

STATEMENTS OF PURPOSE
FOR THE



COLLOQUIUM

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Howard White

These Here Poets

Used to be in the woods all you had to
watch for was junkies nodding off
getting caught with their ass in the bight
now it's these Christly poets
scratching away behind every tree
trying to get you to repeat everything
gotta do your job and their job too
babysit the useless bastards
until the first plane goes out
Canada Council gives 'em ten thousand bucks
to write about what it's like
to be a workingman
tiny little book comes out
cost you half a day's pay to buy it
and here's all your own words
all phonied up so you sound like
some fucking Okie or something
everything's all ass-backwards
Jesus it makes me mad
if that guy ever shows up around here again
he'll have a real accident to write about

This is a true poem, a real reaction to my writing by one of the people I wrote about. I have encountered the same kind of thing many times in my experience as a work writer. I think of it as a typical reaction not just to the kind of poetry I have written about logging and heavy construction, but to much of what is called work poetry. I think it represents fair comment, indeed a predictable comment, and it is one of the things that makes me just a wee bit uncomfortable about calling myself a "work poet." There is an implication in that term that one has assumed the identity of a worker as well as a writer and has become to some degree a spokesperson for a generality of workers. There is more than an implication we are doing something to get poetry out of the university English Department ghetto and restore it to wider use.

In the case of my own poetry I don't know how far any of this is true. I wrote a book

about various types of work I have either done or been close to over the years, but I didn't write as I would have if I were only a construction worker or a fisherman. To claim I did would be to overlook the fact I am a highly specialized professional, a professional artist, university educated, whose sensibility has been formed by a lifetime of devotion to writing. The point is not that I am a less than authentic equipment operator. I started learning that work in my father's camp when I was eight years old and am now part owner of a hauling and excavating outfit. But I was never in the position where I looked down the long road of my life and saw an unending line of days driving cats defining my whole existence. For me there was always something else, something more important, namely, writing. In this I always felt myself an essentially different animal from the majority of people I shared jobs with. And so did they. To some degree they always looked askance at me with my books, wondering why I was really there among them.

The poems I wrote about catskinning are basically written by me, this outcast on the job, for my own reasons, with my eye toward an audience made up not of the heavies in the bunkhouse, but of my colleagues out in the writing community.

It would be interesting to ask most work poets who they have in mind when they write: the lunch room bunch, or the editors and reviewers of *event*, *Going For Coffee*, *Minnesota Review*. I don't know what most would say. It would be interesting. If you asked me I would say they have to be thinking of the other writers because like my own poems, their poems almost exclusively use the syntax of modern poetry, a special codified syntax which is known only to students of contemporary literature, and is unlike ordinary speech and unlike traditional poetry and has a perplexing effect on most working people. And along with this specialized syntax goes a specialized imaginative environment that is not the environment of the workplace but of what Northrup Frye calls the educated imagination. It is this quality of mind that mainly divides the writer from the worker. Most commonly it comes from university, but it can be achieved at home too. Frye of course thinks it's great, but others have described it as being "de-educated," and I found out what that meant when I went back to work after five years of college. It was like being eight years old again and having to learn everything my father ever taught me about the concrete reality of work all over. It was worse than that, because I now had this abstract habit of mind I had to fight. Charles Olson said he spent a big patch of his life trying to recover from being de-educated although I suspect he only dug his hole deeper. It's not easy to get out once you're in.

The result is, the work writing movement, which should have a broad base, finds itself on the margin of a margin: it addresses itself to a literary mind, but only the tiny fraction of that mind which overlaps the world of work. As one of the leading publishers of work poetry, I have the sad duty to report that this condition is reflected in sales. *Going For Coffee*, the work poetry anthology, sold out its 3,000 printing in 5 years, which I consider respectable. But a similar anthology of Canadian Women's writing sold an equal number in a year and a half, and a book of feminist poetry went through six printings in the same period. For most of the work poetry titles by single authors there is practically no market at all except what the authors can scare up among their friends and relatives. Even Tom Wayman's seminal collection of critical essays on the work poetry movement, *Inside Job*, has met with stolid resistance in the marketplace, although it is hard to think of a Canadian literary journal which failed to

acknowledge it. This lack of readership is not unique to work writing and there is clearly interest beyond the literary ghetto in the subject matter, if not the form, but no one can claim the movement has achieved the broad popular acceptance which has frequently been predicted for it.

Many feel it is only a matter of time before this occurs.

I don't think it will ever happen the way we're headed now. It could; there is a bigger job for work writing out there waiting; but as long as our words are aimed at a minority of a minority we're not going to be called.

I'm not saying we have to do it, or that I know how to do it, I'm just throwing the idea out in an attempt to clarify where work poetry stands, to make sure we don't kid ourselves, to make sure we don't bog down in self-congratulation, and to try and get some important questions in the air.

I continue to write work poetry as before, taking work experiences and putting them in forms derived from the exquisitely marginal traditions of contemporary verse. I guess I do this because it comes naturally to me, and it does find some readership, be it ever so small. Still, I think of the "These Here Poets" syndrome and wonder what else we could be doing to include more of the people we are writing about. The logger who inspired that poem is by no means unresponsive to language; he is a mighty raconteur and recites rhyming logger ballads by the yard, some apparently composed by himself and some written by Robert Swanson, a protege of Robert Service who self-published a series of chapbooks about logging in the 1940's and sold something like fifty thousand copies himself in camp commissaries and steamboat magazine racks. He told me he designed them to fit in the racks used by Reader's Digest but a couple inches higher so the loggers would see his name sticking up above Pearl S. Buck's.

It's possible something along the same lines could still be done, but I can't go back to writing like Robert Service, and I'm not sure the rhyming ballad would be congenial to the contemporary mind — although I guess it's still pervasive through popular music. If the price of escaping the poetry ghetto is to write within the kind of imaginative straightjacket a popular song writer or a newspaper writer or television script writer wears, the price might be too high. If one did succeed in writing seriously within such confines, what infrastructure exists to deliver your output to the waiting world?

I notice Tom Wayman in his critical work seems to visualize work poetry as existing more within the writing community, as something which should be taught in more freshman courses and perhaps granted a less marginal position within the world of serious literature but still within it. This may be the most realistic expectation for the movement. But the idea that there could be something more still moves me. The idea that there can be a serious logger writer who is as pervasive in the cultural life of that social stratum as Robert Swanson once was. And a serious auto factory writer, teacher writer, etc.

Actually, I have worked on this idea for a long time through my various publishing efforts, and the experience has not been entirely disappointing. A cartoon novel about early logging we published by a retired faller on Vancouver Island sold 5,000, mostly on the island itself, and made the author a regional celebrity without whom no ribbon-cutting ceremony was complete. The type of work was folk art, which obviously has potential for cutting across intellectual and class boundaries. My journal of regional

west coast folk lore (or whatever you call it), *Raincoast Chronicles*, reached a circulation of 10,000 and became a pervasive cultural influence in rural upcoast areas by treating the story of the region as a serious subject for all forms of writing — poetry included. Its main success came from adopting regional vernacular as a basis of

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Exploring these leads is now my main interest in work writing.

Sandy Shreve

In the process of developing my poetics, both through working on my own writing and reading others' works, I have come to believe that form and content intertwined are necessary for good, and beautiful, writing. Whether traditional or experimental in form, when a poem works for me it's not only due to the writer's technical skills. It's also because the content works within the structure and language to carry the whole so it moves me with recognition and/or revelation; stirs me to think further about something I'd been taking for granted, or even ignoring.

I also believe that politics is normally the concern of art and the writer. This isn't to say that every piece of writing must, or necessarily does, contain an overt political message. But I don't think any writer can produce any amount of work with a total absence of political content — intended or otherwise. And as I read various journals and books, I continually find poetry that has a great deal to say, in political terms, about all aspects of our lives — not the least of which is daily work.

A view that I often hear expressed, however, is that a wide range of content, including politics and daily work, has no place in poetry, or art in general; that art exists for its own sake, not for any message it may have to convey. This can, and apparently does, give rise to an emphasis on form at the expense of content in some very significant quarters.

Jane Rule, in *event's* Feminism issue (Vol. 12, #1), describes and criticizes her experiences with the traditional academic outlook on writing. She notes that professors usually regarded a student's concern with content as "a grave error in critical judgment" that revealed a "subjective and uncultured mind." She continues: "The best way to deal with content was to make it disappear. We were taught, 'Form is content,' studied therefore only the aesthetics of a work, image patterns, allusions, plot structures, sentence rhythms, devices for telescoping time."

With this attitude prevalent in our educational system, and too often echoed in the media, it's hardly any wonder that I know so few people who search the bookstores for the latest poetic works or who subscribe to literary journals. The message to 'ordinary' people is that poetry has nothing to do with them or their lives; that it is inaccessible, hard to understand, and intended only for the initiated few. This, in itself, lends an overt politics to writing: elitism, exclusion, a promotion of apathy and the status quo.

Another problem with the accepted approach to poetry — and one that contributes to the intimidation in particular of potential poets, but also of potential readers — is what I'd call the mystification of the writing process. For instance, I hear a lot of conversations about what gets a poem started. A phrase, a title, a line, or an idea that comes to mind, usually uninvited, seems to be the norm. This is discussed, initially, in terms of inspiration. But then the conversation often turns to the 'puzzle' of where poetry comes from, and usually gets bogged down in the mystique of the elusive muse. Meanwhile, the reality is that the person must sit down with that beginning and create a poem — not by magic, but by working at it. It strikes me that the source for poetry is everyday life, experience, and learning, both the exceptional and the ordinary — which belong to everyone.

There's a great deal of talk about how art and literature contribute to the culture, hence the definition, of people and their societies. But who are to be the definers and the defined, if art and literature, including poetry, are not to be political, not to be graced with content that deals with the everyday of millions of people's lives, not to be accessible to or created by the very people it defines? With the new work writing, as well as with feminist and other particularly political writing, people who were previously defined by others are now defining themselves. This writing includes exciting, beautiful, accessible and excellent poetry. Yet it isn't widely read.

What could be called the 'obscurity approach' to poetry leaves it on the sidelines of society, avoided — even feared — by most, and largely ignored when it should, and could, have a marked role in contributing to society and social change. The reputation of poetry as indecipherable abstraction is far from entirely warranted; yet it remains, irritating, like a paper-thin cut on the lip that won't heal.

But of course, those cuts eventually do heal. In this instance, however, for the healing process to occur, we need fundamental changes in all kinds of attitudes at all kinds of levels. On the poetics front, I believe we have to abandon the notion that form is necessarily the sole, or the primary, concern of poetry; the assumption that poetry has, and can have, nothing to do with the ordinary or the political; and the mystification of the writing process. Then perhaps we'll have more people not only reading, but also writing poetry, and the genre will attract the widespread attention it deserves.

Erin Mouré

The formation of eidetic light as a tool against romanticism ...

I.

The work image.

And what sound means. Poetry is sound. The writing is just the marks on the page, notation for the sounds the poem makes. The sound itself conveys meaning that the words cannot. When we rely too much on the surface meanings of the words we are in danger, for the surfaces are already full, of commerce; the meanings and neurological thought processes they evoke are those of our social and economic culture, and convey those values, perpetuating them, using the words as icons.

Not *sound*, but *sense*, you insist? Sound is sense, the truer sense, underlying the commerce. Example: they say that what people remember of air or train crashes is, firstly, the SOUND. The long-term psychological wounding is concretely the neurological scarring made by the sound, tearing electrically inside the skull. How can any of us write again without considering the sound of what we do!

The desire for narrative. The way we think in stories. The story of the man with brain damage, neurological cortex damage, who would mistake his wife's head for his hat, and who, in order to get dressed and put his shirt on instead of the dresser, sung himself little songs about the objects. Stories, to get through the damage. Sonority. It was sound and rhythm that gave the objects and his actions *meaning*.

To combine these things: the sounds, and this desire for narrative (and what we call narrative order is not necessarily "chronological" ... the chronological being a re-enactment of *principles of thought*, not *occurrence*, that keeps us trapped in our social and economic cultural order: male-defined, hierarchic, heterosexist, white: the status quo).

II.

So, work images. Images of the motions we make, working, not ICONIC but TRANSGRESSORS, to enable us to TRANSGRESS THE STATUS QUO that fails so many of us.

We suffer from the ICONIC. Its images force us to remain at a point of *honour*: where we passively honour what is, even if it is foul or terrible. Our honour makes the foul seem natural. It takes and uses our energy on neuron paths that are already well-established. "Accessible". We can't claim that non-work images are escapes. After all, the work we do is not the reality of our lives but *one part of us*, that we live as integrated/intermingled with our desires. What of our erotic selves, our mortal selves,

our search for spirit in the muscle light of ourselves and others! *To use these images, too — yes, — affectionately, concurrently!*

Images of work, of love, of femaleness, of female lostness in the world that is not defined by us as women. All this takes time. All this takes a willingness to take risks with *language and meaning*, the risk that if we break through them, they will disappear. It is not *meaning* that disappears but *the surface commerce* we are used to calling “meaning”. Accessibility can be a lie, can be reductive — the lowest common denominator of the possible. It is the drug of the comfortable, because we agree with it. It promotes, unconsciously, what-already-is. The rhetoric of the already-powerful. And we know who those are. The whiteness of the woman who is writing these words. Her womanliness. The corporate communicator.

I take risks, to honour the people I work with. Our struggle. Collective, with the paper. With the surface of the page. Because, when I put my ear to it, I hear guns and money. The work of human hands is a purity that *without our talking*, bears no traces of its own. And if we don't take risks with its sound, with the possible, with a wide range of expression, our images of work bear the traces of the powerful: *Guns and money. Women's silence. Whiteness. Heterosexism*. These are the traces our images bear, bear because we speak a language and describe it to each other. And it's not just the way we speak and what we can mean: *the way we see*, even, is influenced by these traces, because the way our bodies interpret the Visible passes neurologically through the language centre of the brain. What is outside the structure of our language can and does escape us. The accessible forgets this. And is, thus, dangerous. Leaves us with the surface commerce. The meanings that have already been manipulated by a social and economic structure. On the surface of the page, put your ear to it: guns and money; the thoughtless oppression of women; of labour in the third world by us who wear its clothes: “the normal”.

To change the traces words carry is to alter the possibilities of human seeing, and this change is enacted, I believe, even for those who do not read. By all means, attract people to poetry! But I think it's false to make poetry “accessible” to try and attract those who do not read it. To make words “accessible” is to buy into and reinforce a neurological commonality: a part of the social order. In my own teaching I've seen that many people do not learn by reading (let alone read poetry); they learn by dialogue with others. Sound, and sight. But the writing, wherever it is, affects the way the language as a whole can be used. The words are so powerful that to open up linguistic possibility within the poem frees someone else, even if they do not read it. And conversely, to reinforce linguistic commonality and structure imprisons others in an Order that does not love them, even if they do not read.

The “accessible” is merely a way of reading. We are taught one way because it benefits the state if we can read what? — the newspaper. So we can *follow*. The “accessible”, by not questioning reading and language (and here the accessible includes those people who refuse the focus on language and banish it from their image-making ...) ends up just romanticizing either the pleasure or the painfulness of what we do. And romanticism is the “allowable escape” — it highlights “the individual”, and uses our energy in a way that is static, that changes or reveals nothing, and is thus not threatening to the currents that occupy current, popular, “accessible” thought and action: capitalist, over-governed, homophobic, racist, misogynist.

Romanticism imagines itself powerful, or powerfully harmed, the target of powerful forces out of its control. It isolates itself. It fails to recognize who it, too, is oppressing. Who its memories oppress. Where its memories are.

The way we see our work is influenced by the traces of the dominant socio-economic order. Even the portrayal of tools in VIWU's logo is influenced by these traces. We must consider the traces, for without breaking through them, we risk replicating the status quo. We co-opt struggles falsely, such as the Black and feminist struggles, that don't necessarily belong to us, that have refused our traces and meanings already.

To push at the edges of the traces, with the tracings on the paper that we are making. To risk, instead, speech, not one speech but many altering speeches. To speak of these things. The sound makes. I must do this because the world where I live does not affirm, even implicitly, the alternation of a self that is lesbian, feminist, womanly. Oh, to break out of a speaking that chokes me, as a woman, that does not speak except negatively, of where I live, of the love I have! That is why I work, with these images: with sound and the narrative impulse, transgressing words.

Susan Eisenberg

Although a focus on work themes has been more consistent in my playwrighting than in my poetry, the work poems make for easier discussion of the effort to unify form and content. *It's a Good Thing I'm Not Macho* is a cycle of poems drawn from my experiences as one of the first women in union construction in Boston in the late 1970's. I attempted to reflect the nature of that worklife experience in not only the content but in the craft choices of the poems.

The technical language of electricians recurring in the poems points up, by its varied usage, the struggle for mastery of a craft. In "First Day on a New Jobsite," technical terms develop from being, "on the First Day/that Very First one," a barrier, manipulated to exclude women:

leaves
without
explaining
hanger
rod
strut

to being, on "another/first day," a signpost of familiarity and membership, when:
we find, almost easily, the language
that is common:

—Get me some 4-inch squares
with three-quarter k-o's—
—Need any couplings or connectors?
—No, but grab some clips and c-clamps
and some half-inch quarter-twenties.
Passwords.

A later poem, "Past the Finish Line," which celebrates the relationships among the first women to become journeylevel electricians, raises the technical vocabulary to its symbolic level. This was a choice to use the image-system of the poem to demonstrate the mastery of the trade. The technical language that once formed a boundary line against women has become their tool for expression on not only a literal but a metaphoric level. The victory of competence is one over both the tools and the language of the trade:

We survived isolation by the law of mutual induction:
magnetic fields of bodies
separated physically
can still overlap and empower.

Work that is physically active often has a distinct rhythm and musicality, giving particular importance in work poems to choices of language, punctuation and line breaks. In "Wiretalk," I wanted the reader to feel the harmony of rhythm required when two mechanics who cannot see each other pull wire through a pipe together:

two mechanics
at either end of a pipe
feed and pull in meter,

Construction, partly, I think, because the work is transient, is flavored with drama, bold characters, quick repartees, sudden changes, and a wry humor against adversity. These qualities pushed their ways into the poems as well. I found that a poem about the constant presence of death on a construction site developed a whimsical nature against all my attempts at somber versions.

The order of the poems and their placement into three sections — "as a woman," "as a mechanic," and "as a woman mechanic" — reflects the build of vision as one grows into a trade over years. I have found it difficult, even in reading selections from the cycle, to stray from the order or to not read at least one poem from each section without feeling that I have violated the integrity of the whole. I have a sense that the poems require the complement of each other to keep the story honest.

Roger Taus

Notes Toward a Left Poetics

Once, during the very brief period I attended his poetry workshop, the poet Clayton Eshleman called me up late at night. He was in deep in anguish. How, he demanded, can you marry your poetry to politics? Surely, he answered himself, your proletarian politics (that old bolshevik chain-gang) make a mockery of *language* (for him the very soul of poetry).

Today, higglety-pigglety, there is in poetry a whole school of fish called the "Languagers," centered in Berkeley and around the symmetrical writing of Barrett Watten. This ascension of reaction in poetry should come as no surprise in this our epoch of a ferocious yet badly decaying ruling class, for it reflects something of a fear of the power and a fascination with the decay. And it is at stark variance with our purposes here, with the rising star of work writing.

My answer to Eshleman then as now is that the marriage existed long before us and will so when we are dust in the Void. The fun is largely in the stance, the taking of sides.

Now, it is likely simplistic and wrong-headed to say "Languagers," for example, don't give a damn about South Africa. They just don't write about these things, any more than they write about the "workaday" world. And that is just the point. What is the "workaday" world? South Africa is the "workaday" — in *extremis*. Aren't all our workadays now layered and skewed?

It is likewise fitting a movement of work writing has sprung up. Notice the high praise *Village Voice* reporter Nat Hentoff recently gave *Mill Hunk Herald*, a worker-run journal published in Pittsburgh, in the same *Voice* issue that presented an arch commentary on that dreadful PEN conference in New York.

The "symmetry" of Watten and others is a neo-classical export in time from the Augustans, via the disillusion of Mallarme, Laforgue, Eliot, Pound, Stevens, and Charles Olson. I can no longer read most of this stuff with more than a tradesman's interest anymore, for after reading in the early 60's the "workaday" visions of Whitman, Patchen, William Carlos Williams, and Gary Snyder, I was never the same. Parlor poetry lost its meaning for me.

That does not mean no interior life, and verse, for living is inviolate, verse its sustenance. One writes, for no reason, of a broken love affair ten years past. One is not always on the job.

The great Cesar Vallejo might have been addressing us with these words: "The writer behind closed doors knows nothing about life. Politics, love, economic prob-

lems, the unmediated haphazard struggle of man with men, the minute and immediate drama of the conflicting forces and tendencies of objective social reality — none of this even reaches the writer behind closed doors." (*Autopsy on Surrealism*, Curbstone Press).

I think *experience* — not language — is the soul of poetry. Language is merely its suit of lights. Experience and perception are its soul and muscle. These, not language (a class-based and therefore highly specialized, bourgeois type of training), are the source of the imagination.

Leona Gom

I suppose that what I would most like my writing to do is not just to reach "literary" people but to reach as broad an audience beyond that as possible. There seems to be an increasing split between "academic" literature and "populist" literature, the former becoming more and more opaque and inaccessible to the average reader and the latter no longer bothering about any literary merit at all, and this is a problem all of us who are writers must address.

Since in my jobs as writer/teacher/editor it's the more academic literature I usually deal with, I'm increasingly aware of the problems arising from such a literature, i.e., the kind of literature that addresses itself only to a small and elite audience. Contemporary poetry especially faces this problem. My students, even creative writing students, have a considerable resistance to reading such poetry (although they often want to write it) and enrollment in our poetry classes at the college where I teach are so low the courses are being cancelled. While it's easy to blame this on the intellectual laziness of the TV generation, we also have to look at the poetry itself and ask why its audience is dwindling and what we can do to stop it without resorting to writing banalities.

One thing we certainly can do is to reaffirm the importance of *subject* in our writing. Primarily as editor and poetry editor for *event* magazine for 10 years, I have read a huge volume of submissions, and far too often the work is dull and uninteresting because it loses sight of a definite subject, because it emphasizes technique and style to the detriment, even sometimes to the exclusion, of subject. The writers are great technicians, but somehow the subject gets lost — it's like tying beautiful bows on an empty package. (I'm reminded of a critic of Bliss Carman, who said, "Doors and windows builded Bliss/ But where's the bloody edifice?") I still agree substantially with Yvor Winters' belief that poetry should have "paraphrasable content," even though the poem itself should always be superior to and richer than that paraphrase.

It's because the new work writing *does* emphasize the importance and primacy of subject that I find it so exciting, and I find it one of the best ways of making poetry again relevant to people who have turned away from it for being too solipsistic, too academic, too (here comes That Dirty Word) boring.

As for my own writing, in most of my poetry I've addressed the subject of farming, the pioneer rural experience. My more recent work seems to be turning more to issues of feminism and socialism. I also seem to have turned, at least for the present, to writing novels, and it's a form I definitely want to pursue, perhaps because in novels there is less question about the necessity of having people, plots, subjects. Writing *Housebroken* was simply just a lot of fun, too, and right now I'm working on my second novel.

Robert M. Carson

While it is true that an author, or any artist, has his/her most complete statement and vision in his/her work of art, it is, nevertheless, instructive (to the artists themselves) to occasionally piece together the forces, esthetics, images that drive them in their life and creation. "The unexamined life"

As someone who adds to the disposition of the Society I live in (through my work on the waterfront) and as a writer of poems, plays and stories, I have cultivated a great distaste for that all-pervasive image of the artist inhabiting an ivory highrise, both isolated and insulated from any sordid grubbing for a livelihood or the mundane facts of life. These are truly the "unexamined" ones, the ones who depend on psychologists to unwind the world for them, the ones who exist in the rarified, protectionist world built for them by capital, agents, fans — a collective "Love ya, baby," is called for here.

This is why my first collection *The Waterfront Writers* (Harper and Row, 1979) is introduced with the line "This collection presents an art that follows the lines of life: the tumult of images, depressions, explosions, reflections, the tender, the brutal." I am concerned with process as well as product.

Later in the introduction: "As workers, we stand at the juncture between a colorful past and a mechanized, routinized future. Old workways, carriers of personal power and identity, depart like soft footfalls in a cemetery. Is it inevitable that we accept the computer readout of our probable future with total submission to the oracles of technology?"

These are some of the fundamental suppositions and questions that scratch at my soul. I still believe, as I did when founding the Waterfront Writers, that work need not stifle art. Instead it can inspire and enrich the artist's vision of the world at large. It forces the artist's participation in life and social processes. Esthetics merge with experience and give validity and value to art and work. This breaks the barrier between life and art. Both are made accessible and relevant. They become a part of our daily experience.

From the material of our lives, the review of facts, stories, histories and myths will come the evolution of a new literature, more relevant to the daily lives of people as they are. From this strong foundation we can move confidently into a future illuminated by a sure sense of our past and potential — directed but not compelled.

I have been with the Waterfront Writers, the Bay Area Labour Theater and other work/art groups. I have read with the Vancouver Industrial Writers' Union and been in

contact with groups like these virtually all over North America and Europe. They seem to be incessant, they do not disappear. They are part of a process spurred by an accurate portrayal of work. All, in their own way, are a part of that collective swapping of stories and histories at work, that engagement of work and art that is part of a consciousness which Bertolt Brecht once called for: "a rat's-eye view of history."

Phil Hall

Inner Handles

I have this dream of swallowing a dagger, so the blade comes out my stomach, but the handle remains inside — reverse of how most people die from knives. Then I fall actively, stabbing my shadow and the earth. What do they care? In other versions it is a nebulous enemy I fall on, taking an evil out with me.

I intend you to accept my violent dream the way you accept cartoon-transformations. For I have come to see this as a poetic dream of process and intent. Just as I have come to recognize cacti and porcupines as mentors.

Each of my poems is a fortress built for a party. How entrancing the melodics of opposition can be! How beautiful the poems that leave all their handles inside us!

This is why I keep harping about the usefulness of poems, why I write tighter than I come across in person — the lathe inside grinding out hopefully beautiful tools.

But having a grip on the handle inside me allows me to love the details of the world, each gimcrack. (It is a lack of handles in dreams that sends most poets off into flights of biological vanity and cleverness. The eyes in the backs of their heads must ache from inventing.)

And I am against inventing. I say in a recent poem: "Invented lives / are insults to our life stories." Instead, I believe in a poetry of deeds: "I did this, I did this, she said such and such, then we ... I thought — then lo and behold, look how moving that was when you stand back, as we stand back together now, reader." I believe also in D.H. Lawrence's *Poetry of the Present*, and in Confessional Poetry, because our enemies lay their eggs in what we cannot say to each other, or in what we take too long to say.

Looking back at my dream, I am embarrassed by its possibly sexual imagery. I am a haunted but stalwart lover of women, so many of my poems amount to a sifting out of tumors from my conditioned sexuality.

A scab-picker from way back, I have always found the power-nodes of my poems under crusts and camouflage, found my best poems in the most despicable places. (cf. — "Life has pitched its mansion / In the place of excrement." Yeats)

And out from the body, where the lines are drawn, and sung: there I am, writing about the work I do, gathering scraps of paper from the streets (Pedestrian Archives), making art-things in the amateur/great tradition of Kenneth Patchen, Grandma Moses, and Henry Miller, and singing dog-awful country songs — ow, oo ...

Much of me is pure corn-ball!

Even my dream is a bit gimmicky, don't you think?

Maybe, once, not so long ago our dreams were more intricate than our waking actions, our thoughts more elusive than our movements in the world — but that is no longer true. Now they are equal.

I wake up most mornings just before the alarm goes off. Whatever I get up to go do: those actions of mine interwoven with yours into a perpetual transformation, the absurdities of media (Police Search Woods For Beauty; Border Pig Reinstated By Green Party); cacaphony, crunch, the splat / whirl of shit as it hits air conditioners everywhere

...
... this is where my poems and the poems I like best come from — with handles so worn by use and love it's as if all those who have used them were holding hands.

Toronto July/86

Processed World

From its inception in the spring of 1981, *Processed World* has sought to end the silence surrounding the underside of the Information Age. The magazine was founded in the Financial District of San Francisco to serve as a forum for the the dissidents and malcontents of the modern office. Thousands of people working in offices are alternately un- or under-paid writers, artists, musicians, dancers, photographers, etc. *Processed World* was conceived in part as a creative outlet for people whose work systematically stifled their creativity — i.e. most people.

Since we don't get paid for our work on *Processed World*, what ties us to the project is simply the pleasure and satisfaction of writing and publishing what we want to say. The hundreds of people that have contributed their thoughts, articles, stories, graphics, poetry, and letters over five and a half years have made the magazine what it is.

Our collective political heritage is varied. We share a non-doctrinaire hybrid of traditions and theories — against capital and wage-labor; against nationalism and governments; for the free association of human beings in a direct democracy to collectively determine and satisfy needs and desires. Or something like that! More importantly we bring our critical faculties to bear on the shared experiences in the world of work. From this vantage point, we have diagnosed the ills of the modern processed world, and have repeatedly called for radical solutions to our social problems. This, in turn, brings us back to our role as workers whose collective activity must be the basis for creating alternatives.

As office workers, we have understood that much of the work we do is useless to us, and of no social value in itself. By extension, most *work*, as it's presently chosen, organized, and executed contributes little to human well-being. It involves handling the largely meaningless data of business, government and military, or manufacturing military hardware and bureaucracy, or manufacturing shoddy, badly engineered, often useless commodities. Most people have no role in determining *what work is worth doing* on a society-wide basis, nor how it should be organized.

Unions have come under critical scrutiny in many articles in *Processed World* for undercutting each other, for dividing workers from each other, for claiming victories in clear defeats, and for being unable to do what they minimally claim they can (e.g. defend wages and working conditions). Insofar as unions harbor entrenched hierarchies, are bound by a self-defeating legal framework, and are stuck in obsolete rhetoric, strategies, and social visions, they present obstacles to workers' power. To the

extent that unions have any success, it is thanks to the vitality and strength of the workers that comprise them.

Due to the great response, and not just from clerical office workers, the magazine has developed a broad focus that includes many aspects of the modern "processed world." Serious analyses and discussion, along with the characteristic PW graphic style, have looked at technology (recently, artificial intelligence, data encryption, animal experimentation), feminism, sex roles, the sex industry, food, childcare and parenting, public transit, education, sports, drugs, architecture and more. Reviews, fiction, and poetry complement the "Tales of Toil" that appear in almost every issue — we've had reports, often hilarious, from inside such corporate behemoths as Bank of America, Hewlett-Packard, Del Monte, Tandem Computers, Blue Shield, and many more.

Aside from the sheer fun of it, the magazine's humor provides a more accessible, less direct way to express the same kinds of attitudes and ideas put forth in the more "serious" articles. Humor has always been used to give vent to feelings and fantasies which are socially unacceptable or offensive, since jokes are less compromising than direct statements. The jokes themselves may be offensive, but ambiguous ("does she really mean it, or is she just kidding?"). People who won't or can't resort to open confrontation find an outlet in humor. Besides, many people don't derive their critical perceptions of the world and themselves via rational, cognitive processes. The *directed* ambiguity of political humor can give people room to react and respond on other levels — attitudes, feelings, instincts.

By serving as a forum for "regular folks" *Processed World* reinforces the simple truth that knowledge and subversive wisdom flow from people's daily lives and not from an ideology or group of people "in the know." Through publishing art and humor, PW emphasizes the importance of immediate enjoyment, both for surviving this insane world, and for reintroducing fun into radical attempts to change our world.

Stephanie Smith

As a literacy practitioner (I'm director of literacy services for a public library in California), I was excited about the implications of the work writing for literacy students. The principal motivation of adult literacy students is the upgrading of their occupational lot in life. Most adult school students identify vocational objectives.

A good many materials used for the teaching of adult literacy learners are simplistic and (unintentionally) patronizing. A widely used second-level adult literacy text begins with the "story": "This is Kitty King. Kitty King lives in the city. It is a windy city." (Chicago?) In taking pains to make adult literacy materials "readable", many traditional literacy texts have little or nothing to say. In contrast the work poetry has plenty to say, and a great deal of it is accessible from the literacy instructor's point of view — simple structures, unpretentious vocabulary, absence of alienating 'classical' allusions. The work writing gives us a chance to use humanities materials with literacy students, and therefore opens the door for wide-ranging discussions on topics of importance, and therefore to the development of critical thinking and self-expression.

My purpose in coming to the colloquium is to share my evolving use of the work writing in the context of literacy instruction, to get ideas from my Canadian colleagues (who have taught me a great deal about whole language literacy instruction), to discover still more poets whose work I can share with the students in our program, and to do a little work writing myself. Work writing helps me to resolve the conflict that I experience in reconciling the channeling of my creative energy into education (another art form) with a lifelong desire to do more expressive writing.

Antler

Rebecca Falls Mescaline Epiphany

We wish that beneficent beings from Outer Space
would land on earth and bring us the Vision we need
to save us from destroying the world.

We wish a spaceship would come from Outer Space
and transport us to its planet's Utopia
where creatures exactly like us but enlightened
or creatures very different from us but enlightened
exist.

We wonder if some of the people we know
aren't possibly from Outer Space,
Or complete strangers of unearthly beauty
or great tender geniuses of love,
poetry, music, dance, art—
are they not emissaries from "out there"?

We wonder if possibly we are
Outer Space Reconnaissance Consciousnesses
programmed not to awake till now,
Cosmic Reconnaissance Renaissance Consciousnesses
programmed not to awake till now.

What is my Mission on this Planet?

What am I here for? What am I here for?

Ding! Ding! Ding! Ding! Ding!

Suddenly we realize WE ARE FROM OUTER SPACE!
WE ARE CREATURES FROM OUTER SPACE!
EARTH IS OUR PLANET IN OUTER SPACE!

We don't have to go in a spaceship from Earth to the moon
and take Mescaline and look back at our Earth
or walk in space after smoking
millions of joints
to realize we're in Outer Space!

That everyone could be a creative genius of tender love
 and living creator of music or poetry,
 painting or dance,
 endless continued gentle passionate creations
 of human mind!
 Behold the lilies, they neither spin nor sew!
 Think of the whales! They don't punch timeclocks!
 They don't need Christ or Buddha
 to be enlightened.
 Everyone's life should be devoted to enlightenment!
 Everyone should be free to receive Visions of Mescaline
 in absolute wilderness solitude!
 Ah, I feel the key, for me, to perceiving, entertaining,
 and embodying Infinite Space and Eternal Time's
 Ultimate Implications are to be found
 in the deepest solitude I can find
 in the non-human Manifestation of Cosmos
 in that realm called Wilderness Reality.
 What does Contemporary Poetry Scene in America
 have to do with this?
 Do I live in America? Is it 1984!
 Do people who are dead continue to argue
 whether there is life after death?
 This is Heaven!
 I don't have to die
 to be Immortal!
 I don't have to die
 to be in Eternity!
 To feel in this flash of existence
 in the Antler form
 the unending Amaze!
 O Poets are Emissaries from Outer Space
 descending their spaceship ramps
 and their visionary message to Earth
 shall be heard around the world!

Biographical Notes

ANTLER is a Milwaukee based poet and industrial worker. His books include Factory and his collected works Last Words. He won the 1985 Walt Whitman prize for poetry.

HERB APPLEBAUM is a construction engineer, poet, short story writer, and anthropologist. Some of his books are: Blue Chips, and Royal Blue: The Culture of Construction Workers. He is also the editor of The Anthropology of Work Review and lives in New Jersey.

ROBERT CARSON lives in San Francisco where he works as a long-shoreman, poet, short story writer, and editor. He edited The Waterfront Writers: The Literature of Work.

SUSAN EISENBERG is a poet, playwright, and a journeylevel electrician. Her collection of poems is It's a Good Thing I'm Not Macho. She lives in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts.

KIRSTEN EMMOTT is a member of the Vancouver Industrial Writers' Union and has poetry in their anthology Shop Talk. She lives in Vancouver and works as a physician.

LEONA GOM's newest book is Housebroken, a novel. Her books of poetry include NorthBound and Land of the Peace. She lives in Surrey, B.C. and teaches at Kwantlen College.

PHIL HALL lives in Toronto and works as a proofreader and poet. His books of poetry include A Minor Operation and Why I Haven't Written.

JIM MCLEAN is a poet and a railroader. His collection of poems is called The Secret Life of Railroaders. He is also the co-editor of 100% Cracked Wheat, an anthology of humour writing from Saskatchewan. He lives in Winnipeg.

ERIN MOURÉ lives in Montréal and works for VIA Rail. Her books of poetry include Domestic Fuel and Wanted Alive. Her first book, Empire, York Street was nominated for the Governor General's Award for poetry in 1979.

PROCESSED WORLD collective includes Lucius Cabins, a self-employed graphic designer and typesetter. Processed World is a magazine which gives an on-going critique on modes of organizing work with special emphasis on the electronic office.

BRENT REID teaches English at Vanier Secondary School in Comox B.C.

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SANDRA SHREVE is a member of the Vancouver Industrial Writers' Union. She is a clerical worker at Simon Fraser University. Her collection of poems, The Speed of the Wheel Is Up to the Potter is forthcoming from Harbour Publishing.

STEPHANIE SMITH directs the Reading For Life literacy project of the Watsonville Public Library in Watsonville, California.