctuation marks enter a playground with funky merry-go-rounds, soulful swings, and slurring slides

"*Performance Bond*," the third chapter, is a masterpiece of hip-hop art. The last chapter, "Rune," is heavy with 20th century histories of black folk who came to Vancouver wanting something the USA flatly refused to give them. Compton reveals that too often, what they wanted is not what they got.

Compton's prose poems address several examples of injustice: "Clarence Clemons [was] a black longshoreman beaten to death by Vancouver police in the alley behind the New Station Café in 1952; the office objected to his common law marriage to a white woman...For Kary Taylor, a black dentist beaten by Burnaby RCMP in 1999; in the words of the police themselves, the officer 'saw a black man in a nice car with an

Oriental female, and... he wasn't sure if it was possibly a prostitute-pimp situation.”

The dentist wanted to have the good time that his respectable station in life afforded him; the longshoreman wanted to establish and support a family with “mixed children”—both wants were violently denied.

At the heart of this and Compton's other work, is the constant awareness that if left to standard Canadian history, these small histories would not survive. Surrounding Compton's books is a sea that is ready to wash away the memories of blacks whose realities and wants were shaped in the massive but relatively young province of British Columbia.



## “Little Thoughts Gone Astray” Christopher Brayshaw visits Rodney Graham at the VAG

Christopher Brayshaw

*Who is there that does not love a tree?  
I planted one, I planted three.  
Two for you and one for me.*

-- Rodney Graham, “Theme From the Phonokinetoscope”

Rodney Graham’s video loop, *A Reverie Interrupted by The Police*, begins with a convict, played by Graham, being led on stage by a uniformed policeman. Graham’s job, at least for the loop’s eight minute duration, is to sit at a piano and play, despite his hands being cuffed together. So play he does, sometimes fluidly, other times jaggedly or minimally, and, on occasion, angrily or resignedly, repeatedly opening and slamming the case shut to create some impromptu John Cage-style percussion. All the while, Graham keeps casting hilariously surreptitious looks back over his shoulder at his guard, looks that simultaneously announce, *I’m fucked*, and, *Maybe if I just keep on going....*

In actual fact, not much happens. The cop stands stolidly, chewing his moustache, outwardly unmoved by Graham’s performance, escorting him off screen at the eight-minute mark, then back on again as the video loops. The piece’s lush lighting and expressionistic camera angles invoke the basic conventions of narrative suspense, only to collapse them. Will Graham pull a gun out of the piano case? Will an anvil fall, beaming the cop on the head? After the second or third loop, you realise Graham’s musical performance—flawed, halting, repetitive, made under desperately unhappy circumstances by an “artist” whose mind is obviously elsewhere—is the piece’s real point, a brief burst of creativity worked out under tense and soul-trying circumstances. The video is alternately unsettling and touching, premised as it is on the notion that circumstances are awful, and unlikely to improve any time soon.

In a funny way, *A Reverie* lays out as clear a case for Rodney Graham’s artistic importance as anything else in his career, which has largely been predicated on doing one thing after another, shifting subjects and media with every new project. Thus the film and video loops, costumes, and altered books, the faked art-historical works, paintings and drawings, the appropriated and rewritten texts, “lighting events,” bookmarks and book sculptures, CDs and music videos and performances. Looking back at this variety, it’s hard to dismiss the idea that these formal changes are attempts to avoid falling into a fixed way of doing things, or of acquiring a “signature style.”

Like *A Reverie's* musical performance, Graham's career has high points (the book works; the photographs; most of the films and videos) and lows (the paintings and mixed-media drawings; the editioned objects based on the more complex films and videos), but what strikes you most, looking over the assortment of objects collected on the VAG's second and third floors, is the conceptual consistency of Graham's artistic inquiries, and the immediate pleasure his works provide.

Used with regard to contemporary art, pleasure is a funny word. Older art—a Manet bouquet, say, or a 16th century Dutch still life—pleases even as it instructs; the works' conceptual and sensuous qualities form an emulsion that cannot be easily separated into its constituent parts. Much contemporary art, on the other hand, desperately seeks to please its institutional patrons, critics, or potential purchasers. The conceptual and formal austerity of works by socially engaged artists like Michael Asher, Joseph Kosuth, or Art & Language is, in a sense, a reaction against a climate in which contemporary art is wholly integrated with fashion, entertainment, and consumer culture (Witness Takashi Murakami's designs for Louis Vuitton, or the co-option of Gillian Wearing's *Signs That Say What You Want Them to Say* into countless advertising campaigns).

So when I say that Graham's work pleases me, I mean that its humor, wide-ranging sources, and quirky formal qualities compel me to spend time with it, and that time, in turn, opens up space to reflect on things—my own behavior, say, or my relationship to nature—which the late capitalist culture I live in would prefer me to ignore.

These speculations, in turn, don't easily assimilate to any preexisting ideology; they're speculative, almost free-form, and perhaps this explains why Graham is unique in the long-term hold that his work has exerted over my imagination. There are individual works of art that move me far more than any work of Graham's—Gerhard Richter's Baader-Meinhof paintings, say, or Vija Celmins' night skies, or Jeff Wall's *Volunteer*—but when pressed by friends or critics to name an exemplary contemporary artist, I almost always name Graham. He has undoubtedly inspired many local artists—Tim Lee comes to mind; so too, in a more sophisticated and tangential way, do Althea Thaugerber and Neil Wedman—but I can't imagine adopting him as a “model of practice,” as I could Cindy Sherman, or Andreas Gursky, or the Bechers. There are just too many things going on at once in Graham's work. Imitating him would be like trying to catch a school of bright and skittish fish with a single pole.

Many of Graham's early works are “supplements” to preexisting texts or artworks that undercut their sources' authority, often in a hilariously direct way. In the book sculpture *Dr. No*, the Ian Fleming novel of the same name is displayed along with an extra, stainless steel page etched with a text by Graham “in the manner of” Fleming, which extends a scene in which James Bond lies in bed with a poisonous centipede into an endless loop wherein the centipede scurries over Bond's body again and again and again. Another book sculpture, *Casino Royale*, conceals a Fleming first edition within a metal housing that looks remarkably like a Donald Judd sculpture, converting the austere beauty of its Judd source into something altogether more craft-oriented, more furniture

than sculpture.

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*Halcion Sleep*, Graham's first performance featuring himself, grew out of a dissatisfaction with his appropriations of preexisting things. "Conceptual art opened up possibilities where I could work, collaborating with other people, having things made, supervising the production rather than making it myself. And for a while it was really liberating to work that way. Now I feel it's the end of a cycle for me," Graham told a *Chicago Tribune* interviewer in 1995

*Halcion Sleep* is a video document of a performance in which a drugged Graham, clad in an attractive set of striped pajamas, is driven from a budget suburban motel to his south Granville home. This silent, formally austere 26-minute piece is alternately comforting and deeply sad, evoking the nostalgic feeling of traveling in the back of your parents' car as a child, and, simultaneously, the hard-to-shake sense that the performance actually documents a one-way drive that will conclude in Graham's death.

Other highlights? The acid-drenched pop backing up *The Phonokinetoscope's* trippy ride through Berlin's Tiergarten. *Loudhailer's* sly nod at Stan Douglas' split-screen, out-of-synch extravaganzas. *Aberdeen*, a slide piece whose simplicity of execution is totally out of scale with its visual and musical complexity, proof that Graham's talent does not solely depend on expensive technology. And, finally, the Rodney Graham Band. Graham, Dave Carswell, and John Collins tore the roof off the Cambrian Hall last week, transforming Graham's wistfully orchestrated '60s tunes into a raucous, hour and a half set of buzzing power-pop. Graham looked a little startled and surprised by all the applause, but it was simply as sustained and generous as his own work.

## Spare me some MASSIVE CHANGE

Anne Lesley Selcer

Psychiatrists describe the heliumed happiness of mania as a sort of demon-chased joy, an upward escape route from depression. Massive Change, the design survey, which opened October 2 at the Vancouver Art Gallery, appears to be suffering from a touch of it. “The media,” the authoritative sans serif on the wall tells us, “with its mind numbing insistence on crisis and disaster has somehow ignored one of the most extraordinary stories in human history.” Standing at centre ring, design star Bruce Mau waves his baton and vanishes the fear, outrage and worldwide unrest of those caught in globalism’s lion’s jaws.

With his students at George Brown College’s Institute Without Boundaries in Toronto, curator Mau purports to solve world problems by giving better shapes to things. “There’s a very negative mood out there” Mau told the *Globe*, “people think things are getting worse. What we saw, was that things were getting better.” But it is confounding to stand in front of Switzerland’s Twike (a bullet shaped vehicle powered by electricity), the US’s Sparrow (a battery run “personal transit module” that does 70 mph) and India’s revamped rickshaw (a revamped rickshaw) and not do the cultural critique.

Design is a topic for serious consideration—style *is* deep. Style compacts information and communicates a thousand things in several directions. There is good reason to think and theorize and talk and write about it. Mau has fallen into the cracks of a strange cultural moment though. With the intellectual dollars in his pocket as the first designer for the hip Zone Books series (which has published Bataille, Deleuze and Foucault) and his collaboration with star architect/theorist Rem Koolhaas on *S,M,L,XL*, Mau is still running on the fumes of the stylishly intellectual 90s and its fascination with all things left-brained artsy, like architecture. He has not however, clued in to the enormous fractures of the market crash, 9/11, the tech-bubble bursting, and worldwide protest over globalism. Here is Massive Change’s design flaw: its tone of educational certainty. In one room you hear the honeyed tones of a Nature Channel voice-over murmuring things like “density liberates land for the production of nature,” smooth as a stewardess saying “seatbacks must be raised and tray-table locked in their upright positions before take-off,” and there is just no room to argue. But all of the intellectual authority seems to repeat the same thing over and over: lack of innovation is the only thing really getting us down. We also get these more specific lines from Hernand De Soto’s *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else* cut and pasted into at least two separate rooms: “lack of formal land ownership is the source of poverty in developing nations.”

The sheer volume of text on the walls is overwhelming. In what other gallery exhibit is meaning of the work written out for you? It feels suspicious; Mau doth protest too much. And often, he says too little. In the “Urban” room text slides fluidly over a fast montage of images, text like: EVERYTHING=DESIGN=CITY=HOPE. Language poetry? New math? Earnest gallery goers, ears to their optional listening devices tend to look distressed. The wall tells us, “access to information is the true catalyst for change”

but why do we feel so powerless here?

Mau is not coy about his worldview. When asked by The New York Times “What aesthetic should designers embrace?” he answered, “The richness of the marketplace.” In some ways this exhibit feels like a 13 room boardroom presentation. You are the client and he is selling the happy version of global capitalism. Nods to social activism include Mecca Cola, a company that fight Palestinian oppression by selling a Coke look-alike. A whole room is dedicated to alternative energy, the only room, by the way, with text that deviates from the assertive ariel of the rest of the exhibit; alternative energy is explained to us in green wispy faux handwriting. Examples of innovative design in the “Markets” room include the Wal-Mart—it has the largest and most complicate data warehouse in the world apparently—and the Visa corporation. Dee Hock, Visa’s originator was inspired by “the complexity of ecosystems and nature’s resilient ability to balance both chaos and order.” This corporate structure succeeds in transcending what Hock calls “the Old Monkey Mind,” apparently responsible for the old set of banking regulations in the way of our ability to spend easier, quicker and, as statistics repeatedly note, outside of our means. Using nature to explain the inevitability of market capitalism is de rigueur, but Hock borrows credit from the metaphor at both ends.

Still, the politics of Massive Change do not cancel out the fact that you get to see lots of amazing things. The “Information” room is cinematic—low lights, a long table, backlighted maps of all different sorts glowing on the walls—the ambience makes the mystery and complexity of world palpable. The Internet is represented by a mess of crazy, crossing coloured lines; the Tree of Life map abstracts and graphs species evolution. Bringing together so many design objects and concepts an admirable feat and the neo-liberal agenda actually may be counter-balanced a bit by the fact that the project is so massive. The Massive Change project includes a lecture series, a radio station and a book. Inevitably, this diversity of mediums will open up a conversation. For now though, the exhibit seeks to confirms the sale and seal the deal by asking you to answer “NOW THAT WE CAN DO ANYTHING WHAT SHOULD WE DO?” A small cove with flimsy scraps newsprint quality paper, a few pencils and a tape dispenser gives you chance to put some text of your own on the wall. Mau is asking for your direction on the project, here’s your chance.

## The Work of Doubt Liz Magor's Iconoclasm

Aaron Peck

*Capitalism is wrong. Monuments, brittle and spurious, appear between dossiers and condos; but happiness, like the real, is deceitful, it arises somewhere else, between flanerie and loose paper.*

The numerous files on Liz Magor one finds in the VAG library tender a standard list: her education, tenure, position in Canadian art, the controversy of the early 90s, and her participation in Documenta and the Venice Biennale. Each interview or review states this list over and over again. To many, Magor's work and name are ubiquitous. Most young Vancouver artists who attend Emily Carr have worked with her. One wonders where to start to review Magor's work in Vancouver. Perhaps it is best to start errantly. A simple walk toward *LightShed*, Magor's new public artwork in Coal Harbor, provides a necessary step. At the foot of Broughton, near the marinas and floating Esso and Shell stations, Magor cast a freight shed in aluminum, reproducing a shed historically found on the foot of Carrall Street in the 1880s. Behind the seawall, glass condominiums litter the downtown skyline, across the harbor the forests of Stanley Park.

Throughout her career, and throughout different mediums (photography, sculpture, installation), one elemental concern remains. Magor searches for evidence. But the question arises—evidence of *what*? It takes the form of birds, clothing pressed into the shape of bodies, re-enacted historical photographs, or habitat dioramas. Whatever *it* is (Magor leaves that question open), the evidence always leads us away from what we believe is in front of us. One such example of this occurred early in Magor's career. In an interview with Alvin Balkind, Magor spoke about birds. She stated an affinity for birds "because you hardly see them at all. I mean they're always bugging off on you. And the minute you sort of think there's a bird, and you try to get close, they just take off." Much like the birds a younger Magor was fascinated with, Magor's work has continued to be interested in what is evasive, what slips away before an encounter proves possible. The anticipated object is searched for, expectations are reversed, and intransigence results.

Unexpectedly, the fact that these works constantly evade us is reminiscent of iconoclasm, the Byzantine philosophy of the eighth century that sought to destroy all images of worship. According to the iconoclasts, the image of God could not be represented in an icon for worship. To do so was blasphemy. Yet for all the iconoclasts' destruction of images, their philosophy only emphasized how sacred they actually held images to be. With this in mind, watching CNN, or any other major news conglomerate, for that matter, we are faced with images: of torture, natural disaster, or domestic boredom. These images are supposed to correspond with someone or some situation in external world, but the opposite occurs. In their vacuous, opportunistic emphasis on truth and reality—in a word, on the news—images in the media end up

devaluating the very thing they attempt to report. In Magor's work, instead of commodifying the image, we are left with the doubtful evidence of objects, an uncertain iconoclasm.

Magor's new work defies belief. Writing of Liz Magor's shacks, *The Office of Soft Architecture* has said that, "politics is collective experiment in belief." Perched on the edge of Coal Harbor's refurbished seawall, Magor's new monument, *LightShed*, continues this experiment. Narrow beams, three and a half meters tall, support a small shed of cast aluminum. The cast reproduces the texture of wood perfectly. Unlike her pieces that appear in galleries and museums, there is no interdiction against touching this work. On a cold afternoon, the aluminum nearly sticks to the skin. The result reverses the doubting Thomas: instead of having belief affirmed by a physical encounter, as Thomas did by touching Christ, the encounter gives way to profound doubt. What, even at close proximity, appears to be a wooden shed turns out to be an aluminum cast. Instead of validating our perception, an encounter with the material of the sculpture evades what our eyes believed. Belief crumbles with touch; like birds, the real becomes too much.

Magor asks complex questions. It is not enough to say her work is about "history" or "economy." In fact, such a banal diagnosis would miss the point. But nor is it enough to vaguely say that these sculptures are about "perception" or "reality." Indeed, Magor uses perceptual tricks, and references to history appear. But far more complicated questions arise: questions of doubt and belief that move seamlessly between collective and individual concerns. Consider *LightShed*. Not only is our image of the shed changed when we examine it, but our relationship to the object (which we never encounter with either sight nor touch, the pathetically Platonic) changes. We doubt both the image and object in front of us.

In *LightShed*, the shiny aluminum veneer of Magor's sculpture mimics Coal Harbor's glassy condos. On a clear day, light reflects off everything: the buildings, the sculpture, the water. We find ourselves at a shiny shed in the middle of a rapidly modernized, rich neighborhood. The angle of the sun against the reflection leaves us giddy. We are left spinning around this collective experiment in belief.

## Thinking Past Tourist Terror

Joni Murphy

As a human experience, shock is fascinating. It can cut us off from feeling, rendering one numb. But it can also have an exhilarating effect, resensitising us to life. Different kinds of shock are at the heart of two recent offerings: Michel Houellebecq's novel *Platform* and Susan Buck-Morss' collection of essays *Thinking Past Terror*. Though these books are radically different in style and perspective, each is concerned with the question of how we react to current global politics, and the shocking events that fill our streets and newspapers daily.

"You're scared," says one character in *Platform* to another as they drink tensely in a Thai hostess bar. "You're right to be scared, I predict an increase in racial violence in Europe in the years to come. It can only end in civil war." But most of Houellebecq's characters are too numb to be scared: they are too drunk and disinterested, self-hating, self-involved, sex-obsessed and emotionally stunted to see the violence closing in around them. As a group, his characters embody some of the most abject qualities of human nature. The main action of the novel involves the central character and his girlfriend marketing sex tourist resorts for "lonely potbellied Europeans." Their plans are brought to a violent end by Islamic extremists using home-made explosives.

If Houellebecq's novel sounds too bleak, I offer you the careful, questioning, cautiously hopeful *Thinking Past Terror*. In her most accessible work to date, Buck-Morss shows that she's in the same boat as the rest of us: shaken by current politics and confused about what direction in which to go. She wants to ask questions like, "can there be a global public sphere" and "how can we foster communication across fundamentalist lines?" But Buck-Morss also goes beyond just posing questions, and offers some possible answers. If we are to act both globally and locally, "it is to the cultural imaginaries of past civilisations that we must look." She insists that we reject the easy rhetoric of good and evil, us and them, and encourages us to look for answers in hidden-away places. In fact, reading Buck-Morss is akin to meeting a great teacher who encourages voyages to the dark places on our mental map.

In the end, reality falls somewhere between these two writers. Abu Ghraib and televised beheadings portray a reality that seems uncomfortably close to Houellebecq's bleak vision. But What Buck-Morss tells us is that we may go beyond the blunt attack of events in search of a better future than the fundamentalist on either side can offer. Neither book offers much comfort, but perhaps their contrasting shocks offer a kind of therapy.



## Evan Lee's Forms

Adam Harrison

As abstract painting was, at least in part, a result of the invention of photography—a reaction to painting's newly anachronised role of depiction—the possibilities of constructively engaging with abstraction through photography are complicated. Artist Evan Lee has long dealt with this problem, creating an aesthetically varied project that provides new and elegant approaches while also creating as many questions as answers. Where most old Modernist photographers redundantly mimicked their painting contemporaries, Lee digs deeper; from depicting illogical forms within their context (a wet sponge in the bathtub, tangled wires) to reconsidering banal but spectacular natural phenomenon (his Stains series turns oil slicks created by leaky cars into vivid suggestions of the cosmos, which are in turn mediations on the photographic medium). His work since 1999 displays a logical progression of these ideas, and his new Curves series seem to be an astute culmination. Made with a desktop scanner, their camera-less status recalls both the avant-gardist experiments of Man Ray and Fox Talbot's photograms, among the very earliest 'photographic' images. It also allows Lee to sidestep photography's traditional depictive restraints, engaging as much with his photographic precedents as abstract painters such as Frank Stella. The subjects themselves, French Curves—a drafting tool—suggest the complicated, seemingly hopeless status of manual depiction in relation to photography and digital technologies. That all of these techniques—painting, photography and digital reproduction—are found here in equal measure is the work's greatest success. Enlarged to painting proportions and displayed as such (they have shown in Toronto and Shanghai, but not yet locally), their presence perplexes. Whether they are to be viewed as paintings or photographs is beside the point. Lee has created a new form that deals with the last two centuries of pictorial art, but could not have existed before today.

## Floating Utopias Corin Sworn's new drawings

Aaron Peck

Corin Sworn's new work presents us with floating utopias. Pencil drawings of playgrounds based on images from *Playspaces* (published in North America in 1976) perch in the centre of pieces of paper 16 by 24 inches. The effect is vertiginous. At first, it may be difficult to believe these images are altered documents of postwar European playgrounds and not fantastic spaces from Sworn's own imagination. Suspended from the surrounding Brutalist architecture, these playgrounds float in a state of exception. That state of exception is exactly what makes the drawings so conceptually compelling: it highlights the ideological function of architecture, and the potential of desertion. *Like marionettes, whisper the buildings, we float in choice and need; we enjoy our symptoms. But the children are left to their own devices; they no longer know their own parents; they arrange their own infrastructures.* These drawings are not nostalgic for post-war idealism—they question both the initial idealism and the suspicion of ironic embrace. They negotiate desire, interrogating utopia with wistful hints. An anarchy of use. The drawings parallel the potential of children as they float in what Matthew Stadler calls “the business of utopia.”

## Making The Minotaur

Charles Mudede

**M**y next movie will begin and end in this city. It was also written in this city, over five days in the Shaughnessy Village, which is not a hotel but an apartment building that “primarily caters to those requiring short-term accommodation” ([shaughnessyvillage.com](http://shaughnessyvillage.com)). The two rooms my co-writer and I rented were very cheap, tiny, near the final floor of the 11-story, brutalistic concrete tower, and faced downtown. Because the rooms in the Shaughnessy look like cabins in a cruise ship, at night the city is a sea of lights that sleepers and insomniacs cross during the journey from dusk to dawn.

Former Seattleite and present Vancouverite James Latteier introduced me to the Shaughnessy two years ago, when I visited the city for a weeklong vacation that was spent reading Dicken’s *Bleak House*. I instantly fell I love with the place, the village, the tower of concrete whose “location is most convenient and just minutes to the downtown financial core; the film industry; local colleges, schools and the university area; central to churches, clubs and activity centres; five minutes to golf courses, easy access to shopping malls and theatres; near the Vancouver General Hospital and Children’s Hospital; walking distance to the Cancer Clinic and other healthcare treatment centres” ([shaughnessyvillage.com](http://shaughnessyvillage.com)). Whenever I visit Vancouver, I now stay in the centre of centres.

*The Minotaur* (the present title of my script—it was first called *More Blue Than Green*, and I’m considering changing the title to *The Lion and Jewel*, which is also the title of the second play by the Nigerian poet Wole Soyinka) was written in the Shaughnessy with Robinson Devor, who directed our second script, *Police Beat*, which was written in Astoria, Oregon in 2002, photographed in 2003, completed in 2004, and selected for competition in the Sundance Festival this year, 2005.

*Police Beat* is Devor’s second film; his debut, *The Woman Chaser*, a solid work of noir poetry that starred Patrick Warburton of *Seinfeld* fame (he played David Puddy, Elaine’s on-again, off-again boyfriend), was completed in 1999. Two years after *The Woman Chaser* was released, Devor, who then had just abandoned the City of Angeles for the Emerald City, approached me at Linda’s Tavern (a popular Seattle bar run by a rich and glamorous woman called Linda), and asked me to take a look at a script he was developing called *Super Power*. He wanted the script to become his next film, but because the setting was in rural Africa, and the film’s main character was an African boy, he needed help from an African to make the some of the dialogue and setting more African, more realistic.

I had never lived in a village, but I was from Zimbabwe, a small land-locked country just above South Africa—where the film, *Super Power*, was to be financed and photographed if all went according to Devor’s plan. All didn’t go according to Devor’s plan, and the script has yet to be realized. However, I managed to fix most of the script’s reality problems with help from my mother, who had spent all of her childhood in a

village, and was still alive at the time, settled in a social work job and a small apartment in South Seattle.

My mother, Tracy Mudede, was killed by cancer shortly after *Police Beat's* principle photography was completed. Indeed, one of the main difficulties of watching *Police Beat* has been the fact that the real world that makes up its fiction is my mother's last world. It is late August and early September, and at this point in time, in this city that my imagined hero patrols on a bicycle, is an actual hospital with an actual room that has a window which looks out at the last buildings, autumn trees, and low clouds that my mother was to see.

It was in the Rose Bud Café (Rose Bud as in Orson Wells) that Devor, who had then also recently lost one of his parents (his father), first presented to me the idea that would become the substance of our third screenplay. "Look, Charles, this is what I'm thinking," he said as he drank beer and I sipped an excellent Bordeaux.

"These are the things that you're always talking about when we are drinking: one, the long and troubling history of Arab/African relations; two, the general greatness of the city up north, Vancouver. Why don't we make screenplay about both?" I thought it a splendid idea. A few days after the basic idea was proposed, we came up with a story idea (make it a thriller), and decided to transform this story idea into a script here, in the city that I often describe as beautiful Seattle's more beautiful twin. I had always wanted to write about Vancouver, to describe its blues and greens and its splendid Sky Train, to fictionalize its radical cosmopolitanism, its unified architecture, its terrific density. With this script, the opportunity had finally arrived. On the first night of writing in the Shaughnessy, this scene was composed:

*INT. SKY TRAIN NIGHT*

*High above Vancouver, the suspended, illuminated Sky Train zips above the city on its raised tracks.*

*Inside, MALIK and HANNA sit snugly together. Malik has changed into a tight black velvet jacket, tight jeans and cowboy boots.*

*HANNA*

*Oh, before I forget....*

*She pulls an object wrapped in tissue paper out of the purse.*

*HANNA*

*That scarf you wanted.*

*MALIK*

*Aw, you didn't!*

*Malik unwraps it, excited as a child, holds up a chiffon blood red scarf.*

*She ties it around his neck.*

*HANNA*

*I know you're a bastard but you somehow  
you make me happy.*

*He stands, turns to face the glass with the city rushing by  
below, adjust the scarf, and admires his reflection.*

*MALIK*

*Wow.... those were the years, you know?  
There was a time when things might have  
been different. There was chance! Where  
did it all go?*

*ANGLE ON TANDAI / MALIK'S POV*

*Seen through the glass at the back of the car and looking at us,  
is an African man, TANDAI, late 20's as well, stylish, coat and  
tie, wearing headphones and listening to dub.*

*BACK ON MALIK*

*Sitting down, taking Hanna's hand and putting it on his crotch.*

*MALIK*

*Thank you.*

*Hanna puts her other arm around Malik and starts to kiss him,  
though Malik continues to eye Tandai at the back of the train.*

*MALIK*

*(breaking away from Hanna)  
Hey, brother!*

*He goes to Tandai with a big smile, sits beside him.*

*MALIK*

*What is it that's happenin' tonight?*

*Tandai removes his headphones.*

TANDAI

*(In a mild sub-Saharan African accent)*  
*I'm not doing anything.*

MALIK

*You're always on this train, you must be  
doing something. What's on your Discman?*

TANDAI

*I'm not sure. It lasts for twelve minutes  
so I call it the twelve minute three second  
dub.*

*Malik takes his headphones, puts them over his ears, listens.*

*He hands the headphones back to Tandai.*

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The movie *Bad Company*, which stars Laurence Fishburne as a CIA agent, opens with a cargo ship approaching the city in which the action will take place, Seattle. We see the lights and towers of downtown from a distance. But the closer we get to the city, the weirder it looks. Gradually, we come to realize that this is not downtown Seattle but downtown Vancouver. Like in so many other films, Vancouver is playing another city. Rarely does this city play itself. The Minotaur had the ambition to rectify this situation—it wanted to make beautiful Vancouver (its financial core, local colleges, churches, clubs, General Hospital, Children's Hospital, Cancer Clinics) the star of the movie.

However, despite all our efforts to capture the mood and beauty of Vancouver, ultimately it failed to become the star of the script, which we completed on the train returning to Seattle. Vancouver is there at the start (26 pages) and the end (2 pages), but it is not there in the middle (90 pages). Like *Police Beat*, *The Minotaur* is about Seattle, and if shooting the opening and closing scenes (roughly 30 minutes of screen time) in Vancouver proves to be too difficult, then Seattle will have to play a role it has never played before: Vancouver.

## A Quick Study of Now

Anne Lesley Selcer

*Content* is a huge and lively publication from Rem Koolhaas and his collaborators at the Office for Metropolitan Architecture. The essays web world economics, history, urban facts and recent shifts in global politics with OMA's building projects. The result is a colourful core sample of the present. Koolhaas has been performing his paratactic poetics of culture since the 1978 publication of *Delirious New York: a Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*. As he leaps from building to building, perhaps it the height that encourages connections between everything in his field of vision. This desire for a unified theory of Now might seem arrogant—think of a record store clerk who sees each notable new release as an significant movement in history—if he didn't grid his picture of the present on so many informational latitudes and longitudes. The potentially perilous leaps seem thrilling, instead of grandiose or reductive. It's an arrogance you can enjoy. His prose is bombastic and exciting and there is humour running through the whole book (printed in quiet letters over a photo of a wall at Harvard with bad wallpaper and blueblood art: "Intellichinz").

The information in *Content* comes in all forms—charts, photos, maps and fact collages. Visual essays and traditional ones explain how the economy, politics and urban planning manifest in the dormers and arches of OMA's buildings. Notable is Koolhaas' "Junk-space" and a short essay by *Empire's* Michale Hardt. Among the more intriguing themes of the collection: how projects like the LA County Museum of Art, the Hermitage in St. Petersburg and the Seattle Library have architect playing curator, as the production of space suddenly bumps up against the organisation of knowledge. Also fascinating is his perspective on Europe's identity against the new backdrop of globalisation.

Koolhaas is both in and of the world. On one hand, he's in thrall to big money (his first American commission was the Prada store in New York), and on the other he has a scholarly detachment, or even a naked cynicism towards it. Hired as a consultant to Wired magazine the firm reports, "we found that a simple consistent rhythm punctuated Wired's seven years of existence: on average, *Wired* proclaimed a revolution every three months. A new future generated before other futures had time to be verified." In the candid "Utopia Station" Koolhaas confides, "deep down all architecture, no matter how naive and implausible, claims to make the world a better place....but we cannot represent the public good without the larger entity such as the State, or more recently the Corporation, that represents the public. And to make matters worse, the more radical, innovative, and brotherly our sentiments, the more we architects need a strong sponsor." He stands in a contradictory place. But this necessary worldliness reaps, rather than retreats from a philosophy, with passionate engagement and lots of pages. And he's on Friendster. I'm still waiting for him to approve my friend request, but when he does, for his birthday I think I'll send him something by Vancouver's Office for Soft Architecture. I can't think of any better response to an architect's arrogance than a poet's deeply serious playfulness.

Chronicle: A narrative insert in a newspaper, starting with a seance-interview between Aaron Peck and Clarice Lispector

**C**hronicle began running in Terminal City during November 2004. Inspired by a weekly Brazilian form, this rotating column doubted the assumption that the media acts as direct conduit for information--that is, immediate news--inserting instead a literary genre into a newspaper. It provided a space--for whatever an invited writer chose to do with it. Excerpts from Lance Blomgren, Matthew Stadler and Anne Stone follow. Thanks also to Peter Quartermain and Mark Cochrane for participating.

Aaron Peck: Aside from your experimental novels, you are known primarily in English for your “chronicles,” which are collected in *Discovering the World* and *Selected Crônicas*. How did you come to this form?

Clarice Lispector: The *Jornal do Brasil* asked me to write a weekly column. The word in Portuguese is *crônica*. I don’t think you have these in North American newspapers.

AP: No, we don’t. The idea of a “chronicle” in North American newspapers is, well, quite foreign. It requires translation. So tell me, then, what is a “chronicle”?

CL: It is a weekly column for playwrights, novelists and poets to write on a single, focused topic.

AP: This is quite a radical idea for a North American journalist. A literary genre in a newspaper! But if I’ve done sufficient research, your column between 1967 and 1973 was, to quote one source, “extraordinarily free-ranging and intimate,” even for Brazilian standards.

CL: Yes, I’ve been told that. I wrote of my boredom and indignation, of my children’s love of the singer Chico Buarque, of conversations with taxi drivers, of the shame I felt when confronted by my servants; I wrote parables, short reflections, or conducted interviews.

AP: So it’s a fairly free-ranging form, in which a writer has a specific word-count and a weekly deadline.

CL: Yes, at times I found it insufferable and other times a delirious joy.

AP: My God—what it sounds like you’re describing is life itself.

CL: That may be a little over-dramatic, even for me. But, yes, let’s say the chronicle is a public forum for writers: a reflection or polemic, a small existential scrap, a digression, a complaint or eulogy, a small story or an idea... like the brittle wings of a dead fly.



## Chronicle: Nearly Me™ – Adventures in the Silicone Skin Trade

Anne Stone

I've spent my adult life unaddressed (and slightly intimidated by) the wall of bra in places like La Senza where full-cupped bras line the walls, ceiling to floor. This year, gift certificate in hand, I wandered into La Vie en Rose on Boxing Day. Being a 36A, there's nothing on that wall for me and so I keep to the middle of the store, where I might buy frou-frou underwear or a tee-and-panty combo—should they have it—or even a pair of pajamas. I do look, though. Near the wall of B through D was an unobtrusive display: A small round table on which was set a dozen or so pink boxes, and a few take-away style, stand-alone bags. These bags contained gel inserts of the kind used to displace breast tissue, and in so doing, refer what is there up and in to give the illusion of more.

Each pink box, in delicate and slightly darker pink letters, announced itself as a 'breast enhancement system.' I opened a box. Nestled inside were a pair of tissue-wrapped, disembodied female breasts, hollow and fashioned of silicone, pale and strange, perky nipples tinted a deep brown. I closed the lid to notice the only other text available outside of the box: the size, large.

I was, to be honest, unsettled and interested. There was, yes, the strangeness of coming upon body parts with an unprepared mind, but here, too, was an opportunity to become exactly what my Barbie dolls had foretold for me as a girl. And which, through genetic circumstance, I'd been if not exactly denied... well, yes, these rubber breasts insisted, denied. The prosthetics, if not precisely my own, could be nearly mine or perhaps, Nearly Me™, as one line of Breast Forms is in fact named—the line created by Ruth Handler, the designer of the very Barbie dolls who had announced, with much inaccuracy, this little girl's impending shape.

So, this designer of little girls' dreams, having had a mastectomy in the seventies, went on to create a line of Breast Forms—a line which, in a roundabout curve, had found their way to me. In the manner of the marketplace, such prosthetics, originated for the survivors of breast cancer, had found new purpose in relation to A cups such as my own. What fascinates, though, is this shift. Stores like La Vie En Rose no longer 'cater to the customer' (a saying that's cliché, maybe, and trite, but there's a certain reasonableness to the expectation). Instead, in this brave new age, such stores enable me to consume even more as I cater my body to pre-existing products, which themselves reflect ... what?

## Chronicle: Win a Date with Nearly-Me™

Anne Stone

Some years ago, I discovered (and immediately desired) a Real Doll—one of those highly realistic silicone sex dolls that can, as the inevitable wear and tear is incurred, be mended with commercial grade caulking or maybe, in a pinch, with a bicycle tire repair kit. Real Dolls present as the perfect, most companionable of creatures—all holes available, snugly fitted, and neatly detached from any of those troubling aspects which invariably accompany human holes and are purported to make actual companionship so difficult.

I didn't want any Real Doll, but one whose "options" would be, as suggested on their site, approximated from a photograph (or better yet, and if they allowed—after a discreet telephone inquiry—made to more than approximate the photo of my choosing). I'd decided to have the doll resemble me so she could be sent out on special dates—prosthetic experiences, I liked to imagine them—a swap meet of sorts, where a person of interest, let's say, is given an evening with a very expensive sex toy that looks like me, and in exchange for this questionable service, I would receive the relics of memory, a series of Polaroids, perhaps, or some other vicarious account.

Through our resemblance, my doll's carefree existence would be troubled. As my likeness, and with our shared memories, my boundaries would come to verge on hers, making the value-free usage promised by her makers nearly impossible. Instead, some larger identity would emerge, one which would redefine my sense of self as I had to loosely include (or repudiate) my well-travelled silicone self.

Unable to afford the doll, I began working with make-shift prosthetics at home (pouring cheap sources of gelatine into plaster imprints of body parts), collecting in the process a plaster replica of a generous friend's breasts; a dress-form torso; and several gelatinous mouths and breasts. The project never came together—there was no skeleton on which to hang these parts, and what I had were a lot of bits—none of which looked like they could be reconciled with the others—and some of which, I suspected, had been eaten by my dog.

But walking into La Vie En Rose, moving to the back of the store, and seeing the boxed set of silicone breasts for sale, I realised that even if I could not afford to purchase a Real Doll, now, thanks to an impulse of the entrepreneurial spirit, I might (if I so choose) become one (in parts). Here, in a dainty pink box, and not unreasonably priced, was a product that might mark the beginning of a cyborg self.

## Chronicle: Four Household Paintings, Part One

Lance Blomgren

The submarine world of the painting always filled the child with mystery and dread. The blue, tropical water belied a creepy, primordial danger that would seep regularly into his thoughts during the day and occupy his dreams while asleep. The gnarled fish and malevolent stingrays that swam in the kelp forest of his sleep would sometimes wake him up, gasping for air. At the marine zoo tidal pool, the boy froze with terror, witnessing first-hand the insectile crabs, obscene, fleshy anemones, and slimy vegetation of the not-blue-at-all underwater world. The painting, which sat prominently in the TV room, remained a constant reminder of his all-consuming fear of the ocean, and ultimately the source of what would become his abnormal obsession with it.

The image of the scuba diver, slick in black neoprene, cocooned with air tubes and regulators, entered his fantasies in his teens. The thought of the thin material, barely separating him from the claustrophobic horrors of the deep, made the hair on his arms bristle. He saved his allowance to purchase a wetsuit jacket which he wore alone in his room, caressing the rubbery fabric as he diligently memorised underwater distress signals. Danger: Raise arm straight out, just above shoulder level and make a fist. Out of Air: Bring hand to throat and make a horizontal cutting motion. As an adult, he fantasized about getting caught in seaweed, running out of oxygen. He masturbated to eloquent scenarios about sea snails entering his body. He began searching for a woman who shared this erotic terror of the sea.

They agreed to meet at the wharf at dawn. As they agreed, they spoke only in hand signals. They poured warm water from a thermos into their wetsuits and shivered as they geared up. They hugged awkwardly, then lowered themselves off the dock and into the water. He felt his stomach tighten with fear and excitement, and could feel his erection growing. The sandy bottom was murky, brown at first, but quickly fell away into a large underwater cliff. They adjusted their buoyancy vests so they could float down the rock face with minimal effort, holding each other as they sank past the sharp drop of water temperature at 40 ft, the hideous sponges which covered the rocks at 60, the ghostly, human faces of wolf eels, peering from their caves at 80, the incomprehensible darkness of the vegetation which greeted them at 110 ft. And then the unthinkable happened. A jellyfish, four feet in diameter, suddenly appeared, its yolky innards throbbing lasciviously inside its translucent, aqueous body, and the man orgasmed violently in his wetsuit. Immediately a wave of embarrassment passed over him as his arousal dissipated. He signalled to the woman, extending his thumb: Going Up. The woman was vigorously rubbing herself between her legs. She pointed downwards, looking dejected, wanting to continue. His lungs tightened as his embarrassment turned to shame and then outright panic in the sea's oppressive atmosphere. Ignoring all rules, he ascended alone, and back on the dock, was unable to even look at the woman when she finally surfaced, and lay there until she left.

## Chronicle: Four Household Paintings, Part Three

Lance Blomgren

Somewhere deep in the minds of all Danes, lurks the image of P.S. Krøyer's painting, *Two Women Walking on the Beach*. This painting, famous for its flat, "midnight sun" quality of light, depicts a banal, yet Romantic, image of two women sharing an evening stroll and some conversation on a beach in Skagen, Denmark's northernmost tip. All children will have seen reproductions of this painting in school, and most adults will have heard that it is a representation of bohemian life in the Skagen artist colony in the late 1800s. Many know that the women are Krøyer's wife, and her friend, the artist Anna Archer. The mixture of bourgeois manners and outdoor adventure, elegance and measured decadence embodied by this picture remains an inspirational model for the passionate, yet practical life: fresh air, exercise, relaxation, friends, family, food. And then there's that light, a haunting North Sea blue-grey that flares in the mind like an afterimage flash on the retina. Similar to the *Little Mermaid*, Krøyer's painting has become something of a national symbol and thousands of reproductions have been made by enterprising souls worldwide.

Perhaps it's not strange, then, that *Two Women* is rarely seen in the houses of Danes. Many disdain it. The painting is hopelessly saccharine, offering little but nostalgia to the modern viewer. So it takes one by surprise when, in the living room of some distant relative, *Two Women* is on display over the fireplace, its outdated quaintness somehow at home amidst the teakwood furniture and minimal décor. The image is not a poster, but it has been printed onto canvas, then smeared with gesso to give it the appearance of texture. It takes one by surprise to see the painting displayed so brazenly, creating a backdrop for what was otherwise predicted to be a stiff, boring evening.

This is really the way to eat an early dinner. Textbook festivity. We shared sandwiches and potato salad. We parenthesized the meal with bitters and port. The houses beyond are dark. The tablecloth is red. There is more than one way to eat rabbit and it is called roasted lamb. The great aunt stews rhubarb. Someone's children were swearing and counting money. The casual comments of a new husband and wife about the news prove significantly to the bystanders that they are perfectly suited as a couple.

We stepped carefully from one slippery rock to the other. The dusk is not cold, not quiet, and is hanging lustily. We can't feel our arms for the air. The laws let us gasp for air so we climb the embankment before discussing unrequited love, and finally turning in.

And this is unrequited love. We are sick with it. We either sleep it off, or find suitable distractions. We are modern viewers and nostalgia is being offered. Isn't the far off sound of traffic on the highway the sound of fortune? Of warning? The evening is like a dog, awaiting its reward for laying still. I am a woman smelling of a soap called melancholy. I heard today that Fred Douglas had died.

## Chronicle: Notes on Regionalism

Matthew Stadler

When I'm in airplanes I think of Rem Koolhaas. He is probably in an airplane right now. His plane touches down in China, which I can imagine in the pale orange light at the edge of the sky where I am now flying: SFO to PDX, 7:00 pm. At this altitude the sun does not set so much as it layers, like a parfait. We fly at 35,000 feet, in a slim yellow layer, the level edge of receding sunlight; below us, dark night; and below that, the land where scattered towns lie, bluish lights clustered along highways. I usually drive those highways. There is Bend, Oregon.

To Rem Koolhaas I am an aspect of the land, wed like Bend to geography, while he floats thoughtfully, Dutch, amidst the global ether. The local is made of dirt and rivers and particular minds, any of which can be moved or transformed by the pressures spreading outward from his airplane. I marvel at our connection — is it love? — and his mysterious power.

We first met at a conference called “Bliss,” in a Rotterdam auditorium of his design, but we did not really speak until seven years later in an Asian fusion restaurant near Seattle's Pike Place Market. I was on drugs, though I did not tell him that. “Drugs are a very American thing,” he said, forgetting Baudelaire and Rimbaud, and Sir Thomas Quincy, the famous British opium eater.

Koolhaas saw Jimi Hendrix play at club in London in 1969. I can't imagine why he didn't take LSD, but now he swims and eats well. He swims wherever he finds himself, briefly touching down. In his travel bag are goggles and a Speedo. A friend said Koolhaas was a speed freak, after we had dinner in Amsterdam, waiting for traffic from the airport to clear. Koolhaas arrived as we were leaving, agitated and unhappy, disturbed by everything, as if the earth spun too slowly.

I have imagined him aloft over Beijing, steeled by the mechanical history traced in sulfur lights below him. The pragmatic reinventions of communist China make him hungry, but nothing on the plane is worth eating. Customs takes forever. His mood doesn't last.

In Seattle, my brothers and I pretended we were seagulls. They have a kind of hauteur, like drag queens. I was a Broadway fag named Seymour Butts, but there was no Broadway. My brothers were Seymour Junior Butts and Heathcliff. On the ferry to Anacortes we perched and squawked, spitting a kind of Daffy Duck commentary about all the hags and bitches. In London, Rem Koolhaas watched Jimi Hendrix with an unclouded mind. Our ferry went from here to nowhere, back and forth, until we became older.

Time flies. I'm riding the train from Portland to Vancouver. Mount Vernon has a new station in the mode of a Lummi long house. Fiberglass orcas cavort amidst tall fountains in the Tulalip Casino's vast car park. I meet a man in the bar car who is either a fag or an architect, in any case, a fellow traveler.

## Chronicle: Advance Praise for Matthew Stadler

Matthew Stadler

Intelligent, strange, and often beautiful.

Lacks the structural brilliance required to maintain control of identity and meaning. You called my son a “Machiavellian psychopath.”

A bland landscape in which all women are lovely and true.

Matthew is an outgoing child who hasn't let his physical awkwardness hold him back. Even at dinner there will be artists right there, doing, you know, doing whatever it is artist's do, painting, writing, performing right there, making art about hunger. And then everyone will be encouraged to, you know, take some action or other. It'll be fabulous. Plans go awry when he meets Amelia, a mysterious dwarf who piques his interest. I notice it mostly on the pillows, so maybe you just need to brush a little better, or wash your armpits.

Here, if hardly for the good, he pulls out all the stops.

Vacuous, pointless, and tasteless in the extreme. A joke that gets its point across with a 2-by-4, as good satire rarely does.

What was the most useful to me was the prof's helpful comments. I felt like I could really come to him. I wish he had more established office hours. The least useful was calling the “exams” exams. All this did was make us nervous. If he called them ‘Sight-Reading Days’ I would have been much less nervous.

I hate your voice. You're so completely fucked.

At the end I started crying, like I do twenty minutes into West Side Story.

More shapely than Henry James. Far outdoes Nabokov for erotic realism.

The rattling noise was probably attributable to a flaw in the original kit, and I have no doubt that with the proper training, Matthew will some day make a very good sound engineer.

Stadler is a little priggish; but even considered as characterization, his fussy addiction to parentheses, and use of quotations from period guidebooks in place of descriptions, can seem annoyingly mannered.

You're not listening to me.

It's not so much that the author has got things wrong as it is that he seems to lack any sense of historicity whatever.

If you fail to attend four court-authorized diversion sessions your license will be revoked for a period of not less than 90 days.

I think Matthew was the best instructor I could have had for ear training.

That thing with your teeth feels so awesome.

Yes! People actually liked species counterpoint, amazing! The objectives ought to stay the same, IMHO. I'd like to HEAR more examples, although seeing is jolly as well.

## Vancouver Splendour

Glen Stosic

Is Bruce Serafin our Harvey Pekar? At first glance the comparison might seem better suited to Vancouver comic book artist Colin Upton, name-checked in the title of Serafin's recent autobiographical sequence *Colin's Big Thing*. But consider: Harvey Pekar worked as a file clerk for thirty-five years while turning out *American Splendor*. Philip Larkin, Britain's unofficial poet laureate of the moribund, served time as head librarian at the unglamorous University of Hull until his death, while Serafin himself survived sixteen years of working the graveyard shift at Canada Post's bunker-like downtown plant before going on to found *The Vancouver Review*. Besides astonishingly unfortunate day jobs, what all three writers share are certain thematic hallmarks that define what might be called the literature of failure: ghastly childhood trauma, the pangs of romantic yearning, youthful ambition thwarted. But it turns out that Serafin is less concerned with perpetuating a bilious sad-sack persona than he is with writing, honestly and with unsentimental clarity, about the exigencies of place and of lives "both miserable and touched by piety."

Colin Upton tells Serafin that his work aims to "produce a record of the Vancouver I know before it disappears forever," a goal Serafin implicitly shares. *Colin's Big Thing* has received attention as an important work of local social and intellectual history. Others might be better suited to offer estimations of the memoir's success as a document of a specific and uniquely British Columbian generation; each reader, I suspect, will respond most strongly to different parts of Serafin's book. For this reviewer, *Colin's Big Thing* was most affecting simply as a chronicle of a sensitive observer mapping out the trajectory of a life. While reading, it became easy to cultivate, as I imagine others might, a self-indulgent kind of fellow-feeling for its author: fancying oneself, like Serafin, as the melancholic outsider, a transplant from the Interior bringing with him the uncomfortable baggage of a self-conscious provincialism, vague artistic aspirations, and a finely-attuned awareness of living on the periphery of things.

It's from this perspective that Serafin is able to enunciate the dilemma of a probing intellect trapped in an atmosphere of "soft, sagging hopelessness." Descriptions of life at the post office yield some of the book's most striking passages; Serafin makes us understand the strange joy commensurate with surrendering to despair. "I wasn't Bruce Serafin anymore, someone outside of things and deeply unsure about his life," he realises during one of his on-the-job epiphanies. The anxiety he normally feels is replaced with sadness: "It was a relief, this sadness. It comforted me. I sighed; and that sigh, that slow, luxurious wallowing in my unhappiness, revealed to me all at once how could be possible to spend a life in this place."

But Serafin avoids the temptation to luxuriate in a solipsistic world of hangdog self-laceration. Instead, he turns his empathic eye to friends, co-workers, and the residents of the Downtown Eastside, and his status as an outsider affords him valuable, if sometimes painful, insights about all of them. Serafin is especially perceptive when

bristling against insularity and intellectual claustrophobia wherever he finds it, whether it's in the self-congratulatory faux-radicalism of Commercial Drive or the sycophantic echo-chamber of academia.

Its tone may often be elegiac, but this is a far from depressing read. Serafin has written elsewhere about the importance of re-visiting one's past to reclaim the messy or once-embarrassing particulars of a life long outgrown. "Accepting that this background is your writer's capital," Serafin writes, is "the most precious things you have." There can be no substitute for going back, he insists: "It remains the hardest and biggest step." *Colin's Big Thing* is a big step indeed.



## The Penetrating Language of Loneliness Charles D'Ambrosio's Orphans pierce the heart of darkness

Bess Lovejoy

*Orphans*, the latest book from Clear Cut Press, is well-named. Though the title refers to one of the book's essays, the loneliness and resilience of the word "orphans" fits the whole book beautifully. There is a sense of loss, and of searching, in author Charles D'Ambrosio's voice. But it's not just the texture of the writing that makes the title so apt: the title also fits the form of the work. Creative non-fiction essays are the offspring of other, more tidy genres, homeless were it not for courage of foster parents like the *Stranger*, *Nest*, and Clear Cut Press.

This is not to say D'Ambrosio's work is weak or in need of parenting. He's an amazing writer: poignant, funny, intense. And in *Orphans*, he's also treading along a really interesting line, one somewhere between journaling and journalism. The work begins with the intensely personal and then seems to move through the self and out, into a stunning synthesis, a new way of looking.

Earlier essays ("The Crime That Never Was"; "Seattle, 1974"; "Mary Kay Letourneau"; "Whaling") are written from very much inside D'Ambrosio's own head, from his own body. The essay "Whaling" is the nadir, or the apex, of this inwardness. D'Ambrosio begins with his penis:

Four in the morning and I crawl out of the tent, thinking, what's my penis for, anyway, other than pissing?

And he ends by going inside his body, inside desire:

*"And so I've arrived in this strange place and it's okay for now, it's rich, it's really queer, it's made of the morning a kind of phantasmagoria, the stuff of dreams and fevers, and what was I really thinking anyway, that my phantom children, needing wisdom and milk, were supposed to be out here with me, pissing in the ocean too?"*

The tension between the ostensible object matter (whaling) and what matters to its subject (babies) is slightly uncomfortable. The essay succeeds more as confession and less as journalism, but the contradictions aren't easily resolved. In the end the joy comes from the mirror D'Ambrosio sets up between the place of the Makah people, the "white-dark" fog, the water, the cold—and his interior space, his longing.

Later essays are less resolutely interior, less a meditation on the world via a meditation on Charles D'Ambrosio. His concerns cleave, though not entirely, in two: on the one hand, there are external places and events (an Austin eco-village in Biosquat), and on the other, the deeply personal (Documents is a series of recollections of his dysfunctional family). This is not to say that D'Ambrosio buys into objectivity. But while earlier essays in the book oscillate from interior to exterior, in later pieces D'Ambrosio reaches a kind of synthesis, where the self is just an entrée into a larger discussion.

And in all of his essays, D'Ambrosio offers an almost casually penetrating analysis, what reads as a natural brilliance. In other words, despite repeated references to literary greats, his work never feels studied, nor laboured. Part of his gentle force comes, I think, from his amazing attention to language, not only in terms of the words he chooses in his own writing, but as an observer of how language is deployed in the world.

The best example of this attention is in Mary Kay Letourneau, in which D'Ambrosio unpacks the infamous teacher-student sex scandal through an analysis of its vocabulary. He sees Letourneau imprisoned by the prescriptive lexicons surrounding her, by the experts “with their Extra-Strength vocabularies, the proficient idiom of the law, of social work, of psychology...” D'Ambrosio is keenly aware of how language structures or influences perception, of the social weight of words. And such awareness is, in fact, one of the very most powerful tools a journalist—or any writer at all—can ever hope to have.

## Don't Forget to Eat Your I's and Me's Biting the Error's explorations in narrative

Aaron Peck

Okay—I'm going to say it, so don't bite your lip: *Biting the Error* is a book of meta-metafiction; it collects essays about what's become known as New Narrative, loosely, a genre of fiction often associated with stories that are self-consciously stories. In its best cases, New Narrative offered some of the most innovative, humorous, or difficult fiction of the past twenty years in the US and Canada.

Many of the writers in *Biting the Error* share an affinity with, or at least bear a resemblance to, the tradition of brutal autobiography. Along with other figures, such as Georges Bataille and Michel Leiris, the autobiographical writings of Stendhal are among New Narrative's forerunners. Stendhal wrote autobiographies full of vulnerability and disgust, never shying away from uncomfortable details that would have put his veritable narrator in a bad light. In other words, he never cleaned up what he called, his "I's and me's." Whether or not the stories are honest misses the point: they are extreme. This collection of essays explores that concern with extremity. As Dodie Bellamy says in her essay: "I'm working toward a writing that subverts sexual bragging, a writing that champions the vulnerable, the fractured, the disenfranchised, the sexually fucked-up." Self-propriety is unimportant. In fact, it's beside the point. Whether or not what much New Narrative aspires towards is successful largely depends on one thing: the narrative "I." Yet it is this questioning relationship to the narrative "I," while being complicit with it, which makes New Narrative different from other forms of contemporary storytelling.

*Biting The Error* is the first substantial anthology of critical writing devoted to New Narrative, collected from the online journal, *Narrativity*, edited by Mary Burger, Robert Glück, Camille Roy and Gail Scott (<http://www.sfsu.edu/~poetry/narrativity/>). Historically, the term "New Narrative" describes a series of writers, initially from the Bay Area (with vital connections to Montreal) who both came out, and come out, of Language Poetry in the seventies. Since beginning in the Bay Area of the early eighties, New Narrative now loosely collects a variety of innovative fiction across North America.

Primarily—though not exclusively—queer, at first, New Narrative took the critical assumptions of Language Poetry and applied them to stories. The relationship to poetry is important to highlight, because New Narrative shares an affinity with poetry that narrative prose often does not. If Language Poetry asserted that identity is constructed by language, or that narrative is a form of commodity, New Narrative respectfully complicated those assumptions. New Narrative writers didn't argue that identity isn't fabricated by social and linguistic surroundings (in fact, they agreed) but—as most of the first proponents of it were gay—these writers were concerned with using (sexual and political) identity as performance. In this case, all those "I's and me's" became very important to the social context of the writing, which was activated by narrative. While conventional narrative has tended to lead toward trite and closed stories (what Flaubert might have called "bourgeois stupidity"), New Narrative, in its most successful examples, opens the story outward, using the devices of narrative and character to question

the societal givens of reality and subjectivity. In other words, *Biting the Error* offers a strategy of attack.

And like any Good Book, it also contains some sing-along jeremiads. For example, Mary Burger's amusing piece "All New Yorker Stories" is a satirical and indignant list of generic plots and characters, a tongue-in-cheek how-to guide for writing banal, but successful, stories. Anyone who's ever spent time reading magazines such as *The New Yorker*, and who has an irreverent sense of humour or a profound pessimism, will recognise with delight the patterns that Burger identifies.

At times, an overwhelming collection of essays of a very influential and nebulous grouping of fiction writers and prose poets, *Biting the Error* is a necessary, useful tool, with a smart cover illustration by Chris Johanson, a resource for writers and readers who want to bite back.

## Jonny Dreaming Underground

Anne Lesley Selcer

I walked around town with a friend who'd lost her parents as a child. She found half remembered fragments everywhere. "I feel like I've played on that roof—we might have lived there," she'd muse. Her crowded memory shook loose clouds of association when met with certain street corners or city blocks. Her childhood was recorded nowhere except in the city's facades, signs and rooftops; she'd give litanies of former business names, describe the shifting of neighbourhoods. Through her gaze, I learned the history of the city.

Vancouver is young enough that people are able to give clear accounts of its changing face. Informal, subjective histories seem particularly compelling in a city that gets frequent remakes with each economic influx or the anticipation of the international spotlight ('86, 2010). Strong traces of the un-gentrified hyper-local can be found in the colourful urban maps of Jason McLean and in the work of a loose network of like-minded artists.

Jonny Petersen, whose recent first show at the Crying Room included crude figurative woodcarvings and crowded drawings, regularly takes his shovel to excavate fallow urban wastelands. He unearths artifacts of the urban past—poison bottles, antique Chinese pottery, a one cent Woodward's trade token, a 90 year old tiny pistol with floral inlays, a 100 year old surveyor's telescope—through which he gleans information about historical shifts in labour, racial migration, and social scapes.

"You can tell what sort of a neighbourhood you're looking around in by the sort of things you find. The Chinese were here but there's a lot of stuff that's deeper than that. This used to be a Jewish neighbourhood," he told me.

The impetus for his digging habit itself reflects a local history. "I grew up in a small town that was a lot bigger and died out a lot. It used to be a huge industry town; there were whole areas of the place that are gone now. You could dig anywhere and find something." His work is clearly influenced by old forms, especially the visual language of the early 20th century advertising.

This impulse to recover and re-value the objects of the past seems to be shared by large swaths of this generation. Perhaps it started first as a reaction to the economics of the Mulroney/ Thatcher/Reagan '80s, then later to the sleek, cyber-utopian aspirations of the '90s. In the new millennium, strains of anti-consumerism, recycling, and a preference for the rare over the mass-produced, coupled with economic reality, has turned a fascination with objects of the past into an articulated politics.

For a whole strata of artists, this has developed into an articulated aesthetic. The "Mission School" artists from San Francisco (e.g. Barry McGee, Chris Johanson, Clare Rojas, and the deceased Margaret Kilgallen), express a "near-religious belief in salvaging what is left of a fugitive authentic world," according to one writer in the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*.

If many artists have taken an interest in their pre-globalized local particulars, Jonny Petersen focuses specifically on traces of prewar Vancouver. He is fascinated most by the untold histories of deviance of this former frontier and port town.

“For a big city, it’s closest to being the Wild West. Between the 1840s and the 1890s it was a party town for gold miners. It has a lot of violent history. Benny’s market over there used to be a whore house.”

I asked him how digging relates to his art. “Aesthetically it’s not that different. I’m inspired by old things more than other art,” he said.

But if he bypasses the institutional art historical past, he is in direct conversation with other pasts. His series of old advertisements with fantastical claims has a sensibility similar to Margaret Kilgallen’s full room installation at the VAG drawing show earlier this year. The pieces reflect both Petersen’s gentle humour and his interest in social history.

“People saw each other in a weird light back then. If you were from a different culture you were from a different world entirely.”

His work is visually dense and the less historical pieces portray a deeply animistic world. He draws a lot of fantasy animals, some which seem like totems.

“It’s almost startlingly obvious that there are complex stories behind them,” said one viewer. He often uses objects from dreams, fragments that imply whole stories, whole other worlds buried deeply underground.

## Discoursing the Octopus

### The death of man and the afterlife of the body

Charles Mudede

Let's begin here, with this longish passage from Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*: "It is in sickness that we are compelled to recognize that we do not live alone but are chained to a being from a different realm, from whom we are worlds apart, who has no knowledge of us and by whom it is impossible to make ourselves understood: our body. Were we to meet a brigand on the road, we might perhaps succeed in making him sensible of his own personal interest if not of our plight. But to ask pity of our body is like discoursing in front of an octopus, for which our words can have no meaning than the sounds of the tides, and with which we should be appalled to find ourselves condemned to live." Arthur Kroker, the subject of this review, is a Canadian thinker who has spent a great deal of time and energy discoursing in front of the octopus.

In the early '90s, Arthur and his partner/wife, Marilouise, established the online journal *C-Theory*, which posted essays and reviews from unknown and very well known philosophers and critics from around the world. Born and developed in Montreal, and presently based at the University of Victoria, in the *Pacific Centre for Technology and Culture*, the journal's influence and visibility on the web has yet to be matched by any other online academic journal. Paul Virilio and Jean Baudrillard are some of the sites' French celebrities; Hakim Bey and Paul D. Miller (DJ Spooky) are some of its North American ones. Though the subject matter of the posted articles, event-scenes, reviews (the best of which are collected in an anthology called *Life in the Wires*) has ranged from theorising cyberspace to the space dreams of a South African millionaire to fundamental leftist agendas, the site's and its editors main preoccupation has been the impact of new technologies on the nature of our reality and, specifically, on our bodies. Arthur and Marilouise theorise the post-human octopus.

At one dramatic point of the generally dramatic 19th century, Nietzsche declared that god was dead. Near the start of the final stage of the 20th century—1966—Foucault, a French Nietzschean, declared the coming death of man: "Man will be erased like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea." By the time Arthur and Marilouise Kroker began their website, man, like Foucault, was long dead, but his/her body was still there, still breathing, eating, fucking, and, worst of all, mutating, experiencing great changes, becoming something that it had never been before. These changes were not caused by internal forces, but by external technologies.

It can be argued that British science fiction writer J.G. Ballard first recognised these changes or modifications of the body in his novel *Crash* (1973), which is about bodies being violently transformed by automobile technology. These days, the transformations are not so violent; indeed they are administered quietly, lawfully, in the name of longevity, improved health and performance. Arthur Kroker is one of the leading present theorists of these changes, or what French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1924-1975) would have certainly called the "controlled transformation" of the post-human body. Kroker's most recent book, *The Will To Technology and The Culture of Nihilism* utilises

three very different thinkers—Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Marx—to examine our changed (and still changing) bodies, and also the changed (and still changing) nature of the space within which our bodies persist.

“We, the first citizens of the twenty-first century,” writes Kroker early in the book, “are privileged witnesses to the empire of (technological) spatialization as it extends its ocular coordinates into deep space and deep flesh.” Space is being transformed by war (death) technologies; the flesh is being transformed by life (bio) technologies. But what is willing these technologies? Meaning, what is driving them and what, ultimately, do they want to achieve? Kroker believes nothing. They want nothingness. And the total force of these accelerated technologies has established a new kingdom, our present reality, the “era of completed nihilism.”

It’s impossible to do justice to these ideas in the space of this review, but what can be said briefly and with an amount of certainty is that Kroker’s theorising is conditioned by poetry. *The Will To Technology* is, in the end, one long poem about that “a being from a different realm.”



## Songs for Growing Pains Genevieve Castrée and the darkness of childhood

Joni Murphy

*Pamplémoussi* is a headfirst dive into a pleasurable yet unsettling realm of the subconscious as envisioned by the artist Genevieve Castrée. Just as in her previous books, Castrée fills her pages with precise black and white drawings of restless but sleepy girls dreaming of broken milk bottles, scraped lips, hovering owls, lovers, and wide eyed foxes. Like Max, the little boy in *Where the Wild Things Are*, the girls in *Pamplémoussi* are left alone in their room, forced to contend with all manner of dream monsters. These kids must navigate their wild emotional waves from their boat beds, either fighting the beasts or cuddling them in their arms. The characters float between dream and wakefulness, between the unfocused sensual experience of childhood and the fetishistic sexuality of adolescents. Castrée manages this tricky middle space between childhood dreams and adolescent nightmares with a light and exact touch.

*Pamplémoussi* is the artist's most ambitious project, a record of seven songs written and sung by Castrée to accompany and complement the book. Like other artists working across disciplines, Castrée excels in one more than another. While her songs are charming, they whisper where her drawings moan. This is not to say I didn't appreciate the songs, just that I found the drawings much more striking. L'Oie de Cravan always produces high quality books, with rich silkscreened covers and heavy, pleasing paper. This attention to detail lends itself particularly well to Castrée's style, and the finished product is enough to make any bibliophile swoon. I could easily write more, waxing poetic on her drawings and music. However, studying her project led me in another direction, one I fear offers more questions than answers.

Why are so many emerging artists tied to the idioms and images of childhood? Musicians like Joanna Newsom, Devendra Banhart, The Arcade Fire; artists like Shary Boyle and the Royal Art Lodge—to name a few—all fixate on the playthings, songs, and stories from a lost youth. Some of this intentionally "childlike" work buckles under the weight of its own self-conscious cuteness. But for other artists, childhood is both a theme and a source of inspiration for vital and urgent works constructed from the fragments of bedtime books and adolescent mix-tapes. In the case of Castrée and bands like Arcade Fire, a complicated, conflicted nostalgia then energises the work. Products of youth culture seem to offer them a vocabulary with which to explore sexuality, death, dread, and dislocation. Aside from their individual merits or problems, what seems interesting is the fact that so many artists of this particular generation have found it necessary or attractive to express themselves through the idioms of childhood.

A longing for childhood is nothing new; one just needs to read *Alice in Wonderland* or *Peter Pan* to know that. But what about the last twenty odd years has inspired this current bout of longing? Was there some generalised failure on the part of our parents' generation to provide compelling reasons to grow up? Or does childhood, with

the mad logic of make believe and recess bullying, offer a way of understanding the world that grown-up logic has not?

Depending on your perspective, childhood is either a safe, comfortable realm of the past, or the fraught foundation of each person's pain and pleasure, a time of uncontrolled desires and subsequent shame. Childhood is both a time of freedom, and of suffocating constriction. Perhaps the tension between these two views is what attracts so many. Certainly in Castrée's miniature world, these two visions collide. Milk mixes with blood, and together sleek cats and wild girls lap it up.

## 2048 Kilometers South

Anne Lesley Selcer

*“The city, like a proper name, thus provides a way of conceiving and constructing space on the basis of a finite number of stable, isolatable, and interconnected properties.”*

Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

I am on my bicycle rolling through the hidden industrial streets East of Commercial between Hastings and the Burrard Inlet. In this no-place of the city, two Vancouver shadow industries flourish: prostitution and film. Just outside the fake decrepit downtown built by the show *Dark Angel*, I see a man pressing a woman up into a doorway, her short black skirt pushed up around her hips. I am used to seeing prostitutes at work, but it turns out a prop truck has obscured the totality of the scene from my view. In the street stands a third man filming. I did not see the man with the movie camera. In a configuration that is seven degrees of hyperreal, Vancouver, as stand-in for LA builds a set that is a stand-in for skid-row. Just blocks from the actual skid row, actors recreate the sex-for-sale scene that actually takes place here everyday.

This overlay of reality and simulacra is only one of the features Vancouver has in common with Los Angeles. Both sprawling, newish West coast cities, they are each the last major point South for their respective country's West coasts. Concepts like frontier and last stop have imbued them with utopian possibilities from the start. Their identities have always been plural and in flux, created and recreated as waves of immigration, building booms and film representation shift their actual and imagined geographies. "Like the freeways...that define and connect them" says Melanie O'Brian, director of Artspeak in a recent discussion over email, "the path worn from Southern British Columbia to Southern California (and vice versa) is one of shared desire." As guest curator for 2048 KM currently at the Or gallery, she has collected post-conceptualist work from both cities.

The tone of conceptualist Ed Ruscha's serial photographs and laconic text works falls dead centre between LA's utopian ether and its pop-culture paved streets. His work has been thought of as the convergence of the terribly real and the totally unreal; as the critic Edward Lucie-Smith put it, there is "a willed neutrality in [its] essence." "Artists working in Vancouver, such as Jeff Wall, Stan Douglas and Ken Lum have found connection to the work coming out of Los Angeles and continue to do so," says O'Brian, explaining the impetus for putting 2048 KM together. "The effect of this crucial conceptual history can be seen reinterpreted and opened further in current practices by emerging artists in both Vancouver and Los Angeles."

In 1966, Ed Ruscha represented his "backwater" West coast city with *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*. If New York, North America's cultural centre, is a city unified visually by the vista offered from the top of the former World Trade Center, (the view from its heights "makes the complexity of the city readable", Michael de Certeau asserted in 1988) LA in the 60's had no such unifying perspectival point. In Ruscha's street level gaze, the buildings of the Sunset Strip stand in for this sort of unification. Ironically

they become consequential and monument-like, the Strip taking on cultural gravitas for this sprawling, ephemeral city. When Stan Douglas offered *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* in response, he similarly unifies Vancouver's identity around a sort of inverse, horizontalized monument.

The palm trees at the bottom of Davie and Denman exemplify the way dreams get landscaped into space. What could a southernmost big city look like if not a faux Mediterranean, a sun, sea and rollerblade resort? But just South of the border, the northernmost US city of Bellingham is all mittens, flannel, hot cocoa and stands of pine. These shifting psychogeographies inform Kerry Tribe's book work, *North is West / South is East*. O'Brian writes of the piece, "Here Ruscha's specificity is replaced with generality, mobility and shifted landmarks. If work from the 1960s was interested in an urban vernacular (mapping movement through the city), Tribe's work maps a global perception of locale."

Tribe, an LA artist who primarily works in video, asked strangers at the LAX airport to draw maps of Los Angeles. The results vary from one diagonal line with a dot labeled "airport," to a graceful abstract of LA's infamous freeway system. The collection of drawings speaks to the pluralities of constructions of perhaps the most frequently costumed city in North America. When Tribe stopped one group of strangers at LAX, whom she described at her October 16th artist talk as a "tan and perky group of girls going to a volleyball tournament," and they wanted to know where she was trying to go, she told them to make the map to any place they found interesting. In the margin of the neatly drawn map to their high school, we see the bubble letters of the teenage hand and an earnest, determinedly helpful set of directions. Such idiosyncrasies make the point that maps are always relational: a map cannot be divorced from the use to which it will be put, or from who is making it.

As the Bellingham example shows, locale is even determined by relationships—whether we think of ourselves as living in the North or South depends on our relationship to the rest of our country. Tribe's work, often structured around a multi-leveled deconstruction of the "real," generates content that reflects this, but also its opposite. "I cannot sit and make art in my studio. It doesn't start till I get other people involved," Tribe said. In fact, marks of the subjective lend a warm cast to work which, among other things, is concerned with a dismantling of the subject. The effect is not retrogressive though, just insistent on the idea that identity and location is enmeshed in relationships. Tribe's brand of humour, while similar to Ruscha's, fills back out his flat affect of irony with these glimmers of the personal (or "real"). She, with the other artists in *2048 KM*, continues the conversations which have been carried on for 40 years simultaneously in both cities.