

*In the Millennium*



# In the Millennium

*Barry McKinnon*

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*for Joy*



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*In the Millennium*



what is it  
we know / or imagine get to

what thought known to be ahead  
in life, one inch from the beginning

at that moment of intense  
sun

in life's regret

downtown in slush

•

in the park I was thinking and can't say it

the  
melancholic twist of truth that I'll never  
get to know enough of you to think anything else but  
what I do. therefore . . .

mark cynically, that I can't  
work the s on Garcias possessive.

*Garcias' Garcia's*

•

January 2000, no illusions  
not called  
typing anymore

the world  
a contradiction of attempts at connection to it /

I crave loneliness as its opposite

time: as matter / steam from the tub  
my empty thought a slight revelation at the haze  
of polluted red

I miss my green Underwood. it implied its own time  
& that future would wipe it out

•

in the snow, no further out  
than when I wandered as  
a child

one horizon leads  
to the next

*snow* –

mobile blazed trail, in seconds  
where  
they want to go

*noise / power*

the instant churned

•

no punctuation for the heart!

diminished in the global sense  
so much caring becomes diminishment /

*failure.*

you won't finally care.

*invest.*

be somewhere else

*stupid*

•

you're probably right  
to the things I can't admit

so  
whatever I thought or felt  
tossed away

simply, we agreed to skate  
in whatever we don't  
want to say, try

again, junctures not unlike  
me in the closet in 1951

amidst the shoes, leather & dark  
till I was found

and pulled out

•

pot is burned. my fault &  
that the smell remains

to remind me of *all* I  
did

& did not reveal in 40 years to ask

*forgiveness*

it's really just a complete sense  
of isolation & not in much control, so therefore –

I think of driving  
into the future:

*everything rage*

but for the miniscule community –  
instants of

us going against the global manufactured to raise  
the collective chant:

*fuck it*

•

together we won't know where to go

•

/ or today  
those skates bought circa 71.

stiffness gone, or never there, all energy propelled  
bends my ankles

I'm winded  
when I thought: *this ice oval will clear*  
*my head*

give little buds of *one* good thought /

*in the millennium*

my aging  
exaggerated

by the fight against it

•

Sunday: *Forests for the World* — ski  
the lake

skirt its edge, clear headed to see the  
conspire: nature — streaked cloud  
to pure

/ light

no mind to see

•

it's over

the table — where light meets  
dark, the vice versa

defined as time  
every thing about to be  
invisible: the countenance of flesh, language

departure

I'll weep later / thank  
the blessing of some kind of surety  
gone

bless the balance the music brings  
(backdoor club Granville Street, the year 2000)

life gone under

more allowance of  
the necessary:

*Gerry Gilbert on  
a bike*

•

it stinks.

last night's crap

in the air, 30 years later  
Husky Oil never once to care

exhaust pipe goes. 70 bucks I don't  
care

no self righteousness assumptions  
of exemptions

to make a difference in the hum &  
buzz and electric surge

•



valentines — I'm late / chocolates  
half price

I buy a box

& flowers chosen in the instant  
I see the buds are closed / imagine them in water

open on

table of our house. later think: *the bonus points*  
*almost add to nothing*

— prize objects /  
the zero of their own attempted instant

what is good?

particular and mechanical  
disintegrations

*that* made to outlast, a slander: those well  
made boots . . .

o

in the exhale  
of mundane thought,

complete

time goes in / the space  
it begins /

•

e-mail pile

*anxiety*

too late to return broken razor,  
the phone

*not working*

so goes better my ending

naked /

to the world, smaller, acoustical,

musical

*visible.*

# ***A Walk***

*taken again to that margin of a world*

ETHEL WILSON, *Swamp Angel*



*a walk*

— knowing  
this risk to believe as a walk to some edge  
returns its body

eliminates

— the darkness  
illusions unfulfilled

so the mind  
— loops to knowing

the rose smell & its disappearance —  
I wanted against the thought of loss

•

*it does matter*

•

the sexual rose — pungent  
wild park of wild roses

returns us changed

(how love but with belief  
we are for its purpose

that the prison contain  
so each be lung

redemption

as air that contains the rose

•

breathe benign  
thankful you might know in time

& kiss to eternity /

define darkness

conditions — undescribed  
that lead to humour and trust

as ebb & flow lead to anything  
better

that we may get above  
the guards

the summons to appear

•

& since we were not meant to be, *why not hope?*

& know time is a liver, sliver & arrow of wind to  
make a neutral soul surmise its own disguise

to come alive, *alive*.

and know we can again  
love, even if it be thought it could not be

•

I wanted not to go, necessarily, went  
warily, without a  
care

drunk

next to a  
Scottish rhododendron, whispered, *give me back  
my heart*

wondered where it went without blame or fault.

(in this life  
I think the worst,  
consequence then comes as diminished surprise

to only pay half, or nothing of  
what you thought

owed

weakness the willingness, the offer to pay anything, to be  
taken off the hook

•

this has been as a  
walk —  
life with you

mythical /

in its endurance

— a petal / becomes a cosmos

•

a worry wort looks at flowers  
to push the residual  
bits and pieces to life — a sense of beauty.

who in a notebook fails to say or record  
simple fact:

cruel father, bears gentler child (your  
love of plants, the fertile hard fruit you'd  
place in the sun like you did the other day, like you did  
over 30 years ago, reminds me

of my own need

my shortcomings lead . . .  
you see it cannot be said, remains a wish

yet real love proclaims it  
in the silence of our bending  
to water plants, to touch (I was never  
good at, being of such family I'm in strange opposition to  
though no less love.

body & soul, now proclaim it  
— accurately as  
carving to yield a cave  
time's cave with light near the end

•

I went left

toward love  
and what I believed /

those years of darkness & all I could not say or know  
or make known, to realize, be made worse by recognition  
of what I needed to resolve



•  
are greener pastures over the hill in a storm cloud? in  
Scotland I didn't quite know

*a long way to walk*

— up the glen  
did I give you my tam to wear?

I was worrisome in that constant moving dark cloud  
that led me to darker places. met others lost along the way

extant, we were

all alive enough to want it more so — preposition to pronoun

to clothe legitimacy

decency / generosity

•  
the female voice became my tether, motionless. weightless  
as motive.

though dark little, those evil in the cave. dark little those evil  
in the cave.

so I would know and vow to overcome

my own dark self

in time decay — & endless day out to desert / metaphorical sea.  
still to complain *water is not the world*

•

to guess at  
where the walk will end. near the sea?  
by that ancient grave in Anglesey?

no answer when the mind's in motion toward its  
awkward testament

— *it will not end*

•

what is any journey partially but a description  
of its length —

did you really see the world

hungover in England?

the sick know what it is to want a home & see  
themselves, the source of their faith that they may some day  
return.

*they wait with a heart  
more forgiving.*

the others come untethered  
see the world wanting it.

I'm in between

though as years ago, as yesterday smelled clover  
at the intersection & was rushed back — my  
Anglia to 37th

early sixties, we fucked in grass.

in sexual love

I compromised to your female harder edges.

a softy,

makes possible  
the change

of heart —

•

did we, 35 years later sitting on the wicker on the  
porch, change our life? decide

*let's be our knowing*

that leaky trail to the —

what's the name of those flowers,  
& why my worry, why, what am I late for?

seconds lost  
might become your fate (accidents  
to love

shift demise to desire

•

how can I make it?

or define the incomprehensible sea of love  
amongst the motion of its wrecks / in the depths

*to the other side?*

•

am I here? last night, beautiful light / burst clouds  
I saw

on the green who  
would imagine

our unlikely symbiosis: me with range  
you with an eye to become a pair

*wild*

cranberries, tart in season

•

I know now  
love by its impossible measure  
that its denial, equally forms its presence  
but that the imagination still seek its flesh / will not still

the human cry —

how name the sorrow  
that defines you  
as those who define  
their well being in selfish smugness

*we know the world will go*

•

it was not the distance gone nor what I saw regaled  
my change of mind; it was the edge

a margin to

the changeable energy of uncertainty that yields to this thought:

*to be without you*

a simultaneous sense of life / its  
obliteration

•

I walk from the hole

to love /

the mirrored edge  
that cast me



## ***Sex at 52***





*it was not so much sex*

•

at 52

a change of mind — the body, to let it ache  
elsewhere

*sex at 52*

as the first fuck, as the last

•

think like an orgasm in selfish exchange

is it we get closest here  
or furthest apart

so caught in the ecstasy / two  
beings slick & wet abandoned to the thing itself /

as want

of physical testament — adornment in the  
human condition?

•

in fucking, aim to disappear / each  
to *become appearance*, a wholeness as part of an  
illusory cosmology

•

we are nowhere in this wanting  
come together

to see  
the double plunge — as primordial / promise

•

women see bones and hard flesh angular,  
whole being in a step or glass held in talk, angled a certain way,  
or a voice as a promise of care or whatever it is would draw you.

men / *same*

to hazard a guess: there is no angle in paradise

a curve we don't deserve: *sex at 52*, in life

I had to go into the dark to be alive.

then I was held in a graveyard, lay blind  
drunk on a wet lawn, at dawn.

all I ever wanted

learn love almost ruined by our expectations of it.

at 52

•

this embrace gives the momentary world the edge you think  
is paradise, and our ruin becomes its meaning

and welds us silver in a ring of virtue and trust  
unerring faith, given at last our sense of a last  
divinational pause

at 52 it was a multiple — might as well say an angel's voice

to pull my winged heart to the wells of thought: disappear to  
come alive. to be nothing

reveals

everything you forgot. & thus at 52, a kind of recognition  
immediate trust leading to kindness though

*noise* — time rattling at your soul & your revenge, to stay it,  
to fuck, to hold & revere the image of this as an absolute when  
the absolute has fallen apart. this is our revenge

*sex at 52*

•

in the drunken fuck

flowers / emerge fecund from slate on  
the roof across

and memory of want when the eye exploits  
the hills / to you a curve ahead of me in the heather  
the sheep, the rhododendrons, the gorse, the thistle.

*sex at 52* attempts to deny

my lost ego — death looming

sex

expansive restoration, this little hope of fools and  
cry babe toughs

must learn to forgive  
make betrayal the sweet meat . . .

a ragged truth to go on

*in beds in fields in grass*

•

*sex at 52*

•

what I do, driven that it gets  
no better, a world of thin design

of what men have done and said, becomes opposite in the  
obsessive blind reliance on their gizmos. in this lie I'm driven

to the fuck, a joke

so the coat leaks & lets me  
to the weather / dull suburbs as landscape when I look out  
the bus — *despondency*  
to sex

as a force against it.

•

*sex at 52 —*

accept terror as a line dissolved  
in the chance for beauty,  
to know /

what it is

*that* wait for space to take its shape — *men / women* — skewered  
time that bids farewell: (sex at 52 without you

I can't imagine.

•

*sex at 52*

plead no love —

to leave



## ***An Unfinished Theology***





the angel an attention become belief

•

a particular place (False Creek — a point, a bay with boats in the  
gray, I thought, or think it now, the heart — *this cliché*  
contains its loss,

— yet gives.

authenticity, momentary point of being

ferries what appears

•

*do you want to  
walk?*

the angel asks

*how do you want to be loved?*

*(death disappear turn its head.*

then I rose to an edge of being

and the shadow in my mind  
pushed aside the rest

and I saw  
*desire,*

itself the thing I desired.

to say *love*, to dismiss that against it.

•

*it is you*

transfiguring

the gray that lights us; jewels in my eyes, parts of bone,  
splinter, feather, ginkgo, goose, — a wish for flight though  
flesh be gone. so we will wish it, know it pain & sweetness of  
it, an ideal we dismantle to fill the hole of want & of what be left  
of time

measure minutes, the unfair ticks of eternity, the second opening  
to glimpse mortal body, beauty of no words  
to say it & language of all we'll have to hold to

the inaccuracies to allow

the unfinished theology embodied in this space of thought that  
attracts / detracts in a simultaneity we know not what  
to call. all I could say in a whisper —

*god bless you.*

•

what did the angel ask who has come in mortal form —

*are you all right?*

I answered torment & pleasure of space & time (energy of  
the impossible that makes us look / see again, to reverse

*become.*

the angel said: *I came to love*  
*by examination of*  
*its shadows*

•  
so  
    in  
shadows we'll be found our point  
of loss  
to illumine dark in these shadows  
& the light beyond

*there is no heaven, but the procreative  
moment.*

I address you

angel

— *a prayer,*

    desire  
self and world unfinished



# ***It Can't be Said***

*for the memory of Ben McKinnon (1922 – 2000)*



*it can't*

*be said*

living, I can't imagine you dying.

•

the window looked west  
later, a dust, a skiff — light March snow. suburbs  
with an elevator, the lake, a bank of Indian  
land. you said:

*they want a road.*

•

*want a road*

into these words, thoughts barely  
to notice the nurse pleasant, caring and human in the seeming  
cold millennial politic versus this kind of care

you dripping into a bag — bladder pain  
pressure, TV up to your right — nonsense to waste what little  
time

our small talk must contain

what can I say: without cliché. I  
swear beneath my breath — angered by a finality  
undescribed,

ourselves, I think later, today, two weeks ahead in life after  
you died, not that death is exit from time: *it is*  
*time*, — *not* a vale, but a folding in space without wind / air  
when the last instant is a burst as if the beginning of the world  
itself *now* reversed and only of itself  
as fact in all its puzzlement.

how to go on  
to form resolve and be of this body about  
to leave

•

*I'm taking this razor back*

the one I use  
to shave you, thinking, I'm this close (though once we hugged  
in a parking lot / later a gravesite & you winced at my move to  
intimacy; therefore, distance & my fear, as they warned, of all  
unresolved

•

in a complex, you taught:

*root hog or die*

•

what can we do but imagine, that our life be described  
in whatever instant of thought becomes image (as the  
picture of me, the baby, in your arms — you sitting on the  
root cellar door with . . .

time ahead.



*this time* that I now inhabit to cancel  
my days.

•

no image / in truth

no subject but time that contains our demise  
so that my attempt at the invitation to place a letter in the  
grave —

I found, instead, a botched copper horse bulged in a desert scape  
that I tooled in an early grade; you had it

copper to last forever. I tacked it to my wall

your empty grave

grieving, grieving  
the resolve of the unresolved —

& only this outside guess  
at your thought:  
the conscious measure of each shallow breath, pressures  
anxieties, indignities, embarrassments, false  
hope. you said:

*I'm in my second childhood*

•

I'm nowhere / an unknown somewhere where

— my attempts  
for location, a wordless elocution — a lament  
in

silence to let image, solid and *only* of the world — enter the eye  
to take my heart from this, left bereft  
and fatherless

(that now I must . . .

in the face of it see a bit of a joke  
in our practical concerns.

*check my mutual funds*

•

legacy almost  
wordless (that day you  
on the river in the rain at that point where I thought  
*this is miserable*

you said

*it's all right with me.*

so I take the rain / my future  
without you

•

you said: *thanks for coming*

I said goodbye twice without looking

the phone to you rang . . .

you died

and I came into this world again, a strange  
and conscious birth

without word, without road

without a father.



## ***Surety Disappears***



surety  
disappears

begs  
to word

silence — its meaning

to the world

•

want

to see in an orb the imagined world

against / abasement

a voice to say: *come  
up these stairs to light*

•

there *is* a voice  
a light /  
between ditch and road, as the drunk in Dublin, myself

sensed human good

in Temple Bar

— a stranger  
hugged me

& my abandonment reminded  
I was in it /

— a life /

to

hold

against / false arrangements

know opposites / not as pain but  
source

•

there is no plan but the *moment*. no end but the moment you  
leave

the past  
I dig from

no time  
to erase

•

grief  
that coming up the stairs I am  
— *my father*

•

lacuna  
between want of all  
denied / delayed



became my soul  
to suffer its own belief

to  
be held  
in  
fear  
of loss as loss  
itself

unearthed as it is unending as it is the heart intoned  
to the singing breeze  
neither wronged nor beaten for it beats  
intoned  
*hopeless* to its measure

*is its measure*

•

this bridge of time where  
my girdled word spun  
mental

the world  
in sigh of disclosure of what it is

I wanted to say

•

where is my rock in earth's  
rocky path

*myself?*

lost in days disappearing  
eternity —

out of this light  
to shadows  
birthed  
to shadows birthed to dark  
to light to dark  
again

•

I've begun  
sick / shaken to what love would absorb  
that a failure contentious and arranged —  
is more bound by the fear that  
justifies it.  
others cursed ahead  
lamp lit

•

woman the lamp — their curving forms  
the world attained to disappear  
as those happy  
bonded in smug delight to the smug energy  
they describe

who will  
we walk with to celebrate the siren  
of marriage / the announcement that this moment is our stay  
against the rest?

•

my soul in its  
zeal to know

she wrapped me  
vanquished she disappeared in her largesse  
that I live

to  
wish I return complete

that *we* may live before  
the arbitrary cease  
us.

•

will I return

to word and flesh as care and force  
seek us / cast us  
as a season returning / ending  
so no line exist / separation, a body  
folding want to want erased  
commingling to the  
good?

on the cobbled path earth  
is a  
universe  
guilds the nothingness  
sheaths moonlight on  
your breast

•

this beauty

is desire that asks  
we bear again  
the moment it appears

toss question, what is left:

*words, the hole despondency*

to flat epiphany: the face, the form, the voice  
turning / mind to buds —  
green & spring's sad  
goodbye.

•

my meaning removed  
— every surmise  
a disguise

*a fool*

•

months later  
on  
the trail I was  
sick of my shadowed loneliness, then thought:  
*it is my only light*

the reality at gulf of being:

*hope is despair*

•

speechless — a smeared dream:

*joy, the moment of all I wanted, the whole of knowing what I  
could not attain of you now appeared. it was the sense of what  
I always knew spoken at last. we flew this way together from  
the world.*

•

space of sun  
light in hall to xerox room. love orbs  
its instant of escape: *pure being, your life was in itself the all of  
expectation without regret in the complex of all of its  
aspects, — was lived,*  
*faced*

*(our plane flying low / destined.*

*a desert below*

*(how beautiful you were, what I knew — smile, body of whole  
self contained so nothing now could change the sense of it  
presented*

•

a whim of wind & a sense of self I am. irrevocable; my  
hallucination & illusion — smiling to announce:  
*this is a place I'll be*

no beginning remembered, no middle not knowing the distance  
to its end.  
but a kind of traveling — to see  
grass and snow

*my measure of meaning*

a gulf — to endeavor shaped  
in the simple decay of complex attainments exact as the risk  
to attain them: life at the bearing

edge I sensed myself  
when the accordion  
became my desire's pleated air

into the suburb thinking — what becomes in love not  
expressed (these minutes we could keep — redemption

to a hinge of words, a river of loss come to

the meaning  
of itself

•

*how else speak but lose*

our loss to containment / refills this window's  
crack of light — our fate to *a containment recognized* —

•

Cottonwood Island — 30 below (March  
river hued blue in / north sun  
over mill

all energy is the incomplete

*this end in space*

(I glance the cutbanks

in the

irreversible luck of time to make  
my heart a memory





# ***Head Out***

*(A Letter, Essay, Poem — to Cecil Giscombe)*



## Preface

My friend the American poet Cecil Giscombe and I took part in *Philly Talks* #18: A Dialogue with Contemporary Poets, in the Rosza Centre at the University of Calgary on February 2, 2001. The reading, talk and discussion took place with a live audience (and an audio webcast for those who wanted to listen and ask questions live via the *Philly Talks* web connection, phillytalks.org).

Short weeks before the live event Cecil and I exchanged new writing that became the focus for the *Philly Talks* newsletter web document. This material was accompanied, also, by responses / reviews / reactions to our work by three other poets: Wayde Compton, George Elliot Clarke, and Giovanni Singleton.

What follows here is my written response to Cecil Giscombe's e-mails to me prior to the reading: it is a response to Cecil's poems / poetics / & concerns as I see them. In this version the text has been edited and Joy McKinnon's Giscombe photos added. I do, however, prompt any interested reader to see the full context of *Philly Talks* #18 — which as a whole consists of the poems, essays, statements, e-mails, queries, and written responses that arose out of the live web cast discussion.

I'm not sure that during the talk / discussion part of the event Cecil & I made any teleological advances — even without the pressure to do so; however, we both agreed the next day of feeling — the word we simultaneously blurted out in laughter — was: *stupid*. When in the range of intelligent, huge, hairy, and difficult questions that we were asked — concerns of place, race, meaning, form, content and the intents of poetry — our answers, or a least mine as I remember them, went out by the seat of my pants. If only had we *more* time to *think!* To say what we *really* mean! To revise the spontaneous inaccuracies *with* felicity! etc. . . .

Nevertheless:

*never apologize*, I once heard it said:  
risk to let the voice and writing stand.



## Head Out

Cecil: On the phone I asked: *What are we going to do?* — a question regarding the why, when, what and where of the *Philly Talks* event. We both began to laugh / nervously. But this to say, you've plunged ahead and given me a wonderful essay / letter, new poems and notes I'll respond to here — make a plunge that I hope gets me to somewhere and you — to connect our journeying / returns

into the large concerns of our talks: *poetry & . . .*

the complex practice of it that we may stand *reaffirmed / ashamed* together, also in a kind of happiness and laughter — bound as we are to attempt its secret / lead our lives by it — baffled dumb / to want / any need to journey / return.

Ten years ago: you in Normal, Illinois, and me in Prince George, B.C. — an unlikely geographical connection, your voice on the phone — smooth, subdued, quiet, intelligent and polite — introducing yourself via George Bowering's suggestion that you contact me — you a poet with a project, making a simple request: you needed an invitation and a letter to support your plan to track the black explorer and miner John Robert Giscome's journey and life in the mid 1800's *viz.* his presence in B.C., based on your serious premise of a family blood tie.

*J.R. Giscome / C.S. Giscombe*

And within a year, there you were in the parking lot of the Downtowner Motel in Prince George. Did I wave first or did we wave simultaneously? We gave no physical clues for identification. I knew from scant historical information that J.R. Giscome was black / you couldn't be white (I'd have been very suspicious if you were!)

*the blood ties.*

*now, here,* your return via John Giscome to begin the long journey — almost a decade ahead of you — into the poem:

*Giscome Road*

our immediate connection / spontaneous

difficult talk / easy talk. We, familiar with similar materials or lack of them, and *questions* — and a sense of a share in a cursed journey, if it were not for the almost promise that its very activity is what could equally save anyone on it.

We talked

into the night — back porch beer epiphanies / and over the years of our talks to a kind of necessary knowledge — as if by articulating a shared skill, concern, and practice, each step ahead be taken more assuredly — give simultaneous courage in the foolish prompt to risk

*words*

*the wilderness      the nothing*

dumbly / head out

as early miners packing each thing for a journey into vast unknowns, up the physical canyons, through miles of bush I can barely walk a block through. (Cecil, that day on the Giscome Trail in the sheer and wonderful context of the “historical” moment, being with you, I was also being bled by many species of carnivorous bugs — and in fear noted trees shredded by recent

hungry bears. How far did we go until we got the idea: this,  
*now, here*, the literal Giscombe Trail / *his* portage on  
to Summit Lake / the water  
shed divide at 54'40" — longitudes and latitudes of history.  
I watched  
you swim out quite a way.

our subject? What tools, what corporeal / mind / necessity let  
us start with an agreement, spit out without a thought, yet a  
thought we continuously return to by virtue of its curiosity — to  
a “theme” of sorts: “this is a place we decided, *but there’s  
nothing here.*”

*right and wrong*

*the name’s the last thing to disappear*



*Giscome/Giscombe*

*no more Saturday nights there*

Who cares in the expectation of dislocation as normal in the  
Canadian northern corporate practice and ethos? In recent  
history (the 50’s) the Cheslata indians “removed” from their land  
by the Alcan / Kemano project, given scant hours notice before



the flood. Giscome emptied on scant notice in 70, (there's a long list of other towns and people) — and most recently Tumbler Ridge\* where I write this (a coal mining town shutting down) — a place in a huge transition that very much attracts me. In its disintegration to become a ghost town for ecotourists, old-age pensioners, snowmobilers, poets, and misfits — I begin to feel, illusionary or not, a sense of being, temporarily, out of dislocation: these beautiful mountains, and air and cheap real estate — a real place in the detritus after they've gone, whoever they are (innocent or not). I'm thinking of the *what&who* in the ruthless discard of primal economy. What of value can be kept? What's changed in America, the north —

*here*

& Giscome, the town in 71, where Joy and I felt *not* at home, but that this place *was* a home; she photographed each house, street, church, train station, mill, machines / machinery and *every thing* abandoned.

\* Tumbler Ridge was becoming a ghost town in 2000. The world price of coal dropped and allegedly the TR supply was dwindling, so the mining companies shut down / moved out. By 2005, world prices went high enough to attract several companies who have since opened or re-opened mines. TR is now integral to the new global economy — namely China's requirement for resources in its move to the next stage of industrialization. The oil and gas reserves in the northeast BC region and the additional economic activity this generates means the local economy is, as they say, thriving (but not without, also, new threats of serious social and ecological costs).





On one of those trips to Giscome I drove out along Eaglet Lake until I feared going on. This sense of nothing ahead. A road to end without reason. Where would I be in this momentary terror — my soul I literally sensed, *gone* — cast from the earth into *the diffuse centerless light*. Is this *the* dislocation, or *the* terrified connection — (poem, now, as portage of our own necessity and making — words as map, tendril, trail and path to return to where? — the poet going forward / back on a syntactical bridge only strong enough, *in* this necessity — because we're traveling light — to carry only his / her own weight? The words / words *got you to Giscome Road*.

no backdrop

*here*

you made words / large fact of a world once blank, *almost* empty, *almost* nothing / went back —

ward for / word into terrestrial multiples: Jamaica to the babbling old man / — a long lost Giscom(b)e on a front porch — knew nothing you needed *to know*: no evidence at the primary source: *therefore*

•

Cecil Giscombe on a ten-speed bike, poet peddling into the  
centerless light: Jamaica, North America, Normal, Prince  
George, Giscome, the prairie Midwest — into

diffuse light.

(feet, head, and eye

into —

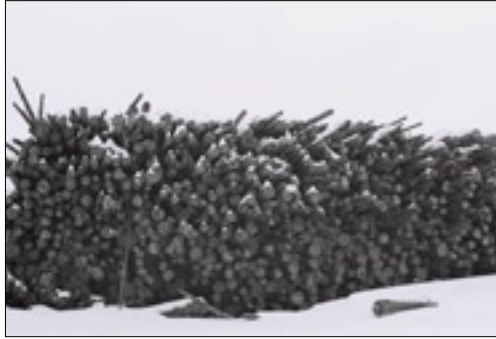
*nowhere / somewhere, far, two directions, with open  
return. into & out of . . .*

*describing it*

head out



CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS			
DATE _____			
TRAIN NO	FROM	DUE	EXPECTED



### Endnote

Many of the thoughts in my improvisation bounce from Cecil's title *Into and Out of Dislocation*. I think I'm just beginning to understand it (beyond the medical description of Cecil's injured / dislocated arm as described in his book) — in terms of his life and writing as an African American writer in America, *and* Canada. The title poses a great millennial question: if we know, with varying degrees of intensity the arbitrariness of what being *into dislocation* is, (aren't we *all* in it, or about to be?) — then what is it to be *out of dislocation*? The *place* this question imagines is open to what human values we would presently wish to define it as (a real *place* without compromise or illusion?). What presence & location do humans anywhere have in the current psycho / sociology of what has happened / happening here / anywhere you care to look? The world's largest clearcut in the Bowron valley is 40 minutes from Prince George — large, invisible; it's "nothing", they say. The unrecorded world, *this* close, (20 minutes from Giscome) — yet, minimal fact given the human dislocations & disturbance of the larger daily world eco / human diaspora. A question:

the task of poetry?

*poetry /*

What I've wanted. The poem itself (an artifact / *real* place) — & I've also wanted the very moments of its act & its energy (integration / location) — to include, as well, a necessary,

disintegration of its conscious *and* unconscious premises? By this I mean the practice I think I see in George Stanley's new work: he writes / builds a line that seems dismantled *at the same time* — to reveal accurate processes of mind and life moving to their jagged truths. This want of a new world! This want of the new poem! *Get a life!* I hear them say while “real life goes on” into and out of the language and world at hand — *into & out of . . .*

I think the task — & Cecil so large among the others I admire for taking it on — is to break form, break ground, *be* ground (*not* backdrop), so that when the radio is on, the static clears.

*Now* voice and music are heard, and the pleasure of the information to make what need be known and said, visible.



### **Notes / Works Cited for *Head Out* & Endnote**

The line “journeying and returns” is the title of an early book by bp Nichol.

The line “reaffirmed / ashamed” is from William Carlos Williams’ poem proclaiming: “I am a poet! I am a poet!”

References to “this is a place, we decided . . .” is from Cecil’s essay “Border Towns, Border Talk”, published in Beeler & Horne, eds., *Diverse Landscapes: Rereading Place Across Cultures in Contemporary Canadian Writing* (Prince George: UNBC Press, 1996).

“The name’s the last . . .” is from *Giscome Road* (Normal IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1998).

Various titles I’ve taken from Cecil Giscombe’s *Prairie Style* (Chicago, IL: Flood Editions, 2008).

“Real life goes on” is a Robert Creeley quote on the back jacket of Cecil Giscombe’s *Into and Out of Dislocation*.

### **Post Response: Supplement to *Philly Talks* #18**

My job as a poet is to see and to unravel arbitrary and pre-conceived notions and definitions of reality, including what I might conjure as my own: the poet can’t help but do this because of the very nature of the energy & process of the language that’s chosen him or her. What has been mapped by manipulative and self-interested forces, from whatever source or reason, is firstly what the poet must at the most rudimental start of the thinking and writing process attempt to take apart. I must find myself asking unanswerable questions; there is no choice. The poem is a process that defies the static, the set, the static arbitrariness that herd most populations through life and language. The poem is verb: there are no nouns in nature: nature has neither centre nor periphery.

Place becomes for me the perception of that moment when my eye sees an instant and then sees through it / knows it; the poem moves at it, in it, becomes both it and not it. This written instant is of a / the world unmapped, immediate and excitingly incomprehensible, (now there and visible for “gradual awareness”) and by that fact more real in its assertion than the lower-order uses of language that manipulate to create static, noise & stasis. In these manipulated claims of the “real world” by those obsessed with power, the dramatic premise is that once a thing ceases to move it is easier to kill (literally or metaphorically) — the poet included. If Cecil and I share anything, I hope it is a clear sense of these margins, bounds and conditions and that we are neither black nor white (but a multiple of complex human activity which may include

these designations\*) — while in the heart and moment of the process of seeing and writing, terrified or not, in this necessary disappearance of the preconceived.

This is part of a poem I wrote in the 1970's that Cecil referred to — having an importance to him — shortly after we met.

... it should be easier, so I go  
back

— some uttered language, rooted in the void,

as driving N.E. of Giscome — to McGregor — not making it  
— running low  
on gas — the sun blinding — a sense of being

nowhere, suspended & scary. the truck  
moves along,  
between mountains, a train, slag heaps, ( a copper  
mine? thus  
the green ring that edges the lake?

such descriptions, without a meaning — or I am without  
a meaning,

not clearly, at 35  
driving ...

*(The the. 88)*

\* I'd like to question large and assumed categories and nominalisms even further as when poet George Stanley writes to announce: "I am not a man ..."(68). Similarly, here is Leonard Cohen saying: "... in an embrace you're neither man nor woman — you forget who you are. Once you have experienced yourself as neither man nor woman, when you are reborn into the predetermined form which you inhabit, you come back with the residue of experience or the residue of wisdom which enables you to recognize in the other extremely familiar traits". (Crouch 21).



Here is part of Cecil Giscombe's poem "Far":

It's that this far inland the appearance of a fox is more than metaphor. Or the appearance is a demonstration. Sudden appearance, big like an impulse; or the watcher gains a gradual awareness — in the field, taking shape and, finally familiar. The line of sight's fairly clear leaving imagination little to supply. It's a fact to remember, though, seeing the fox and where or, at night, hearing foxes (and where). The fox appearing, coming into view, as if to meet the speaker.

Push comes to shove. Mistah Fox arriving avec luggage, sans luggage.

*(Inland, 5)*

I see these lines as a conjunction in our thinking and writing — poets moving into / out of sudden appearance to trace the fact of a dislocated moving place.



## Works Cited for Post Response

Crouch, Leanna. Ed. *One on One: The Imprint Interviews* (quote from “In the Field”, Leonard Cohen interviewed by Barbara Gowdy), Toronto: Somerville House, 1994.

Giscombe, C.S. *Inland*. Oakland CA: Leroy 7 Chapbook Series Two, 2001.

McKinnon, Barry. *The the*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1980.

Stanley, George. *At Andy's*. Vancouver: New Star Books, 2000.

For a chronological history of the town of Giscome see J. Kent Sedgwick's *Giscome Chronicle: The rise and demise of a sawmill community in central British Columbia 1912 – 1976*. Prince George: College of New Caledonia History Series, 2008.





## A Note on the Photographs

Joy McKinnon took the Giscombe photographs that appear here. In the early 70's when we heard the town was being abandoned & bulldozed — as is a common history with Canadian company towns — Joy decided to make a photo record before the town's impending fate. Taki Bluesinger, a Vancouver photographer and media artist, was visiting at the time; he also took an interest in our project to create a visual document of a place about to disappear. In conjunction with Joy's black and white photo document, Taki and I convinced a colleague at the College of New Caledonia with a pilot's licence to take us up for an aerial view. It was a bumpy ride with Taki at the controls of an old-style video camera the size of a small suitcase, panning the town below. I've heard that someone in Taki's family has his archive. I hope the shaky video film still exists as part of it — in the black and white of what we saw those many years ago.





## APPENDIX I

### Bayday

This poem was written shortly after the town of Giscome was evacuated and bulldozed. A local radio station in Prince George, most likely CKPG at the time, was running advertisements for the Hudson's Bay Company's "Bayday" promotion which involved a roving car equipped with a loudspeaker that randomly stopped at various houses at various times of the day. If a "lucky" resident happened to hear and respond to the bullhorn line: *you've got 55 seconds* etc. . . . they'd win some kind of prize. My sense was that if someone in Giscome came into the street for the "prize" they might have had their house bulldozed while their backs were turned. The italicized radio lines were jotted and spliced in as I wrote.

Giscome shack town, no more  
Saturday nights there. one man remains

to watch the mill. he knows nothing  
can be carried easily  
away. but the people willingly  
were

on one month's notice . . . *the answer to their  
problem . . . CBC*

(some houses are livable yet  
bulldozers to scrape it all away, as if some natural  
cycle is at work

but people people lived  
there

as CBC goes on:

*we are capable of understanding  
the culture . . .*

*etc.*

as the local radio goes on jingling  
and jangling

the nerves:

*you've got 55 seconds  
to come out & see what*

*you've*

*won.*

**APPENDIX II**  
**The Upper Fraser Road**

from *Giscome Road*. C.S. Giscombe

(the Upper Fraser Road makes a long S across the tracks & goes on.)

first view:

the church with its giant cross, the steeple rising above trees & visible too, through those, a red Blazer wch I assumed — from a quarter mile off — was many parked cars or indicative of them, it being Sunday morning

following:

the 5 houses,

Giscome School w/ its windows all decorated for Halloween & the banner inside WELCOME TO GISCOME & their gym shoes in cubbyholes visible too through one window,

the CN trackside bldgs,

the single vehicle, the Blazer, parked out from the church right past where a little dirt road stopped,

the floating green edges of the lake past the flat where apparently the mill was

(the district inhabited if sparsely, unhaunted).  
(the view on out Eaglet Lake at the mountains



**APPENDIX III**

**Notes Incorporating 2 Lines By Barry Mckinnon**

from *Giscome Road*. C.S. Giscombe

I

(On the long road back from there I drifted  
— I was on my English bicycle—  
down through some commotion I made  
in the landscape.)

2

there's no center where  
similarity would begin

nor annotated wasteland out there leaning

on the easily borrowed heart for an announcement,

there is no-

where to go out there —

3

came to necessarily centerless space, though (or the intimation of  
that & out of that the specific, there

4

to which I came up some ways

(I'd come up through a long silence on the way up

to Giscome up the Yellowhead

X miles out of Prince George, NE of there

5

& turned back into the direction I'd come out of,

out of the gap of the landscape there, a  
named edge: the juncture of this one little edge  
in the line of trees,

the gap of that lake's many edges —

6

no more / saturday nights there

the town bull

dozed but the evidentness on passing even quickly through of  
some-

thing having happened there, some things having taken place  
there, even people

fucking, say, in the houses (those gone & the few ones left)

or in the fields just past there, . . .







*Joy (An Epithalamium)*



in my head

a place

where desire contains  
the description of its loss —

now, thrown to the moment of dread.

that I did not get *there*, to *that* missed, I, forsaken in

time and hope to revise: make old  
to new

a life, and world  
with you

that I must speak  
what I sense I cannot say  
be said: image / you, *the figure*, literal *in* my life  
to make *it* my life so I was final — *myself*.

•

I first saw

you — teenage blur. *you* in that chance,  
hand to breast, the kiss / a relinquishment deep — sexual.  
blur of moon —  
Volkswagen — river bank  
primordial, visage of  
self in moment of consummation / world  
entered, defeated to the self become.

love was its articulation to the complex of itself. our  
dream: only to say *it is*

the breast, the curve of hip I saw then I saw  
& pled help us in this recognition: hell of

forms separation.

so mindless was I followed / loved abandoned  
to believe I could be, to speak, to be  
with you.

•

memory a  
loss now kindled  
to talk these years to see ourselves

in love's attempt — defined. detailed

you  
in 64 — as now, love then also its threat (leaving it  
that I become  
measured when I think: *the others*

I break to jealous heat: *the thought*

*the loss of you*

— like a substance the river is drowned is itself  
*is time is loss*

•

this dialogue drifts. *come up*  
*come up the stairs with me* — please hear  
this testament against our grief:

loss, against loss, to make a  
life with you by shards / remains

a plea

a move to love / one's time & language  
to reach again

the body — sensed / riven  
by days we balanced the beam  
of love / in domestic routine —

but wild we were to risk what we could lose: *each*  
*other*, that the distance made each return a measure that now  
to sense

*fathoms, a surface, a light, a life*  
*somewhere.*

•

yesterday, wanted to *say*, be *believed* to cessate  
its need, to see, all unreal mistaken for the real.

your body, every moment  
of it, as entrance, where

I vanish be found — *vanished*

do you see me? that what you see is what I believe

I see myself, *am I the belief of what you see?*

•

*I had a life*

I had no bus to take

I was outside to ask how faith now bloom to possibility  
of faith

so I measured the changing light —

waited

in space

•

*you did not want me*

or my beauty, or mistook the world's attraction as what unfolds  
to be

as a place it takes to leave (a porch, a car, a bed, walking to  
Vancouver blind

— waking to that recognition I believed unable to  
bear: *I wanted you*

concomitant: myself in its loathing echoed a soul without itself

•

*born in fear — I invent a place  
with exit near. when in sleep  
in a dream I will believe — wakes love to*

*marry us  
again*

## ***Bastard File***





## Radio On

radio on, thinking

*I'll write a story about gardening, for Stan  
Chung — or George Bowering*

or —

or thinking: where's that noise from? *or*  
my old friend David Phillips out in the mud of mid life  
resentful though he has the biggest heart I know, clear  
mind honed in anger. it's maybe time. let's loosen up, go back to  
love (ashamed at the world.

— “he loves the learning and the teaching for their own sake”  
— (CBC)

me: it's Feb. 16, — and a hangover enough to let the half sick  
mind write out its course. or, it's too cold at 30 below, to go out,  
though the sun is high, bright — and beautiful, but you must  
constantly think, stink of polluted air. perhaps, there is no hope.  
(yet live daily &

sing the body

*electric*

•

“the squids eye” is similar to what? no different than the  
statement: *I can't understand what he does* or to think the  
future of poetry is past. (as in that garden I was so dumb, I didn't  
know how to rake. *make many little piles* & while in the rain  
wear *proper* gear — and sense the foliate world.

I turned the radio off and hit “save.” “untitled” becomes, “poem”  
& I wonder in this task how best get out of the way of what  
breaks in. I go back in revision, turn on the heat cube  
& drink from a Tim Horton cup.

•

furnace on. 38 below / a letter being read, “there were tears in  
my eyes.”

life’s ease. distractions. but in the kitchen coming out into the  
intensity of the dining room sun, I thought, this is the kind of  
day you may die — slight momentary sense of wellbeing  
in the body’s earned space. I won’t worry. by now it’s ten  
o’clock and I think I know

I’d rake one big pile. old Tom smoked, bowled / waited for  
retirement: *make little piles. don’t work so hard.*

today: or all day, my old black radio propped in the wood — I  
chop, clear snow in the 20 below. sense of / *I won’t do  
school work.* how many years have I wanted only to live  
my life, or / on the ski trail with Noel, I yell ahead: *I think I’ve  
just started to sense pleasures, enjoyments — embodiment of the  
fundamental human and open heart.* actually, it was something  
I said about “12 years gone” — tyranny of self in systems of this  
world. but here: the woods, the isolate, animals tracks and  
cracked trees (all whites, shades of it, and darks

— *arc of northern sky* —

### 3 Lines: Gender Studies (a collaboration)

I am not a man

my mother calls me  
daughter

I am my father

*George Stanley*  
*Ken Belford*  
*Barry McKinnon*

### **Transliteration: *Bushed to Lost Along the Way***

Sometime in the early 90's I got a letter from a professor at Sichuan University describing his literary project: to select Canadian poems for a Chinese anthology. He found my poem "Bushed" in Margaret Atwood's anthology *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English* and wanted permission to reprint it for his proposed *Selected Canadian Lyrics*. I sent off a quick note to say yes and forgot about it.

In 1995 I got a copy of the book and curiously searched through its 190 pages to see what my poem looked like graphed in Chinese. I couldn't read a word, but the overall company of poets felt good: George Bowering, Daphne Marlatt, John Newlove, Margaret Avison, Al Purdy — 33 Canadian writers, each with a short poem translated for millions of Chinese readers.

Later, chatting with the writer Calvin Wharton in Vancouver, I mentioned the anthology and that I was curious to hear what "Bushed" was saying in Chinese. Calvin offered to ask his partner Lian Zhang to do a translation from the Chinese ideograms (*without, we agreed, letting her see my original poem in English*). Lian agreed to this and translated the Chinese version of "Bushed" into "Lost Along the Way" (and also included a translation of the Chinese translator's notes about my "unknown biography" and "his idea").

I'm moved and cheered by Lian's transliteration from "Bushed's" dark mood to something more sanguine. Such delight at the surprise of the borderless light poetry looks for / the beauty it finds.

## Bushed

I am in a desert  
of snow. each way  
to go, presents and equal  
choice, since the directions, &  
what the eye sees is the same

if there were some sticks, you would  
stay & build a house, or  
a tree would give a place to climb  
for perspective. if you had a match, when  
the wind didn't blow, you  
would burn the tree for warmth, if  
the wind didn't blow & you had a match

there is this situation where love  
would mean nothing. the sky is  
possibly beautiful, yet the speculation  
is impossible, & if you could sing, the song  
is all that would go

anywhere

迷途

我正在大雪覆盖的荒漠上  
每条小径都是平等选择通向远方  
因为每个方向和放眼所见都是一样

如果这里有一些木棒  
你就留下来，建造一间住房  
如果这里有一棵树生长  
你就爬上树去朝远方眺望  
如果你有火柴，风也不扬  
你就燃烧这棵树来暖暖身上

真有这样的情况  
爱情不将任何意义附上  
天空多么美丽空旷  
在这里不可能沉思默想  
如果你能够放声歌唱  
那歌声定将传遍四面八方

---

巴里·麦金农 (Barry Mckinnon, 1944— )

生平事迹待考。这是一首具有现代派特色的抒情诗，所描写情景的时间地点不明确，诗人的感情也没有在诗中得到直接的表露，他只是用象征、暗示的手法去引起读者的联想和感受，委婉曲折地传达了自己的思想；即使是处于困境中，也不要灰心丧气，要努力创造条件、发扬乐观精神，去战胜逆境带来的艰难和挫折，开拓美好的未来。

## Lost Along the Way

I am in a deserted wilderness covered with snow  
every road is an equal choice towards the distance  
because whatever you can see, as far as your eyes can see  
in every direction, is the same

If there are some sticks  
you will stay and build a house  
if there is a tree growing  
you will climb to the top and look into the distance  
if you have matches and there's no wind  
you will burn this tree to warm your body

So this can be true: love has no attached meaning  
the sky is so beautiful and spacious  
and here it's impossible to be silent and thoughtful  
if you can let your voice go to sing as loud as you can  
then your song will be carried to every corner of the world.

### Translator's note

His biography is unknown.

This is a lyric poem in a modern style. It's not clear where and when the poem is written and the poet's own feeling is not directly expressed in the poem. He uses only symbolism and suggestion to help the reader make associations and feel the experience.

He indirectly expresses his own idea: *Even if you are in a very difficult situation or are trapped you shouldn't be discouraged and lose heart. You should try to create positive situations and be optimistic to defeat all the difficulties and twists brought by adversity, and open up a beautiful future.*

*Lian Zhang's note:* The sound equivalents for "McKinnon" in Chinese, mean, in this order:

*Wheat / Gold / Peasant*

## Writing on the Ridge

*for Donna Kane*

on the ridge Donna Kane:

*I thought you were a paranoid,  
but now just cursed*

then describes a red light behind me in the bush  
honed in to track me down  
that only I can see

she almost agrees, it's *really there*  
to find me even here

like cops in New York, a bust  
for a 3.5% beer, or

border guards as hegemonic device, who ask my name  
and deny they did

the paranoid it's true, is the one in true  
possession of the facts.

truth & what else goes out  
— a life punished without full enrollment  
& what gift given only to bring me trouble

the light: red: hegemonic / demonic  
out there on the ridge, serial and un-  
written, tapped to a source

god or devil now somehow both  
the same



o cursed, I'm made to reverse that I'm made to laugh  
in my happiness & light

the light and good / not dark nor shade nor  
demon red

•

on a dark street in Tumbler Ridge  
a dark car pulls out and follows  
every turn

*who is that she asks? it's the light, the secret  
police. it's the curse of what we know*

*a moment in the meaning  
of life*

*noise & silence / these our words without words*

*it's the writing on the ridge*

she begins to weave the car in laughter, this  
curse to be with me.

— flash of red light behind us

## Retinal Detachment

worry to fear. the line between meaning . . .

*only eyes* —

that half a world is dim, milky, sad

*I'll do my best* — the rest seems a rustling fate in the wall  
the arrogance of immunity

impugned / be humble human at last or  
recognize it can be its beginning — the accumulated past -

*it's only you.*

threat of loss  
to become a strength? —

in the hospital silence, waiting — crazed scream / of wordless  
condition

how lucky you are to get  
this far — *the measure* & corporeal recognition: *in the land  
of the blind the one eyed man is king*

in the trans luscence palpable separation that the world is 3  
inches off in my walk and reach — though never, in my  
unrequited fate, sensed my  
part

such it is with luck  
what my mother said looking for the hidden blessing

*the hidden blessing*

here the silence of the sick to say . . . to know their power  
*not to complain*

otherwise, it was May, me on my way, happy to be each day

shadows / detachment — subdued in the palpable enormity  
to become all of me

— its diminishment  
(if this is about anything)

this / distorted  
sense of being the blind will see



# ***Prince George (Part One)***

*for George Stanley*



*a man in himself is a city* — (W.C.W.)

beleaguered / belied    the entrance (*himself*,

he enters

canyons

in Hade's hot air

•

memory of *that* travel

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

busted out — clearing forests / water / air

not form but    what

shapes

*the city*    a body

to its

soul —

•

down

town tribes —

in their source of

detachment, begin to be

themselves again —    hunt /

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

*these bulldozed souls*

no pity or remorse to equal what's imagined

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

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

in simple light

*they see*

•

what do *we* see so clearly in its lack

to see without image / articulation — a reason

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

•

the man, the city — what parts in  
the metaphor, this *way* of dreaming — is the heart a down  
town? 1969: the routes (bakery, bread, meat  
balls, a pickle and up 4th to  
the Astoria (beer — to the Bay, the Northern, Wally West, I.B.  
Guest & down to the corner — 2nd & George, the Canada, the  
blues, beer,

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



•

*libraries are for loafers*

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

*the smell of money* — the brushcut hero who could make it

the local ethos: *up*

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

and in a dream of this world woke to

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

•

man a city: the female forest —

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

*root hog or die*

when a city becomes its coldest hearts

we live in the illusion of its habitat:

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

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

*I can't breathe*

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

•

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

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

*I want to go back*

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

the apt / penthouse — top floor Trojan Manor \$300.00

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

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

home —

*the city: a world*

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

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

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

•

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

a shit hole.

•

*when are you going to write something good?*

•

its activity is also its own resistance: what  
to say: what subject, or image — what body part contain  
the life / what weakness is strength when

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

in shame that now the city can not be made

this rotten dark soul, a man  
a metaphor, a language convinced of its own rhetoric easily  
believed (men (the city  
its self / fooled  
by little stakes / little power (that those governed  
men will thrust their outlines — will sacrifice the rest. will  
save themselves  
others (those sickest

grin

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

•

the city exists / knows itself / cannot change

easily

oh corpus of belched noxious gas  
oh corpus of the fruitless / oh corpus of malignment oh  
generous corpus of the material world oh  
industrial corpus behind the corpus oh corpus of the beautiful  
& gentle wind oh corpus in our misaligned prayer oh corpus  
of promise and care

*oh grid of light, muscled male*

•

stomp the tourist's head into the walk — that part psycho  
path — the city staggers in a hoedown dance / wild  
in iconic illusion of how it sees itself — dressed  
to kill any thing in sight

•

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

•

(off Queensway embarrassment, then disgust — teen hookers to  
cross through

the riven world displayed by its line between: *us*  
*and them*

little girls, the man, a city — / homeless

•

*why did you stay?*

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

to work

a language in its attempt to equal

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

*be allowed to live.*

•

in the city: Nechako, Fraser

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

*city core*

body is thought

through parking lot, plumes  
/ trees,  
/ polis / man

## ***Bolivia / Peru***

*This poem is for Viv Lougheed, John Harris, & Joy  
— travelers / companions & for those we met along  
the way, & for the Bolivian lady who said to us one day:  
Que le vaya muy bien — may it go well with you.  
As it was, we went and went well.*





*Bolivia*

— my life a chunk — language and mud about  
to slide as thinking that leads to this:

*Bolivia is not a place*

in my head, airsick in La Paz, said, *it's a measure*: what the first  
and second world take for granted without the 3rd — as an  
amazement  
when it's finally seen. firstly decide it *does exist* and make an  
entrance without preconception; now no exceptions. who you  
are or not is now arbitrary. scary.

in Lima you land to trust it enough to leave your pack, go  
to the can (young lispy guys hanging out

later, you get mugged

•

on the plane to La Paz / think *Bolivia Bolivia Bolivia* — how to  
conjure sense of this violation to be so far from the familiar  
— that down below, land depressed — stretched, brownny all  
the way.

blue rim of lake — Titicaca? — the flashing roofs of tin.  
mountain & plains, the people there I imagine.

gringos / — anyone white who looks like us,  
— not arrogant but sense of immunity (quickly disappears  
at border / guards ask you to fill out visa forms again.

•

descent. the Alto Plano through slums of dirt, mud and dust, a swirl  
of your first — not glimpse of landscape — but flashes / faces, a  
kind of teeming human activity, bodies hanging to it — temerity,  
— this . . . life without hope?

•

thinking goes away. is now something else

•

not a measure you measure:  
(in Bolivia without a clue, or language — a passport you believe

what literally gets you in and out quickly dissolves (*no*  
passport, *no* embassy

*you're no one. this is a shithole*

•

Plaza de san Francisco. off the micro bus into the swarm of  
masked shoe / shine boys / hard breath up market streets to the  
Hostal Arcabucero

cool-out with cheap beer & coca leaves. take a shit, still good  
throw up / put toilet paper in basket w / sign, “Thank you for  
your comprehension” — mouth dry, anxious.  
altitude / home —  
sickness — want of the familiar — the . . .

Bolivian weather: a complex made simple by its fact; does not want, as me, to be noticed, is a wrap neither hot nor cold, requires minor adjustments: the high sun beautiful, equatorial — the breeze exactly at

the point I need it — the summer rain in the city of La Paz.

•

we drive  
to Sorata

by jeep, up to the Alto Plano, through slums to the more pastoral. Bolivia is ground, brown to green, each inch an agricultural possibility; then to brown again, dots of rocks — the impossible land scape of mountain / moraine that yields at the lip of the descent into the Andes valleys huge / open descending bowls of an ascending geometry (farms / measured hectares of hand carved earth / greens to the upper glacial / margins.

*Sorata*

*The Oasis.* resort of sorts not quite right but as an unfinished plan out of synch (homemade signs “Camping” “Baño” “Restaurante”— North American style / campground being eaten by the flood. we mud it to town, the square, the church, the internet, the international telefono — markets, tiendas, cafes, the *holas, buenos dias* — Spanish greetings as pattern become repetition. the familiar / to the ease of easier maneuvers: “habitation con baño? con ducha?” I ask. bold enough to fuck up. let your guard down: think, *paradise is a complex*

*convergence:*

its opposite: 2 sides with guns who shoot it out (La Paz Policia versus Bolivian Army / 30 dead

or

the guy in Sucre at the moment I thought, *this is paradise*, tells us his pocket slit, wallet taken, then dropped in the fight. welcome to . . .

any world we know is impending: *adjust*, continue through cobbled streets — think, the simultaneous & coincident: *good and evil* — every moment holding inherent threat / possibility

•

*Bolivia, Bolivia*

•

— in the weight of *every thing*, not merely noticed, but *taken in*: carnival sounds, the wobbly drums, all combos of Bolivian colour (reds, ochres, the pastel wash, whitewashed brick beneath the canopies of tin — Bolivia *crumbling* in the repeated 4 bar brass Bolivian riffs in the dance & human shuffle of its own celebration.

•

JOURNAL: Feb 13: leave Sorata. Ricardo's jeep up to Achicachi. Harris says: a shithole! La Paz in riot — police vs army (issues of income tax?) total 30 dead — looting / bank machines smashed / fires etc. conflict also in Cusco? Potosi? — threat of general strike? my real sense of fear in this context. also of coca farmers, Campesinos blocking roads. no taxi or bus to take us safe & out. store packs with Juan at hotel. Viv to walk out or hire bike to road blocks, see what's up. Jesus! we walk to edge of town. gringos. pure fear. Joy says take an Ativan. want beer / to go home. say to John this is not my fucking idea of fun, I'd fucking go home this min. if I cld. mouth dry. word is cars

*coming thru. get a taxi (Alfredo? despite rumors of blockades drives us to ferry & from there take microbus to Copacabana. guy on bus (hidalgo? an engineer fills Viv in on La Paz. he left this a.m. & walked thru road blocks 30 km — worried. advised us to keep going into Peru*

•

get to

Cocacabana: through hills / down to Lake Titicaca — the intense sun, the intense blue, the Mediterranean / Bolivia. a “beautiful setting”. “good to see tourists” I write, “sense of safety here.”

thinking of La Paz, write: *sense of no control or way out if trouble comes yr way. side note: cant sleep properly. (altitude? drink coca tea / rain temp: perfect for me.*

the brain works its spectrums and doubles — from weight of self importance, to / sense of *I don't care*

(Bolivian farmers cling to the sliding hill, become earth themselves, a move of colour in slow stooped moves to plant —

•

JOURNAL: Feb 14th: *never any sense of discomfort in “weather — sun / hi altitude. (7.7 Bolivianos = 1\$US) at hotel 120 B's (bfast included). lunch very cheap 6 B's — & hike up behind town to ancient cave site — & on down valley & up to Inca drawings — □ □ □ series of squares (red). hard to see point / meaning. local farmer describes / “meaning” in Spanish / Incan history etc. give his kid a candy, a pen & a few pages from notebook. beautiful sun / clear — back to highway (note old air strip) warm 3:30 - flag taxi, 2B each and back to Copa (meet Dutch travelers, Hendrick and Emilie at bar “Ricks Place” — have beer — supper). to bed. sleep a problem. wake up at 12. cant get back to sleep — altitude? feel pretty good during the day.*

who in their heads, think what? is it  
to diminish fear with the familiar, the repeat of daily routine  
to be one's self while about you

the poor /

the dark Bolivian stars, on the all night Flota from Potosi  
to La Paz?

•

JOURNAL: Feb 15: up at 6:00. beautiful sky / boats on lake. cld  
see lights of Puno across. electric shower luke warm / catch boat  
"Titanic" at 8:30 to Isla del Sol (2½ hrs) slow along coast thru  
2 narrow channels. land at Cha'llapampa & go on to Inca town  
thru old lady's yard: vamoose! vamoose! irritated. she waves  
us on to the Inca ruin. cant understand the guide's narrative  
— an explanation of Inca mythology. sense he didn't know  
what he was talking abt. lady guide finishes talk. no baño. piss  
behind ruins and hike on up the Inca ridge. eat lunch at 1:00.  
Viv makes tomato/onion sandwich. excellent — & then on  
walking / talking w/ John abt college politics, writing, pensions  
— no diff than we've ever talked —

•

sun & weather: the Isla del Sol

JOURNAL: Feb 16: Viv takes pic. me w / Llama (spits!). kids on  
trail selling rocks (senior, Inca! Inca! Viv barter. I buy one for  
1B — give kid another .50 B get another rock! these are the only  
rocks I'll keep, I think — eyeball vista thinking I'll never forget  
this, but probably will — the contours, colours smells, textures:  
no real way to document the detail. "description" of "3rd  
world?" (is there worse ahead. what world's next?)

— walk rocky Inca path

*to top of town / no trail markers. perdido! “lost” & ask 2 locals direction. w/ no words for “boat”, “water” etc. tho I remember the boat is called “Titanic”. I ask, “donde Titanic? Titanic?” question doesn’t register. instead guy shows me his hat / says “Llama!Llama!”*

•

in Bolivia detail is reality.  
Peru is motive

•

*JOURNAL: Feb 17 Monday: Lv Copa for Puno thru Kasani. micro bus to border — 2 border checks — no problems — Puno — a shithole!, John says / sheds, shacks — taxis, bike taxis, stink of diesel & burnt out motors, Lake Titicaca — green polluted ring — hot: walk into town w/ packs — winded — ask directions to plaza — & head up. main street — banks, restaurants — mid class mixed w/ tourists, police, shoe shine boys, beggars, locals etc.*

— swarmed by shoe shine boys. two on each boot, laces removed. my pack Viv thinks is next.

•

in Peru  
what’s learned, a pattern: one price to begin, a higher price to end. the tactic: hound tourists  
until  
they give in / or be as the well dressed gringo on Isla del Sol  
waving  
them off: *get away! get away!*

JOURNAL: Feb 19 head into Andes. beautiful verdant hills  
(fertile) w/ Andes behind — hours of travel thru small villages.  
lots of food / vendors on buses — corn, pop, cups of red (jello?  
etc. nb. woman hacking turkey out of backpack. note: — 2  
police checks for “contraband”. John out to watch packs. no real  
sense of what they’re looking for. scary. a routine

Juliaca: incredible mix / people — but all poor. dirt, dust,  
garbage, stink, woman sweeping garbage to garbage. no hope.  
this is total poverty / stink. bus winds thru mud streets / vendors  
markets etc. sense of no one working unless waiting is the work  
— what’s the economy?

these — stretches, mountains undulations rhythms and  
lines / potholes

— bus without shocks

to Cusco Peru

•

old voices leave me / sentiments and measures replaced —  
emptied

Cusco: Inca city / replaced: colonial Spanish impositions,  
inquisitions and worse. piece it together how? Bolivar, Pizarro  
— names of streets, statues, heroes / villains

*South America.*

the perfect fit of Inca stones form Cusco’s lower foundation  
— the rest dismantled, replaced with curly Spanish stone &  
iron / churches — evidence of commerce and  
robbery

museums / Inca pieces — Spanish colonial remnant and artifact



how to know or fit anywhere

•

in Cusco: hawkers, the plaza ringed, territory staked, tourists stalked / menus thrust to the face: “my friend, you eat here!”

“tomorrow”

“tomorrow! tomorrow! maybe next year!”

equivalent of *fuck you*.

or / the lady with the painted gourd hitting it over and over: “no ceramico! no ceramico!” a block later you give in — 10 Soles

these measures of someone’s hell / money strapped to your balls

•

drink at bar, *Norton’s Rat* (Jeff, American ex pat: “muggers strangle you to point of death — leave you stripped . . . lived in Juliaca. rent 35 US a month / my neighbor / priest. some kind of hassle . . . they blew his house up”

•

buy ripped off package to Machu Pichu

\$100 US

admit to thin identity of being

•

Machu Pichu / no urgency to reach Incan / Mecca. the slow train  
makes its way / along Urabamba — a rush of mud — impatient  
turbulence / a gush to the Amazon: birds / trees — more  
“tropical”

— mountains

“mystical”. mist circling / greens / grays — the vertical cliffs  
of

*Machu Pichu*

photo of me in spot where Al Purdy stood  
— the sugar loaf mountain Earle Birney climbed behind me.

*the tour*: I cling to the rocks with vertigo & savor the guide’s  
narration:

*see the Inca world*: sun dial damaged in beer ad shoot! see the  
condor’s shape and wings! / a cosmology / teleology: everything, I  
think, is fortress / is enemy.

“beautiful”

•

JOURNAL: Feb 21: Cusco: tourism hustle at high pitch and  
annoying. Bolivia starts to look much better — less tourist hype.  
cheaper. l/v Cusco. get large bus (pink style flotta), back thru  
Andes high valleys, back thru Juliaca / Puno — Copacabana  
— back to La Paz.

in these routes retraced, know more — *miles & patterns* — &  
know less / the political configurations, history — that nothing  
quite works yet.

•

La Paz in the words  
of the local, is *tranquilo / normal*

Bolivianos dolled out in eye of smiling guys with guns.

quick clouds & rain. revolution & coup — *Bolivia*

•

we walk La Paz again. plaza shot up. coffee / cheesecake at  
Alexander's. desayuno at  
Dumbos.

JOURNAL: Feb 23 here, amazed at the mix: a middle class,  
*indigenous, plump ladies in mushroom dresses, bowler  
hats / Hidalgos, army / police — private cops in blue  
snowmobile suits / shoe shine boys w / masks (Viv heard that  
kids non-unionized wear masks to hide identity or to protect  
vs fumes? the hills of mud abt to slide — downtown a kind of  
little New York / the morning explosion of activity, off the main,  
treed streets embassies, apts, American style restaurants / the  
Thelonious Jazz Club — big band, w / Indians, Spaniards  
led by Dane, Anders Andersen on tenor — read tough jazz  
charts / swing and improvise.*

*downtown La Paz / Viv w/ helpful Hidalgos at broken bank  
machine. / amused guy w/ machinegun comes over, curious.  
Bolivian toddler grasps my hand — choked up by little kid's  
curiosity, trust, innocence / vs what we know and learn as  
opposites.*

•

fly to Sucre

JOURNAL: Feb 26 — landscape below, mountains — smears of red / green, — rivers — brown / wide. land. take taxi to town. Sucre: 1st impression: old, colonial, clean — a change from usual slums of Bolivian city outskirts. “paradise” of sorts (weather, architecture & sense of “good place to be”. at point of thinking this, French Canadian guy tells us abt being robbed / scammed earlier in the day. guy is diverted while robber slits his pocket w/ razor blade.

great sleep! no altitude probs here so far. — Saturday: walk w/ packs & bags. get taxi for 90 B's — 3 hrs climb thru countryside to Potosi

•

what gets identified the moment you sense identification lost as yr life on the roads to Potosi — John shaking the driver awake. I'm under a bag / coming to the literal heights & end

of Bolivia

(head clear / a few words / my sense of transgression

to

Po to si high in the silver

Andes — colour change / weather change — cold (bleak, clouds & chill in wind

walk on the bones of six million worked to death / though no graves to mark them (blacks from Amazon / kids from anywhere

mid 1500's all the world's silver Bolivian coins shipped out to Spain

from Potosi's mountain — Cerro Rico / the mint

•

at the la Hostal Compañía de Jesus — I write, “a bit under construction”. Joy says, “a rathole” — 40 B's a night / toss cold in my sleepless nights, write: “the place cold. bombed by globos. everyone WET”

“every 30 seconds need a big breath”

•

in fragments of fragmented place what souvenir contains it / or thought of heart & mind yield its sense & meaning?

the bus ride from Potosi to La Paz is dark, a backroad bumpy / slow — a metaphor, but of what? when I wake: “no crying babies. *everyone* asleep.” I look & think — are the stars in the Bolivian sky, cold? dark? in the bleak & cold

“a wonderful sense of moving”

sense the weight place takes. *human.*

*Bolivia Bolivia*

•

leaving  
/ its memory ahead of me

•

La Paz: the morning / leaving: keep trying / tying pieces — string

the wordless image of the imagination — a defiance to the  
humble recognition of any attempt

we tie up bags with string. get taxi in pre dawn — commingle /  
in happy sense to leave / no thought of coming back / no  
memory yet in the immediate detail of the climb up  
to Alto Plano to airport & single thought of home.

La Paz doesn't twinkle behind: it exists; the farmers  
coming in (ancient cycles & routines

produce & coca leaves

— last chance for airport souvenirs: I buy 2 beers (Pilsen &  
Pacena)

jet out & down / the Andes, high arc & down to the coast &  
Lima Peru

think of the day coming in —  
same steward (lousy coffee / Nescafé?)

land in the heat of Lima / grey thin clouded coast. sun breaks  
through

with 15 hours to kill.

•

write: *don't have any portents about lima /*

hot

*take taxi downtown — miles of incredible poverty / thru  
slums to main plaza — the Peruvian tourist hustle — square  
looks ok — incredible colonial structures — changing of the  
guards / police*

walk toward the church /  
over the boiling / mudshit Rio Rimac

to the meaning of one's big moment  
between life and death —

*mugged*

on a corner in Lima Peru.

•

*(robber grabs purse. flash of red. no face / body — Joy screaming my name — clutches purse to chest, then flipped / back to the ground dragged in / along street. guy won't let go. no thinking. the pure action of all bodies adrenalized response. seconds? I yell you cocksucker! raise travel book "Peru" above my head & bring it down full force to guy's head. Joy released. I fall full force, dead weight to ground. wrists hit first. elbow, legs — physical terror. violence. desperations. get up yell to crowd — get away you fuckers! Joy ok — bruised. my wrists hurt elbow bleeding long scratch on leg. duck into 1st safe looking restaurant. drink 2 beers. in shock — get safe taxi out. remember sympathetic waiter in Spanish sd:*

— in life there is good, there is bad.

•

as simple demonstration of anyone's care,

pilot asks, *how are you tonight, sir?*

*I'm bleeding*

*are you emotionally ok? soon — I'll have you 35,000 feet  
and home*

•

impossible /

presumption of conclusions — a habit of the world now broken

fucked up by mugging / choked by what we come to know

that the eye, is also the mind, & contains it as large as it was

•

maps and places, muds and shapes & colours  
of a peopled earth — poignancy's, complexities of mind  
and place —

*Bolivia / Peru*



# **Sixty**

*for Ken Belford  
and the memory of  
Robert Creeley*



*sixty:*

no sense  
of beginning — beginning sense of ends

thinking —

*the in between*

*memory gardens,*

— a whole unfinished

•

45 years ago in spring  
green, fecund on my way.  
— the moment said, *this is /*  
*the moment's moment:*

— as first site  
of the milky breast in moonlight — river, trees — at the dead end  
making out

*to pleasure / to suspension / to being*

•

my mother on the porch, smoking — held a Melmac cup,  
was beauty to me

— *the self emerging is known and given*

•

I had no words  
no answer

I was held *in* by meanies & punished all the more. I stopped  
speaking and refused Latin blackboard drills

•

in  
defeat I thought I saw a way

— to embrace

*the now* surpass  
explanation / rules

•

I stare out, the ticking clock. blinds part  
drawn, rippled breeze in trees — script / scriven  
contents of a given you cannot describe —

•

I'm drawn by a blank sensation

•

*you have a very full life* —

•

as any other measure as that caught in what it  
thought — to say what?

*life un*  
*folding folds the equation*  
*it attempts*

*the older I get*

•

*he's not afraid of anything*

•

death —  
*say it.* these days. life  
*is* its condition elaborated in the face / *nothingness in space*

•

no place *but context* (sinewed time & body its memory —  
the house on 15th I lived in gone. I drive on

•

my suspended head scary / revolves. I'm a  
low number on a scale. the here & now of non resolve a  
constant I now see? neutral blurs & shapes

•

& what thought  
as fragment is pieces: *to enter world / to leave the earth*

I sense now the surfaces — a commingling wish to be no one  
yet not separate from what seen

*otherwise:*

the corporate picture — we are small as a bug in / millennial  
ruins —  
the last dash —  
for . . . energy transformed

•

I fear what dark reveals, yet this  
revelry  
of light. *morning.* some regret. *failure no longer  
matters* as time crunches to its future diminished

•

the transition *is* happiness — illusions gone / to *faith*

— a zeroed consciousness less faked — wisps . . .

out of breath father pissing in a parking lot: — an  
old man

*I do what I want.*

•

in Grade 1 over the Plasticene forest I saw the trees —  
rustled leaves quiet in my anxious break when space of mind  
sees space

•

time not memory but dream. *places.* dark  
purples streaked low and east 50  
years ago, last night or night before —

•

disappearance is weightless (all that was or is to a narrowed  
horizon — the surprise of self enacted to know no more  
need to its surprise

•

yet thought up the canyon — *love increased by threat  
of its loss — itself a season, its intensity increased by sense  
of diminished time.* mottled colour & leaves. the simplest /  
most intense —

sensed myself  
— a laconic embodiment neutral  
in the neutral air. I sensed — words stripped, flesh of season /  
*reasons gone.* what words?

•

*at sixty*

... a presence

that resembles nothing but itself —

by the condition of its source

to bear its thought





***Prince George Core***

*for Sharon Thesen*



city, mind — body.

the mind disintegrates. the body now a shell

“everything must go”. so the shell is left — its last punch  
through the wall — broken

windows

empty *for lease /*

*for sale*

*the city*

*core /*

Saturday Jan. 12: up 3rd, sense this: *not followed* but what’s  
ahead / to the thrift store, my fear: I cannot easily pass through

*/ crack heads /*

desperate predation & no sense of *what*  
they could ever care

: the city as body — began, arked, disintegrated. garbage strewn,  
lumps of clothes / single shoes / bags of needles / thrift store  
moved or bankrupt though the goods they sold were free

to my right, natives clumped, stoned and grinning, once  
dispossessed, to be dispossessed again / not mingling, but  
*clumped* by the abandoned Food Teller doorway / wait for crack,  
booze and heroin

what it is, *is*. cruel that body and mind sense their own demise.  
the city is organ. it sees itself. disintegrated. its body and mind  
its own demise

turning left, sense *nothings left*. “closed / staff shortage”

give shake of head,

fucked / without a voice.

•

the heart did not break / became homeless: we stood boneless in a heap / stunned then drunk, *not seen as the map*, the city, the larger world — emptied of resource. no recourse to the map that once led / to the wilderness back to the path it once was. in this heap, stolen bikes through snow — the grinning homeless lad either in legitimacy says *hello sir* — the friendly light of human greeting or as sardonic gesture: *fuck you*.

garbage, demise — butts, puke, sand / gravel, the snowy streets. slush to mud by the Ramada / *everywhere* — the opera as backdrop, the screeching of a high human voice to keep these humans away — bums on George. what wealth / squeezed, burned, hoarded as the world went / everywhere else but here. so as I, city at last with out illusion or dream or grandeur — or friendly face / sincerity — is it the care of David Petrescu I miss who saw the pleasures and treasures of the dump, the beer as source for possibility, the Cottonwood flood, a sign to move. there is no choice when of a place it is the place you'll be

metaphors of recognition / value of what is seen, exposed. the body, raw, open, sexy in its arc, ugly in demise, aging to know body and soul are *one*. the mind disintegrates / is the heap of clothes, dumped as the he / she walked out into snow & cold, no light ahead on the dark road beyond

here. decay, cliché — in the shit of the city / of city fathers, I look for . . . *vision care. mind care. heart care. body care* — all that's lost but our cheery thought / foolish reminiscence to ask / names of all gone in the toxicity of age itself not knowing how to turn. John Harris would ask for a vision, the alternate. I can't find the grammar machine — make no proposal /

give thanks /

grumble in the arc and demise. sense it always here, *that* beginning illusion. I so lost in whatever task sought — sense of work, to do good & in the face of a force sent out to beat it, but that *that* gave resolve and strength — my endurance in the

face of such shallow delights they sought by removing what little  
delight we had. many will not see:

the imported force, their source unknown, the conspiracy, piracy  
of those in charge

a world is made — of mud / become bone, sinewed road / a  
habitat of beauty, raw rivers to meet. the confluent / myth /  
abundance — dance of possibility — imagined before global  
demand became a line / or time, split & frayed by industrial  
demand no locals could fight or resist, driven to slick and simple  
rhetoric — that abundance as goal became its own & pure  
objective goal. *the trees.* paradise ahead like history

swaths / rectangles / some messy cuts in the contours I saw in 69.  
sometimes sense, *much still left.* the mind disintegrates, the body  
arches & all the more such strength to require faith, some sense  
of decency in whatever mistake was made. I build a fire, I see it  
— call it — / the aging body drawn by last wish, not to think:  
*what's deserved / not deserved.* the fire burns. regret, all not  
done / what done gone

*the old city / core*

disintegrates — simultaneously evolves / to malls / outsourced  
plenitude — the perpetual motion of returned goods — an  
isolation once sensed defines us being here without

when I saw the dark — became pulp myself / in the glimmer of  
the dark winter snow

Joy says *let it go* — as if some other force must be known / defeat  
the past & open an opening brief to future light: *you decide*

in the body's arc / demise —

the mind as habitat. city gone, overtaken — divided: those who  
enter the bank / those who wait — beg spare change. slush &  
snow, the diesel air — sense of a shitkick to the soul. some *thing*  
battered in front of us. the body disintegrates. the mind some  
final habitat

*the city hates itself*

*peeled back* / no false surface, in the surfeit — wealth can falsely bring

3rd & George. no children on these streets, is true, yet so large this recognition / simple eyes open to what is seen: *no children on these streets*

old days? maybe nothing's changed — no sense of going on / to question the ebb and flow of social energies that the biggest thing cannot be seen: the drivers in the growing economies / talking heads / coughed slogans / toxic cliché and denial. what was I going to say given this window of opportunity in the 24/7/365 — this thinking a complex mask, or heard as specious airy thought? — no one expelled from paradise *is irony*

in the 30 below. I'm on the streets again— list the close-outs, pawn shops belly-up, though cheer the mainstays — the tenacious: Morrisons, Prudentes, Moffats, McGinnis — the German bakers / the shops on 4th — outsourced to College Heights, Hwy 16, box store clerks mumbling *have a nice day*

what is left. brooding, landscapes / ravaged. trees – in many places gone. logging. bugs. stock piles — sense of world fast tracked for the last grab / *this is eco nomics*

sun, bright to my left, south rays intensified. 35 below. chill factor. the tenacious north

*what we become*

/ this sense of home / the desire to leave — time and life, a river (eddies, swirls / floods / the digital earth

## Notes

### Bolivia / Peru

*Bolivia / Peru* is a chronological assemblage of journal notes, thoughts, splices, poems, questions & reflections inspired by a 5-week trip to South America.

I think we're moving into a new & necessary time for poetry: the poem has to resemble the nature of the various & fractured realities it addresses without presumption, and be wary even of the emotions & thoughts & forms & devices that promote it.

In *Bolivia / Peru* I've had to struggle with sentimentalities, notions & slants from a North American perspective that do not work or address the larger task of what I think the poem must reveal. In South America I was in a complex without knowing the histopoliticosocio, and therefore entered naked / naive to its experience — perhaps the only way to risk any world's range of pleasures / dangers, and in this weight to thankfully and humbly survive it — to know a little more.

In the Bolivian and Peruvian countryside houses and huts are built with bricks of mud that slowly dissolve in the weather. In this way I want the poem to stand, be habitable, and yet show dissolving forces. My attempt to impose an architecture, however crude, is part of the struggle and pleasure of the writing.

The journal notes were written in Bolivia & Peru from Feb 7 to Mar 11, 2003. Journal entries that appear in the text — the sections in italics — are transcribed as originally jotted.

Text assemblage: April–July 2003 in Prince George / Tumbler Ridge, B.C.

## Prince George Core

The descriptions / images in this poem, for the most part, are a result of walks from the Millar Addition to and through the Prince George downtown city core — its centre at 3rd and George.

The Food Teller is an abandoned restaurant on the corner of 5th and George, across from the Ramada Hotel. It is a street of bars, a decaying cabaret, drop-in centres, a thrift store, a second-hand book store, a cold beer and wine store, etc. Opera blasts daily from the Ramada, presumably as an aural abrasive to drive away lingerers, dope dealers, hookers, transients, etc.

David Petrescu was a friend who died too young, but taught me the pleasures of the downtown in earlier days (buns and meatballs from the German bakery, beers at the old Astoria and the Canada hotels) — and developed my eye for eccentric thrift store junk.

Cottonwood Island at the confluence of the Nechako and Fraser rivers has been flooded many times over the years, and eventually forced the inhabitants of the Island Cache to move to higher ground in the 70's. Houses and shacks were abandoned and later bulldozed. The 2008 ice jam / flood, the worst in 50 years, backed up the Nechako 26 km and into the suburbs.

The Moffat, Morrison, Prudente, and McGinnis families, among several others, are longtime independent store owners in the downtown core. They stay and survive despite the heavy competition from the box stores and malls that have killed much of their business.

John Harris is a friend and writer with an intellect of large proportions who inspires much of what I have come to see and believe about place, politics, and literature.

Joy, my wife — practical, impatient & laconic who gives clear-headed advice in disturbing contexts. When I didn't have a title she said: *you're writing about the core.*



*the city hates itself* — is a line from my friend and colleague Anna Djuric.

*Prince George is peeled back* — a line of observation from the poet Lissa Wolsak.

*life is like a river* is a line from Robert Creeley's poem "A Full Cup" in his last book, *On Earth*.

### **Acknowledgment of publications where sections of *In the Millennium* first appeared**

#### JOURNAL PUBLICATIONS

*The Capilano Review*

*West Coast Line*

*Textual Studies in Canada*

#### ONLINE JOURNALS

*It's Still Winter: A Journal of Contemporary Canadian Poetry and Poetics*. <http://quarles.unbc.ca/winter>.

*Philly Talks* #18: C.S. Giscombe and Barry McKinnon.

Responses by Wade Compton, George Elliot Clarke, & Giovanni Singleton, Feb 2001. <http://phillytalks.org/library>.

#### ANTHOLOGIES

Baird, Jean, David McFadden and George Stanley. Eds. *71(+) for GB: An Anthology for George Bowering on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 2005.

Atwood, Margaret. *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse*. Toronto: Oxford, 1978.

Hui, Zhu. *Selected Canadian Lyrics*. Sichuan, China: Sichuan University Press, 1995.

#### CHAPBOOKS

*Two from In the Millennium* [*Prince George (Part 1)* and *Sixty*]. Toronto: Bookthug, 2006.

*Boliva / Peru*. Prince George: Gorse Press, 2004. Winner of the bp Nichol Chapbook Award for the best poetry chapbook published in English, 2004.

*Surety Disappears*. Prince George: Gorse Press. Runner-up for the bp Nichol Chapbook Award in 2008.

*Head Out: A Letter. Essay. Poem. to Cecil Giscombe*. Prince George: Gorse Press, 2007.

The following sections were printed at various times by Gorse Press in limited editions for private distribution: *In the Millennium*, *A Walk*, *Sex at 52*, *An Unfinished Theology*, *It Can't Be Said*, *Joy (An Epithalamium)*, *Bastard File*, *Transliteration*, and *Prince George Core*.

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