

# TORONTO REVIEW of BOOKS fall 2012



# ISSUE NUMBER FIVE

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**EDITOR'S NOTE****BY JESSICA DUFFIN WOLFE**

This season we watched deep cuts to Library and Archives Canada begin to take effect as we learned how the archives cached by web browsers make websites load more quickly. We said goodbye to the Toronto Women's Bookstore and Douglas and McIntyre, Canada's biggest independent publishing house. We witnessed our sometime newspaper of record, the *Globe and Mail*, try to discount allegations of plagiarism against one of its columnists by saying they came from an "anonymous blogger." We thought about how the same digital force that has laid off editors, fact-checkers, and copyeditors has made it easier to spot the holes they've left. We worried about the gap-toothed look of a street without bookstores and a country without publishers, and we wondered about how well we're caching our own culture for the next time any of this stuff comes up.

This fifth issue of ours takes us to sea in Matt Rader's poem, "My Life Aboard the Last Ship Carrying Cumberland Coal," and in David Ritter's essay on the Art Gallery of Ontario's tiny models of the Napoleonic ships that were "instruments of imprisonment." Medeine Tribinevicius looks at the oceanic geography of the Internet and Naomi Joseph considers the consent involved in setting sail online. That mighty bivalve ancestor of the hyperlink, the footnote, is an honoured guest in this issue, both in Tim Jacobs's tribute to David Foster Wallace, and in Gillian Savigny's poem, "Cognate of lapis lazuli. Three Studies of Fruit." William Nelson and Cindy Blažević each consider the private and public

words of artists that allow them to communicate—or not. Angela Hickman finds an ancient book culture living out its year as the UNESCO World Book Capital in Yerevan, Armenia, while Meghan Davidson Ladly follows the fate of books in the streets of Paris, that other international book capital, where books are thought of as “instruments for the elevation of the soul.” Amid these life-in-death fables of the contemporary book industry, Emily Holton’s illustration, “Even the Poor will Bury their Dead,” feels like a parable for the many farewells murmured lately by book people.

Still, books are migrating, not going extinct, and new hellos remain to be said. In response, over the last few months the *TRB* has been growing, changing, taking on new faces, and asking more questions about what a browser cache like this one can do for readers across platforms. Lost at sea online or in books, writing remains our navigation instrument, telling us what’s out there, tracing the lines around where we’re at, reeling us in. Each issue is a dispatch. Keep listening.

## GETTING INTO IT THROUGH THE GUNS: THE THOMSON COLLECTION OF SHIP MODELS AT THE AGO

BY DAVID RITTER

French prisoners of war held in Britain built some of the ship models in the Thomson Collection at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO). Cream-white as if carved in ivory but made from bones in the prisoners' rations and other humble materials like straw and human hair, the "Prisoner of War Models" are masterfully crafted and exquisitely beautiful, despite their genesis in misery and their deathly and imperial symbolism. Kids' reactions to the ships reveal this strange duality between their charm and their sinister history. Conservator Sherry Phillips tells me that nine-year-old boys are her favourite visitors to the collection. "They always get into it through the guns," she says. "That's the first thing they want to know about."

The Thomson Collection is one of the largest collections of ship models in the world. It contains models built from 1692 until well into the twentieth century; Simon Stephens, curator at Britain's National Marine Museum, details their history in his masterful catalogue for the Thomson collection, *Ship Models* (2009). While most of the models were made as advertisements for life-sized ships meant to be sold to buyers like the British Navy Board, some were built as keepsakes, and even the "useful" models often found their way to private homes where they were prized for their craftsmanship. There are warships—canon-

wielding sailing ships and modern aircraft carriers—along with car ferries, dredgers, and pleasure craft. Most models are built to a standard miniaturized scale (1:48, and later, as ships became larger, 1:96) and measure between around 20 and 270 cm in length. Small and well-cared for, the models are marvels of craft and preservation.



*POW Ship Model of the 'St. Lucia'*  
The Thomson Collection of Ship Models  
© Art Gallery of Ontario

Since the Frank Gehry renovation of the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) in 2009, the models have had a lower-level room of their own. A large glass wall stacked with ship models encloses one end of the room, inviting passers-by to come in, and posing the boundary between the collection and the rest of the gallery as a question. Gehry's undulating cases evoke the sea and a sense of movement among the still models. Several of the models' original cases remain in the collection; beautiful and elaborate, they too are works of art. Gehry's cases reflect this artistry, opening the border between the collection and its display in a thoughtful conjunction of object and space.

As in many rooms at the AGO, the mood is alternately meditative and vibrant, often depending on whether or not children are around. Off the beaten track at the gallery, the collection can be a surprise for visitors, who descend to find a room filled with wavy glass and pint-sized ships suspended in mid-air. Soon the eye is drawn to the little details, the gold leaf, intricate rigging, or tiny lifeboats. The builder's model of the British

passenger liner *Golconda* has miniature chicken coops and livestock pens on its deck. The gold-dredger features an elaborate system of conveyer belts, filters, and pumps to separate minerals from the waste dug up from the river or seabed. The seats on the builder's model of a 1920s river-cruising launch are made with wicker and dark green leather.

The quiet and the soft light of the ship-models gallery invite visitors to contemplate these details and the obsessive care of the builders. Phillips says there may be details inside the models—"wall paper in captain's cabins, painted floor cloths, little tables, or little ivory embellishments"—that viewers will never see. Researchers use endoscopes and other scientific instruments to discover them, but since these details are forever hidden from view, the maker's reason for including them remains a mystery. With the identity of most of the model builders lost to history, and even the purpose of many of the models still unknown, the ships urge their viewers to speculate about their meaning. Unlike many better-known works of art, the Thomson models hold something back, refusing to reveal themselves entirely even on repeat viewings.

In the presence of children, the collection reveals a more playful quality. The ships resemble toy trucks and other playthings, and they seem immediately approachable to the untrained eye. Under this gaze, the bright paint, coloured flags, and tiny soldiers come forward, sparking fantasies of life on the sea. Several models in the collection represent specific vessels, like the *Edinburgh*, a 70-gun warship launched in 1721, or the *HMS Hogue*, a British cruiser sunk by a German submarine on Sept. 22, 1914. These models are not just the result of

craftsmanship. We imagine not just the builder's life but the sailor's as well. We see through the model to the ship, moving and firing, teeming with people and activity. As the models refer to specific histories, they invite us to imagine battles and conquests from the perspective of the seamen below deck or the captain above.

While imagining the use and operation of the ships, we encounter the collection's darkest aspect. The navy was Britain's foremost instrument of imperial control, facilitating the ruin and enslavement of people and nations around the globe. Most of the ships represented in the collection were built for combat, and while advances in technology facilitated a larger scale of destruction, life on board offered its own horrors. The *Maltese Fighting Galley* features a tier of oars manned by slaves and prisoners. Torpedo boats, destroyers, and aircraft carriers from both World Wars carried massive ordnance used to bomb harbours and raze city blocks. Moreover, as the gilded decorations on royal ship models in the collection attest, British ships often stood as symbols of imperial wealth and power. Even non-military ships like the dredgers and cargo ships inflicted massive environmental damage and supported the British Empire while offering little comfort to those working below deck. The collection is accessible in large part because it summons images of romantic sea adventure. Yet just as it conjures up fantasies of naval action it compels us to remember the terrors of the British Empire and the malevolent purpose that all this craft and technology served.

The prisoner of war models pull awe and sadness even closer together.

Sailors captured during the Napoleonic Wars (1794 - 1815) and then held in British prisons and on decommissioned ships moored near the shore built models for sale to improve their horrid lot. The precision carving attests to the skilled trades the sailors plied before being pressed into naval service. Later prisoner of war models feature brass and wood, after their makers had a chance to acquire better materials and tools. The earlier models made from bone, however, are particularly amazing because they come from such meagre resources and awful conditions. Here there is no separation between the model-maker's shop and sea life; here the builder and the war-ravaged victim are one and the same. The prisoners modelled the instrument of their imprisonment, paying gorgeous tribute to the power that defeated them and held them in exile.

Sasha Suda, Assistant Curator of European Art at the AGO, says the collection makes no attempt to disguise its relationship to the past. The models, she says, "are not hiding it. They are very much testaments to that moment in time." The smooth lines and fine details do not belie the ruin the models brought and were born in. To admire these objects—serene beneath Gehry's fluid glass—is to be split. Our fascination with war machines, our feelings of attraction and repulsion before the symbols of imperial power, cannot easily be reconciled. As viewers we are suspended in contradiction just as the builders were, holding on to beauty in the midst of destruction.

# MY LIFE ABOARD THE LAST SAILING SHIP CARRYING CUMBERLAND COAL

BY MATT RADER

You give your firstborn daughter  
A central-Asian name  
Meaning blue or water.  
Years later two bluebirds alight on either arm  
And an artist's quick needlework  
Stitches birds to skin  
So even  
In your obsequies your fetlocks  
Wing away, appear then disappear. Of course  
Now you are a horse

With pale blue withers on a high Afghan plain.  
What does it mean to be  
Such a thing? Behind you, the blue Pamir mountains.  
Before you, antiquity.  
You follow a trade in lapis lazuli  
From Badakhshan to the court of Cleopatra.  
You see morning's blue aurora

Alight on the Nile delta and around the eyes  
Of the pharaoh. Oh.  
Oh,

Isis, God of sailors. Entering the Salish Sea  
*Pamir* becalms in a thick mist  
Off Cape Flattery.  
The water beneath the ship is dark lapis.  
You are on the yard of the crossjack working canvas.  
Out of the blue  
The blue  
Wings of eros and agape alight in you. Deus ex caritas.  
Your God is born.  
Cape Horn.

Galapagos. Azores.  
The hurricane with a woman's name that sinks *Pamir*  
Off the blue shores  
Of the Portuguese vernacular.  
It all comes together in the English word  
Azure. The hue of your daughter's eyes.

The bird

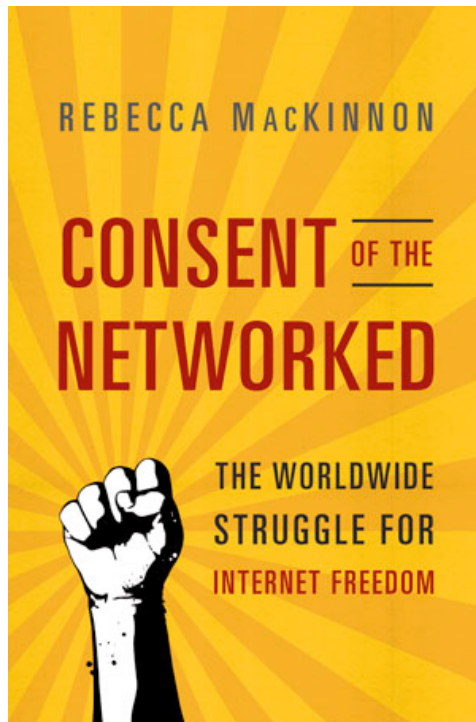
A sailor gets on his arm for sailing the globe in three thousand years.  
The horse that gathers away, appears then disappears.



**ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS VON SZOMBATHY**

## IF NETIZENS UNITED: REBECCA MACKINNON'S *CONSENT OF THE NETWORKED*

BY NAOMI JOSEPH



Chinese journalist Shi Tao was jailed in 2005 after Yahoo provided Chinese state security agents with emails he had sent on a Yahoo China account. The emails had alerted a New York web editor of a recent Chinese government document instructing national media in what not to report on the latest Tiananmen Square anniversary. In 2010 Facebook deleted a page created on its site by Egyptian protestors, who used the page to organize anonymously. The page was titled “We Are All Khaled Said” after the man who was brutally killed by police in Alexandria, allegedly because Said was planning to post incriminating video of the Alexandrian police online. In the same year, Facebook deleted a page called “Boycott BP” following the infamous oil spill.

Facebook claimed to have deleted these pages because their creators used Facebook under aliases, violating the site’s terms of use. As Rebecca MacKinnon suggests in her book *Consent of the Networked: The Worldwide Struggle for Internet Freedom*, Facebook’s application of its own terms of use is arbitrary at best, corrupt at worst. Apparently no one is tipping off Facebook to its hundreds of users registered as “Donald Ducky.”

While the title of *Consent of the Networked* states the author’s political goal, MacKinnon devotes most of the book’s pages to describing her obstacles.

“Consent of the networked” is the Internet equivalent of consent of the governed, a basic principle of democratic government in the modern world. When private companies operating in the digital commons (the online equivalent of the public square) do the bidding of governments that have not informed, let alone consulted, their citizens, that principle is violated. MacKinnon holds all three parties to account, because in her dystopian vision of the future, as in Huxley’s *Brave New World*, “we all voluntarily and eagerly submit to subjugation,” unable to resist the thrills of online shopping, gaming, and social media.

The difficult part, which MacKinnon does not tackle in detail, is determining how corporations, nation-states, global governance bodies, and private citizens ought to act in order to prevent the disquieting events MacKinnon recounts from recurring or escalating. Instead MacKinnon tells “netizens”—worldwide citizens of the Internet—to mistrust government. She pronounces the failure of UN-led congregations of governments, companies, and NGOs from around the world to develop Internet policy. She writes,

It is clear that it is not in the interest of the world’s netizens to leave Internet governance to nation-states. Yet the structures and processes that have so far been built for multi-stakeholder Internet governance are failing to mediate the kind of global politics needed to uphold and protect human rights, civil liberties, and free expression in the global network.

MacKinnon has slightly more faith in companies’ abilities to develop sound policy on their own, as she argues that tech companies will recognize their long-term strategic interest in “keeping the Internet open and free.” MacKinnon predicates this argument on an elevation of certain tech companies to the status of nation-states, calling these companies “digital sovereigns.” Facebook is

“Facebookistan”; Google is “Googledom.” With this rhetorical move MacKinnon imparts the responsibilities of states, from protecting freedom of speech to protecting privacy rights, on companies that in her view wield state-like power and authority. Both companies are giants, but their sovereignty—their supreme power over defined territory, in MacKinnon’s use of the word—applies only to their websites and platforms. Google hovers over our digital lives, gathering market research from web users logged in to their Google accounts, but it does not “govern our digital lives,” as MacKinnon asserts. These companies govern digital spaces that we willingly enter and exit when we log in and out. Yet MacKinnon puts the onus on private companies to live up to the responsibilities of governments. She has more confidence in the “trust but verify” approach to corporate Internet policy than she does in any governmental Internet policy.

As MacKinnon’s subtitle—“The Worldwide Struggle for Internet Freedom” —indicates, MacKinnon uses the same nebulous language of Internet freedom that she exposes as fodder for political manipulation. “Internet freedom” can mean a number of things—freedom of networks from governmental or corporate manipulation, freedom of individuals to connect and interact online, freedom of individuals and organizations to participate in shaping Internet structure and governance. As in the offline world, uses of the word “freedom” are often vague and, likely thanks to that vagueness, politically rousing. In 2010 US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton introduced “Internet freedom” as a priority of American foreign policy, stating that “[both] the American people and nations that censor the Internet should understand that our

government is committed to helping promote internet freedom.” In the speech Secretary Clinton did not discuss abuses of power in the private sector, nor did she discuss in any detail a US role in preventing abuses by authoritarian governments.

MacKinnon also tells us that just over a year before revolution took Egypt, First Lady Suzanne Mubarak gave an unscheduled speech on online child safety at the UN-formed multi-stakeholder Internet Governance Forum. Before her husband’s regime fell, Mrs. Mubarak promoted the Cyber Peace Initiative to protect another kind of Internet freedom—freedom from child predators. MacKinnon, who was in attendance, writes that Mrs. Mubarak’s speech not only disrupted “an entire morning” of programmed conferencing but showed that “child safety is commonly used by authoritarian regimes as an excuse for censorship and surveillance” (an aphorism reminiscent of the controversy surrounding the child safety bill introduced by Canada’s Conservative government this year). MacKinnon has a term for this political tactic, “digital bonapartism”—a play on Karl Marx’s term for power-hungry demagogues’ wearing of populist masks.

MacKinnon’s invocations of Internet freedom, just like those of the politicians she mentions, aim to rally her troops. Her book is peppered with assertions that “[the] Internet can be a powerful tool in the hands of citizens seeking to hold governments and corporations to account—but only if we keep the Internet itself open and free.” Her populist message is powerful but undermined by her antagonism toward Internet commercialism. We should

think of our online selves as “netizens” rather than users or consumers, MacKinnon tells us. But sometimes we are just consumers, and sometimes private companies justifiably disregard ideals of Internet openness and freedom when choosing what to buy and sell online. In her chapter on corporate censorship, MacKinnon blames “Big Brother Apple” for selectively populating its online App Store, occasionally rejecting apps devoted to political satire. MacKinnon neglects to mention that those dissatisfied with Apple’s media selection can find or create content of their choice on a web browser, all while using an Apple device (assuming they don’t live in China). Or they can go to one of Apple’s rivals: Google’s Android Market is keeping pace with the App Store, as Android’s operating system market share continues to beat that of Apple’s iOS.

In matters of corporate censorship, MacKinnon has bigger fish to fry. Internet censorship software designed by Canadian and US companies to protect children and employers is used by repressive governments in Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen, Sudan, and Tunisia. Corporate lobbying has helped make intellectual property enforcement a cornerstone of recent Internet legislation in Canada and the US, encouraging governments that view IP law enforcement as legitimate censorship and surveillance. A spokesman for the Chinese foreign ministry stated last year that “the Chinese government’s legal management of the Internet is in line with international practice.” Without a great deal of public pressure, that practice is unlikely to change.

# **INSTRUMENTS FOR THE ELEVATION OF THE SOUL: THE PLIGHT OF THE BOOK IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY PARIS**

**BY MEGHAN DAVIDSON LADLY**

Paris conjures up many images. Some visualize the Seine and arching footbridges; others see patisseries shaded by plane trees or a five a.m. street crêpe; others still, think of books. Writers and writing infuse the city's marrow, from contemporary stars like Muriel Barbery to the 1920s icons Ernest Hemingway, Sylvia Beach, and James Joyce, and back even earlier to Victor Hugo and Voltaire. Today on Rue de la Parcheminerie, shelves upon shelves stretch up to the ceiling of Abbey Bookshop, towering above the stacks on the floor. On Quai de Valmy, overlooking hipster-favourite canal Saint-Martin, Artazart's colourful mash-up of design ranges from Helmut Newton and Patti Smith photography to books on typography and Communist-era graphics, with a few Polaroid cameras on sale for good measure. Mots à la Bouche in the Marais fills the window of its blue storefront with the latest queer fiction, provocative art books, and biographies.

Paris is legendary for its literary scene and bookshops of all descriptions and, whatever your taste in bookishness, it boasts many more flavours to choose from than your average North American metropolis. Yet beneath the romanticism of this scene, the city's booksellers are confronting a shifting landscape pitting the revered cultural status of literature against new social and

economic realities.

“It is worrisome, very worrisome,” says Sébastien Grisez, manager of the French LGBT bookstore, Les Mots à la Bouche. “All the booksellers and the publishers are very anxious not knowing where the situation is taking us. There are a lot of changes going on and people have less and less money; there are many problems converging at the moment.”

Perhaps the most visible of those problems is the VAT crisis of the last few months, which left many French bookstores strewn with protest leaflets explaining that book jacket prices would be different at the cash. When Nicolas Sarkozy’s government raised the VAT tax on books from 5.5 to seven per cent in April of this year as part of austerity measures to combat the country’s deficit, the change became symbolic of a growing malaise within the industry.

“The political situation, or tone, that is given to the country by the president and by the government really has an influence,” explains David Delannet, co-manager of the late George Whitman’s reincarnated Shakespeare and Company bookstore. “You just felt that he was not supporting that industry at all and it weighted on people.”

While Shakespeare and Co. remains a vital force on the Seine, two other prominent English-language bookstores have announced their exits in 2012. The Village Voice Bookshop had been a fixture of the Saint-Germain-des-Prés neighbourhood on the left bank for 30 years before it closed at the end of July. In the Marais, The Red Wheelbarrow has been up for sale for several months. For Métissa André of Abbey Bookshop, the atmosphere at her shop, which sells both

new and second-hand books, is one of tenuous fragility; sales are down and more people seem to want to offload books.

Despite this grim ambiance, however, France still has a robust independent book industry. According to Matthieu De Montchalin, president of the French booksellers association Syndicat de la Librairie Française, there are roughly 2,500 independent booksellers in France, 1,000 of which are in the greater region surrounding the capital, with 200 in the city itself. The state has enacted several policies prioritizing literature over the last few decades that have protected the independent book market from much of the carnage witnessed in England and North America since the rise of the large chain retailers.

Much of the security these small bookshops have enjoyed results from the 1981 Lang Law, named for the then-culture minister Jack Lang. The law established a fixed price system for French-language books, whereby no retail outlet, including the global players like Amazon and Fnac, could discount a work by more than five per cent below the price set by the publisher. Through this measure, small stores were given a level playing field, as they could not be undercut by deep discounts from the large retailers. In 2011, the law was further extended to cover e-books. The French, however, seem to prefer the tangible flesh of print. E-book sales have remained below two per cent of total book sales for the last two years. In contrast, the National Book Count for 2012 found that e-books accounted for 10 per cent of all English Canada book sales.

The municipal government of Paris has also invested in maintaining the city's literary scene. Paris launched an interventionist initiative in 2008,

spearheaded by Mayor Bertrand Delanoë, to preserve small culturally oriented enterprises. “In France we are more attached to small independent businesses, we like things that have a soul,” says André. In conjunction with the development agency Semaest, City Hall purchases real estate in *arrondissements* throughout the city and then rents it at a discount to cultural operations, in many instances seeking out small bookshops as tenants. “It is helping bookstores to survive,” says Delannet, “because you can’t compete with H&M and Channel or Dior—these guys make way more money than the book business.”

Paris’s investment in preserving its literary landscape, and indeed the country’s overall esteem for literature, clashed with the VAT increase. During his spring election campaign François Hollande pledged to reverse the increase and this summer, as President, he fulfilled that promise. The VAT on books will return to 5.5 in the new year.

Perhaps a new President with a commitment to old policies can shake off the disquiet felt within the Parisian book community, but even with a shift in political mood and fresh occupants in the Élysée Palace, challenges remain. English and French bookstores may often attract different clientele and English-language books are not bound by the fixed pricing legislation, but they are all subject to the realities of a troubled economy. France may be faring better than its Mediterranean neighbours but it is still feeling the effects of the Euro-crisis with three consecutive quarters of zero growth and an unemployment rate at a 13-year high of 10.2 per cent. People have less money in general and therefore less money for books.

“We know that the years to come will be difficult,” says De Montchalin. His worries, however, are not just focused on economics. He is concerned about fostering a love of reading within a younger generation raised online, and points out that when you lose the habit of reading books, habits like reading newspapers and thinking critically about the world could be next to go.

“Reading speaks of all subjects,” says De Montchalin. “We need to show children that books open lots of doors, and that it gives as much pleasure as watching a film or playing a video game.”

Perhaps, however, the literary scene in Paris will be its own saviour. The romanticism that enshrines literature within the city attracts countless tourists enamoured with the past and the thought of touching shoulders with literary ghosts. “All the history of writers and the books that were published here—Paris is sort of a myth because of all that,” says André. The reality and the myth of the place are not entirely separate: beneath the clichés, and perhaps in part because of them, lies a culture that reveres the printed word and its industries. For now at least, France still venerates its writers and the idea that Paris should be a safe haven for bookshops.

When the VAT increase was announced, booksellers and their supporters argued that books should be considered vital and classified as goods of first necessity. “Books are not just any kind of merchandise, books are instruments for the elevation of the soul,” says Delannet of the argument behind the Lang Law. “And so you have to have a rule to preserve bookstores for people to have access to that.”

## CLOUD CARTOGRAPHY: ON *TUBES*, BY ANDREW BLUM

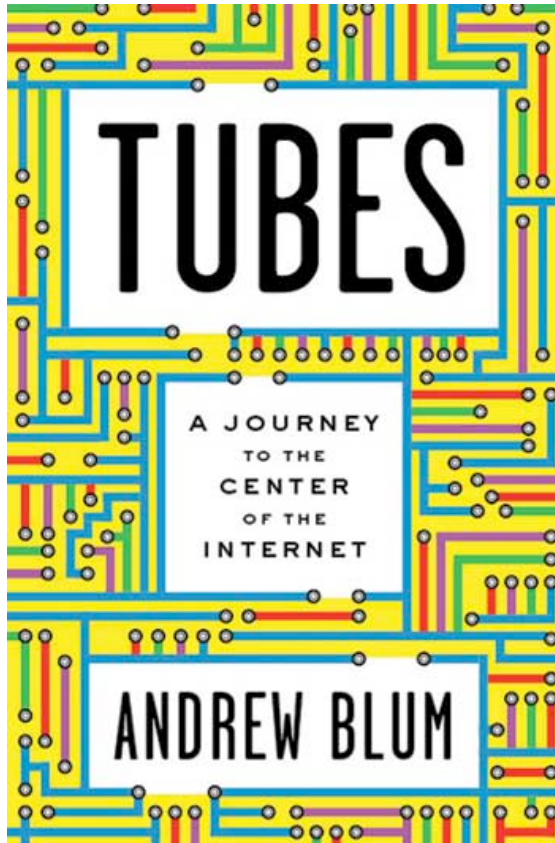
BY MEDEINE TRIBINEVICIUS

*Reviewed:* *Tubes: A Journey to the Center of the Internet*, by Andrew Blum (Ecco, 2012)

When U.S. Senator Ted Stevens, speaking in opposition to net neutrality in June 2006, infamously described the Internet as “a series of tubes,” he was ridiculed for being out of touch with technology. The phrase was quickly absorbed into the lexicon, becoming tongue-in-cheek shorthand for describing an increasingly ethereal network that we’ve grown to rely on economically, emotionally, and intellectually, one that we continue to describe in vague terms, the most current being “the cloud.” The thing is, as Andrew Blum attests in his new book, *Tubes: A Journey to the Center of the Internet*, the Internet really *is* a series of tubes. Blum, a student of human geography, correspondent for *Wired* magazine, and now cartographer of the Internet, writes:

I have confirmed with my own eyes that the Internet is many things, in many places. But one thing it most certainly is, nearly everywhere, is, in fact, a series of tubes. There are tubes beneath the ocean that connect London and New York. Tubes that connect Google and Facebook. There are buildings filled with tubes, and hundreds of thousands of miles of roads and railroad tracks, beside which lie buried tubes. Everything you do online travels through a tube.

With this as a starting point, *Tubes* sets out to map the physical presence of the Internet, to trace the pathways of the multitude of data – emails, Skype calls,



Facebook posts, cat videos – uploaded and accessed every day.

Blum’s fascination with understanding the physical reality of the Internet originated in what for many North Americans is a catastrophe: his Wi-Fi stopped working. A squirrel chewed through one of the cables that brought the Internet into his Brooklyn apartment, darkening the blinking green lights on his router. The physicality of the problem – a broken cable – started a train of thought that led him on a global search for the physical manifestations of that near-mystical thing that is the Internet. But this book is not simply a physical mapping of the wires and fibre optic cables (the “tubes”) that make up the networks; it’s an exploration of the human geography of how this network was conceived, born, and grown into the essential tool of humankind that it is today.

As one may expect, finding the Internet’s physical presence is somewhat anti-climactic. About halfway through the book Blum writes: “I had learned what the Internet looked like, generally speaking: a self-storage warehouse. An unusually pretty one, though.” This description holds for all the other components as well – the data storage centres, the many miles of cables, the Internet exchanges – with the exception of the locations where the new technology overlaps with old, the art deco AT&T and Western Union buildings in New York City, or the super-modern glass and concrete corporate utopia of the Docklands in London, for example. The book is less about understanding the individual parts and more about comprehending the scale of the physical infrastructure that composes the “thing” we imagine when we talk about the Internet. This thing, Blum maintains, is profoundly human. In his search for its

physical character he returns to one basic point, that the Internet is ultimately a social exercise: “[T]he Internet is public *because* it is handmade,” he writes. “New links don’t just happen according to some automated algorithm, they need to be created: negotiated by two network engineers, then activated along a distinct physical path.”

So why is it important to think about the Internet this way, to understand the physical and social interactions that make up the technology that so many people use on a daily basis? Can’t we just continue to think of the Internet as a cloud up there somewhere and just download the new Yeasayer album already? In a piece he wrote for *Wired UK*, Blum describes the “infrastructural lobotomy” that shifted our understanding of the Internet from a physical presence to an idea, and obscured the specifics of the Internet – how and where data is collected, stored, and accessed. When we lose sight of the specifics, we also lose control of our information, risking, at the very least, a violation of privacy; at worst we must begin to come to terms with fact that our thoughts and relationships are not fully our own. In Blum’s view, this re-configuration of the Internet is what makes access to the network a universal human right.

Consider what happens when control is exerted for political or economic gain, when a government cuts off its citizens’ access to certain parts of the Internet (I’m looking at you, China and Zimbabwe) or bandwidth is capped because of inadequate infrastructure or poor network regulation (see much of the developing world). Possibilities are constrained, economic gaps widen, intellectual debate is stifled, and the gap between haves and have-nots gets even

bigger. In his global travels, Blum identifies several physical gaps in Internet infrastructure. Small towns in the U.S. are (physically) bypassed by massive channels of data. Underwater cabling is vulnerable to natural disaster. In 2006 an earthquake south of Taiwan caused an underwater landslide that severed seven of the nine cables passing through the Luzon Strait, cutting off Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, and most of South Asia from the global Internet. Up until very recently only a single underwater cable connected South Africa to the rest of the Internet world.

This last bit of information gave me serious pause. Having spent a fair amount of time in South Africa over the past two years, one of my biggest complaints about the country was the unreliable, expensive, and slow Internet. Before I leave Canada, and the moment I hit Heathrow or Frankfurt on my way back, I update my computer, download all my books, magazines, and music, and revel in how quickly everything loads. But beyond my entitled expectations, the lack of reliable broadband only contributes to keeping the continent unstable. Blum certainly hints at this discrepancy when describing the two future cables (one running up the east coast, the other up the west) both being installed by Tata Communications (a division of the Indian industrial conglomerate), but his moral outrage is aimed at intellectual property, rather than at the digital divide. He's most annoyed by Google's obfuscating behaviour when he attempts to visit their data centre and, instead of getting a tour, is escorted through the parking lot by a PR-spouting guide, and shown the lunchroom. Blum writes: "I'd feel better outsourcing my life to machines if I could at least know where they were,

who controls them, and who put them there. The great global scourges of modern life are always made worse by not knowing.”

I, too, would feel better knowing who owns my information. But more important is to understand that if, as Blum posits, the idea of the Internet is a universal human right, we have a responsibility to make good use of this resource, this wealth of fibre optics and light. In examining the built environment that comprises the backbone of the Internet, overlaid on some of the familiar communications pathways and geography of the earth, we can better understand the flow of information through these tubes, and work towards spanning the gaps.

**NOT HIMSELF: ON WITOLD GOMBROWICZ'S *DIARY*****BY WILLIAM MAX NELSON**

*Reviewed: Witold Gombrowicz's Diary, translated by Lillian Vallee (Yale, 2012)*

The Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz arrived in Buenos Aires in August of 1939 on the maiden voyage of the trans-Atlantic liner *Chrobry*. He had been able to use his minor notoriety as an avant-garde writer in Poland to receive a free ticket on the ship, ostensibly as a representative of Polish culture. Within 10 days of his arrival, World War II began and he was stuck in a country where he did not know the language and had no standing as an author. He lived in Argentina for the next 23 years, never returning to Poland, though he lived the last six years of his life in Europe.

Gombrowicz was 30 years old when he arrived in Argentina, and he struggled to restart his life. He was still decades away from being celebrated as a great Modernist author. He found it difficult to write as an émigré. What little literary reputation he had came from the work he completed before leaving Poland: the collection of stories *Memoirs of a Time of Immaturity*; the surreal novel *Ferdydurke*; and the un-staged play *Ivona, Princess of Burgundia*. By 1953, poor and desperate to reignite his career as a writer after more than a decade of interruption, Gombrowicz began to publish serialized installments of an unconventional diary. It was not a recounting of everyday activities, a dutiful

chronicle of the self, or an anguished confession. It was an extended exercise carried out from 1953 until 1969, through which the author experimented with different personae and made himself into an entire cast of characters. As he explained in his pitch to the director of *Kultura*, the Polish émigré journal that published the serial installments of the *Diary*: “I must become my own commentator, even better, my own theatrical director. I have to create Gombrowicz the thinker, Gombrowicz the genius, Gombrowicz the cultural demonologist, and many other necessary Gombrowiczes.” The *Diary* first appeared in English translation in three volumes in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s and is now available as a single volume that includes previously unpublished material, including a final entry from 1969.

At the margins of Polish culture—far from Poland, or even a sizable community of Polish émigrés—Gombrowicz forced readers to take notice of him. From the *Diary*’s famous opening words, added when the serial entries were first collected in book form, Gombrowicz toys with his readers, both fulfilling and subverting expectations of a diary:

*Monday*

Me.

*Tuesday*

Me.

*Wednesday*

Me.

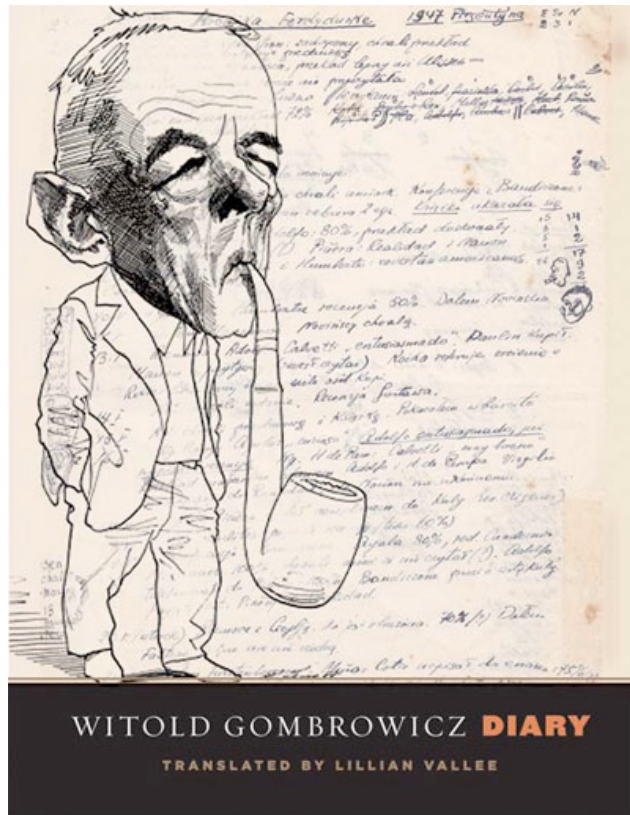
*Thursday*

Me.

Writing with a sclerotic style and a lust for transgression, he takes on Catholicism, Communism, and other elements central to Polish life, while railing against his critics, offering advice to Polish artists (“don’t try to become Polish Matisse”), criticizing Argentina (“batter that has not yet become cake”), insulting more famous literary rivals (“a first-rate second-rate writer”), and stage managing his reception (“I forbid you to speak about me in a boring, everyday, ordinary way. . . I demand a holiday word for myself”).

Gombrowicz undertook a very public act of both self-creation and disappearance, often revealing himself through his opinions of others. The variety of these opinions, and their sometimes contradictory nature, make it difficult to pin down a “real” Gombrowicz. Ultimately, the *Diary* reads like an extraordinary attempt, using a nonfictional form, to enact a line from Diderot’s fictional dialogue *Rameau’s Nephew*: “Nothing is less like him than himself.” Gombrowicz achieves this strange effect by presenting himself as if he were an unstable character being written by an unreliable narrator. This technique opens up a clearing, not so that the real Gombrowicz can be seen, but so that he can be seen hiding.

The great achievement of the *Diary* is the creation of fleeting moments where the reader can sense this type of authorial absence—a present absence—that allows us to experience Gombrowicz being less like him than himself.



The *Diary* was an extended performance of the fact that Gombrowicz “felt elusive in being” and wanted to find a way of writing that could evade constraints and weaken “form.” For Gombrowicz, form was existential, not merely literary. It was Form. It was the master concept he employed in the pursuit of avoiding concepts. He fought against it because he thought of it as external and dangerously recursive, emerging through the interactions of people whom it then constrained. His literary works, including the *Diary*, were exercises in finding new literary forms to avoid Form. Often, as in *Memoirs of a Time of Immaturity* and *Ferdydurke*, this manifested as an avant-garde immaturity bristling against social and literary conventions. *Ferdydurke*, which is itself a nonsense word, sees a 30-year old man turn into a teenager. In pursuit of this mature immaturity, Gombrowicz makes up new words, plays on old words, changes nouns into verbs, and occasionally shifts tense within a sentence. One translator admitted having the confidence necessary to tackle the novel because of her experience as a psychiatrist treating schizophrenic patients prone to the invention of private languages.

The *Diary* has much the same spirit as *Ferdydurke*, though Gombrowicz employs more direct and matter-of-fact language to paradoxically heighten the impact of his search for the seam between sense and nonsense. Gombrowicz called himself a “serious clown” and his writing is at its best when the clown sets himself up as the voice of reason while simultaneously employing metaphysical slapstick to deflate lofty abstractions. Throughout the *Diary*, Gombrowicz repeatedly toys with the ideas and the persona of Sartre in passages that mix

derision, exacerbation, praise, and mockery. Writers like Sartre “seem to forget man is a being created to live in an atmosphere of average pressures and median temperatures,” Gombrowicz observes as if he were a man of median temperature. Acknowledging existentialism as a great and necessary philosophy, Gombrowicz thought that it nonetheless ignored “some elementary, unbearable ridiculousness.” He could not contain what he saw as its scholastic abstraction, overbearing seriousness, and demand for an “extreme, forced awareness” that distorted everyday experience.

After applying “maximum consciousness” to his own life, he found it impossible “to meet the demands of *Dasein* and simultaneously have coffee and croissants for an evening snack. To fear nothingness, but to fear the dentist more. To be consciousness, which walks around in pants and talks on the telephone. To be responsibility, which runs little shopping errands downtown. To bear the weight of significant being, to instill the world with meaning and then return the change from ten pesos.” Pointing out these parts of existence that existentialism seems ill-suited to capture, or even recognize, he breaks into a laughter that is “not only planted with both feet in ‘common sense,’ no, it is worse because it is more spasmodic, it is independent of us.” For Gombrowicz, the gap between abstract ideas and the plain palpability of the everyday world was too strong and resilient. In the *Diary*, he shows how it repeatedly, spasmodically pressed up against him.

## YEREVAN, ARMENIA: WORLD BOOK CAPITAL

BY ANGELA HICKMAN

When Johanna Skibsrud's *The Sentimentalists* won the Scotiabank Giller Prize in 2010, reviews in the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post* commented at length about the beautiful book produced by Nova Scotia's Gaspereau Press, where books are printed by hand, carefully bound, and often include letter-pressed dust jackets and patterned end papers. These volumes are works of art in and of themselves, and although Douglas & McIntyre printed a trade paperback edition of the novel to make it more available to the public, many readers I know held out for the Gaspereau editions, which slowly made their way to bookstores across the country. I am lucky enough to have a Gaspereau edition, and it is indeed a work of exquisite craftsmanship. As students and readers, we quickly come to revere literature, but there is something equally as incredible about the physical object of the book – the pages, the binding, the cover, even the letters on the page – that we rarely get the chance to appreciate.

This year, the World Book Capital is Yerevan, Armenia. My father, who works in Armenia, told me about the designation, knowing that as an avid reader and sometimes book reviewer, I would be immediately interested. In researching the World Book Capital – a program run by UNESCO that moves to a new city each year – I discovered that 2012 is also the five hundredth anniversary of Armenian printing. Armenia isn't exactly a straightforward place

to get to, but it seemed foolish not to find a way to visit a festival that celebrated not only literature, but books as printed and bound objects.

My parents and I arrived in Yerevan after driving in a taxi for nearly six hours on the road from Tbilisi, the capital of neighbouring Georgia. I was sick –



**ILLUSTRATION BY JOE  
OLLMANN**

not car-sick, as it turned out, but sick-sick – and although I had all kinds of visions of running out to explore this book city on the first day, I instead spent the afternoon and evening lying on a lumpy sofa, trying not to move in the hope that stillness would calm the roiling inside me. If my trip to visit the festival could in any way be considered a sort of secular pilgrimage, at least I had the suffering part down.

The next day, after a good night's sleep and some over-the-counter antibiotics, I set out with my mother to find Republic Square, the centre of the city, where we hoped to find the post office and perhaps some information about what bookish events were taking place, since the streets were strangely devoid of any indication something special was happening. After walking for several blocks, we were pretty sure we were

going in the wrong direction, but decided to press on for one more block. In Yerevan, pedestrians cross major intersections using underpasses rather than crosswalks, and the last one we dipped into before turning around to try our luck in the other direction was a mother lode: a sprawling, subterranean book market.

I had heard about how booksellers in Yerevan sold their wares in a particular pedestrian underpass, but I had pictured a more North American-style underpass, which in my imagination resembled a road running beneath a narrow, old-fashioned bridge. This, on the other hand, was a collection of wide passages that crisscrossed beneath the intersection above, with books literally stacked floor to ceiling, many covered in dust. On both the tables and shelves sat all kinds of old books, including several complete sets of encyclopedias with gold lettering still perfectly formed on their green leather bindings, but there were newer books too, their covers shiny and bright amid tables covered in dingy paperback editions of Russian thrillers and science fiction, books I wouldn't have looked at twice except that the Cyrillic titles gave them an exotic appearance. The majority of the books had Cyrillic letters on their covers, leftover from the time when Russian was the dominant language of education, but there were also many Armenian titles, some of which must have been written by Armenians. Still, the one that caught my eye again and again was the Armenian translation of Antoine de St-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince*. Every bookseller seemed to have at least one copy, its cover a clean white beacon in an ocean of worn, musty volumes.

When we did eventually make it to Republic Square, a truly enormous

square ringed by a collection of pink sandstone Soviet-era government buildings, I finally found an indication that the city was doing something to celebrate its international book status: hanging between the pillars at the History Museum of Armenia were huge banners proclaiming Yerevan as World Book Capital.

We paid 4,500 drams (about \$10) each, and walked up to the third floor. The exhibit, dedicated to the five hundredth anniversary of Armenian printing, carried us through three rooms at the back, and luckily the interpretation cards were printed in both Armenian and English. Armenians have been printing with presses since shortly after Guttenberg printed the Bible, but the history of their printing extends far beyond that, back to the time of cuneiform characters hammered into rock, several examples of which sat in museum cases, their lettering hardly faded. From there, the exhibit chronicled the advances in Armenian writing, charting the changes and the challenges that led to the creation of the Armenian alphabet by the monk Mesrop Mashtots in 405 CE. Manuscripts and translations written in Armenian were produced almost immediately; copies of various Bible translations, featuring letters so small they seemed impossible to decode, were laid open behind glass. So important was Mashtots's 32-letter creation that, after his death, he was granted sainthood in the Armenian church.

Since I speak absolutely no Armenian, when wandering through this exhibit I was at no point distracted by trying to read the books laid open to illustrate the various scripts, painting and printing techniques on display. While I would normally see this as a hindrance, in this case it was for the best. The

interpretive panels were presented in both Armenian and English, and I like to think that had the content of the books on display been relevant, they would have been translated as well.

Nonetheless, this early written Armenian remains something to take note of. As the country experienced periods of lost statehood, the exhibit guide explained, the language was its bastion of strength, allowing Armenians to maintain their culture independent of who was in control. Although spoken traditions can be very strong, writing down history and culture further protects them, and allows them to be kept hidden during the reign of an unfriendly nation.

The exhibit ended abruptly with the turn of the eighteenth century. Certainly more books were printed after that time, but either the curator ran out of space in the exhibition hall or decided that more modern books and manuscripts weren't of interest. It certainly wasn't for lack of documents, though, as Armenian manuscripts are housed in huge museums around the world, with one large one within walking distance of the museum. (We tried to visit, but it was closed, with no indication of when it might reopen.) For an exhibit that had, up until that point proceeded with such attention to detail and chronology, it was jarring to find that it ended with no information about modern Armenian publishers and certainly no looking ahead to ebooks or the impact of technology on printing.

Initially, this lack of attention to technology was comforting. I was pleased to see an exhibit so staunchly about the printed word and the objects it is found

in. In that context, I thought, ebooks aren't relevant. But the more I consider it, the more I worry that an exhibit about printing chose to ignore the modern context. Casting the beauty and importance of the physical book into a historical context is dangerous, because – from my Western perspective, anyhow – that seems to doom physical books to the past.

As I looked at the books in the Armenian exhibit, it was Skibsrud's *The Sentimentalists* that I thought of most and not the trade paperback edition of Miriam Toew's *A Complicated Kindness* sitting on my bedside table a few blocks away. It often feels like we've come so far from where we started, but for all the innovations and modifications to printing itself, the form of the physical book hasn't changed much in 500 years: we no longer have to cut our own pages, but the essential structure and function have remained the same, which is certainly something worthy of celebration.

## THREE STUDIES OF FRUIT

BY GILLIAN SAVIGNY

illustration by Ethan Rilly



Have I painted these scenes?  
Or merely collected them?  
I will try to display them  
in pure colours, simplest  
form.

i.

First: the orange of an orange<sup>1</sup>

in the dining room, Caroline  
is cutting the fruit for me  
and I am sitting on her lap  
when a cow rushes past the window

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<sup>1</sup>My father kept nine orange trees in the hothouse at Shrewsbury—a collection that rivaled the Orangery at Kew.

startling me so I startle the knife  
and it bites<sup>2</sup> my thumb  
between the knuckles.

I do not remember the cut itself  
but the pain must have acted like a  
flash—citrus spark sting—  
illuminating the moment  
for my memory to capture.<sup>3</sup>

ii.

The outline of a house  
and a small shop.

The house I am staying in  
while on vacation with my family

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<sup>2</sup>I use the verb ‘to bite’ here not in a metaphorical sense. A knife may be thought of literally as an evolution of our teeth that has taken place through the mind. A knife is a tooth we carry in our hands. In this way, the injury I sustained as a child may be compared to the accidental biting of one’s own cheek. I still carry the scar.

<sup>3</sup>In January 1839, a brief notice appears in the journal of the Académie des sciences introducing the daguerreotype process. To encourage the French government to offer the process as a free gift to the world, Dominique François Jean Arago reminds officials of the fleet of artists Napoleon took to Egypt to record discoveries made during his campaign. The daguerreotype, he claims, would make the same undertaking less expensive and improve its accuracy and speed.

and the shop contains a shopkeeper  
who offers me a fig<sup>4</sup> in exchange  
for a kiss from the maidservant—  
a good trade to a four-year-old  
and better yet when I find the fig  
is not one but two, fresh fragrant  
ripe purple, both of them.

Later, I am locked in a room,  
an attic, for being naughty  
and I try to break the windows to escape,  
but at the window I get caught  
in the view:  
the sea.

We stayed there for weeks,  
my family always in the background  
where I can't make them out.

iii.

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<sup>4</sup>The ape and the fig have carved their initials into our genes. We can trace all of our arts, of which memory is the first, back to the fragrance of dates—the fruit-eater and the invisible flower.

A cottage, shaded  
by plum trees,

inhabited by a hermit—an old man  
with white hair and a beard  
that seems to stretch to the floor—  
who gives us plums.

I do not know why this scene  
impressed itself upon my mind<sup>5</sup> –  
the taste of the plums, their rich indigo<sup>6</sup>,  
an indistinct fear of the old man. What instinct—  
hunger, pleasure, fear of death—  
grabbed hold of it?

To get to the cottage, we crossed  
a broad stream in a carriage.  
I remember the white foaming water.  
I had heard stories  
of people drowning.

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<sup>5</sup> Memory uses light and sensation to make its pictures, then pours the solution down the drain.

<sup>6</sup> Green is the primary colour from which all others descend. I am told that ancient Roman texts contain instructions for making purple dye from damascene skins. The ruins of their camps are littered with pits. For my own part, eating the sign of Caesar out of hand is a sour experience.

## SUICIDE AS A SORT OF PRESENT: THE CULT OF DFW

BY TIM JACOBS  
FOR THE FLAWLESS.

*Reviewed:* Every Love Story is a Ghost Story: A Life of David Foster Wallace, by D.T. Max (Viking, 2012)

You are, unfortunately, a scholar<sup>7</sup> of the works of the late David Foster Wallace (suicide, a trellis-and-belt hanging, Sept.12, 2008).<sup>8</sup> Early in 2002, while researching what would become your dissertation on DFW's novel *Infinite Jest*,<sup>9</sup> you submitted a query to *Harvard Magazine*<sup>10</sup> regarding the source of a (perhaps real?) quotation from a DFW short story: ". . . that every love story is also [a

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<sup>7</sup> To be precise, you are "a *Canadian* scholar" to the author of the work presently under consideration (Max 288, your emphasis added). You also note, as it were, that today's use of footnotes does not represent a winking grad-schoolish *homage* to DFW's trademark style: you just know that there's lots of peripheral insiderish stuff perhaps of interest to the potential reader of the DFW biography, and that notes may just be the best way to convey that stuff.

<sup>8</sup> DFW's *autopsy*.

<sup>9</sup> Jacobs, John Timothy. "The Eschatological Imagination: Mediating David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*." Unpublished dissertation. McMaster University, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> *Harvard Magazine*, "Chapter & Verse: a correspondence corner for not-so-famous lost words," March 2002.

ghost story. . ."<sup>11</sup> Ten years later you receive an email—"SUBJECT: Got yr email from Matt Bucher"<sup>12</sup>—from a D.T. Max Research Assistant, who buttered your parsnips—"just wanted to say I adore your Brothers Incandenza essay (Im sure you get that alot)"<sup>13</sup>—about the source of the quotation. When the R.A. told you that D.T. Max, author of "The Unfinished: David Foster Wallace's Struggle to Surpass Infinite Jest,"<sup>14</sup> would use the quotation for his title, you knew you'd have to review it—if only to find the source of the quotation.<sup>15</sup>

Your review copy was a seriously uncorrected proof. You know from having reviewed proofs before<sup>16</sup> that one should ignore indiscretions, but sentences like this—"In another [Mark Leyner] story a father lives in his

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<sup>11</sup> Quickly now: (i) the quotation's editorial interpolation is part of the apparatus of the fiction; (ii) the story is "Tri-Stan: I Sold Sisse Nar to Ecko," *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*. Little, Brown: New York, 1999. 209; (iii) the expression also appears somewhere in *The Pale King*—without the interpolated article ("[a]")—DFW's posthumous, Frankensteined novel, which you've not read yet because the whole DFW Industry is so depressing, so sue me, you say; (iv) Nick Maniatis, founder of the—largely—reliable DFW fansite, *The Howling Fantods*, informs that D.T. Max himself "revealed that the first[-]time appearance of the phrase[,] ['every love story is [also] a ghost story[,]'] is in a letter Wallace ascribes to Virginia Woolf on the Merv Griffin show." You don't get it either.

<sup>12</sup> *Wallace-I list-serv* gate-keeper and DFW-encyclopedia incarnate.

<sup>13</sup> Jacobs, Timothy. "The Brothers Incandenza: Translating Ideology in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 49.3 (2007): 265-292—and, no, you don't get that a lot.

<sup>14</sup> *The New Yorker*, 9 March 2009.

<sup>15</sup> R.A.: "I've got reason to believe it is a quot[ation] from (or a paraphrasing of) Virginia Woolf, perhaps on [sic] her essay[,] "Henry James's Ghost Stories[,] [Times Literary Supplement, 22 December 1921, available online for an extortionate £5, which you paid] but I haven't had the chance to take a look at the full text of the thing." You found nothing resembling the mysterious quotation in your reading of VW's essay, sadly.

<sup>16</sup> Like William T. Vollmann's surprisingly clean and massive proof of *Imperial*.

basement centrifuging mouse hybridoma"—(155) give some pause. You had to use three bookmarks: one for the "Notes," another for the "Additional Sources, By Chapter" notes, and a third for the "Endnotes" section nearly identical to the AS,BC notes. You'd hoped that Penguin would harmonize this weird bibliographic trinity for the final edition (they didn't)<sup>17</sup>. And there's a bit of Whisky Tango Foxtrot to the notes themselves. Chapter Six's note three, for example, is a lengthy Jr. Freud affair about mother-children relationships and "Infinite Jest," the samizdat video cartridge in IJ, but the primary text is about an irrelevant IJ character. Most enigmatic of all is that the whole quotation/book-title mystery is never resolved: it comes up in an early note, but goes without discussion. Discussing DFW's first published short story, Max writes that "'The Planet Trillaphon as it Stands in Relation to the Bad Thing,' [. . . ] is more original in subject than in style" (35), and then the note says

That 'every love story is a ghost story' is a thought that stayed with Wallace from the beginning of his writing career to the end [. . . ] From 'Planet Trillaphon' to the posthumous Pale King[,] moments of happy love in Wallace's works are rare. (312 n. 8)

You don't get how a statement about DFW's first short story's subject/style has anything to do with (i) the mysterious quotation or why it mattered to DFW (he doesn't even use the expression in "Planet Trillaphon"), or (ii) why it comes up here then, or (iii) the concept of "happy love" in DFW's

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<sup>17</sup> D.T. Max himself graciously loaned you his personal copy of the finished edition at the eleventh hour, no thanks to Penguin INC (Canada and USA) as they were obdurately unhelpful, highly bureaucratic, and surprisingly territorial.

oeuvre, or (iv) what “happy love” even is anyway. Further, if the phrase was so important to DFW, and you liked it so much yourself that you appropriated it for the title of your history-making first DFW biography, don’t you think that you should maybe talk about it in detail and where it comes from and why it matters? You further wonder why it only receives such second-class citizen’s treatment in a footnote of all places.

Max wants a good story and is willing to reach for it. He refers to DFW’s review-essay on American usage<sup>18</sup> to make a specious biographical connection to drug-use: “In a later essay, he would remember the problem with getting high, recalling how under the drug’s influence one eats [. . . ],” and then quotes liberally from “Tense Present” (Max 11). But this is disingenuous, quoting far out of context; DFW is dismantling the colour fallacy in his essay, arguing against the possibility of a private language. He is decidedly not recalling anything about his personal drug use. It isn’t a personal essay. DFW uses a witty analogy to show how all featherless bipeds see green the same way—the essay’s example is of a kid on a couch, having eaten ChipsAhoy! cookies, and watching a televised PGA event, under the influence of cannabis, wondering if what he sees as green is the same as what others call the colour green. This kind of reach for a putative correspondence between DFW and his essays and fiction undermines the credibility of what is an otherwise thoroughly documented bio.<sup>19</sup> Stick to the life,

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<sup>18</sup> “Tense Present,” *Harper’s magazine*, April 2001. 39-58.

<sup>19</sup> In an email (18 July 2012) Matt Bucher confirmed that the book’d been “fact-checked half to death—anything that could not be doubly substantiated was cut.” You believe him.

you say—there's plenty there.

But the book is entirely irresistible, and will be received that way for the DFW aficionado and novice alike.<sup>20</sup> It's worth humping through the silly Intentional Fallacy fields and superficial treatment of the fiction—"the car, an AMC Pacer, would later surface, with Wallace's mother's Gremlin, in *The Pale King*" (33). And the lit-crit bumbling: "though it [*The Planet Trillaphon*'] was not pure autobiography [right, because it's fiction], the authorial "I" [the writer?] and the "I" of the narrator [so, just the narrator?] parallel one another in the story [where else?] in a way [such as?] they never would again in Wallace's fiction [because DFW didn't write cross-over fiction?]; the sense of dismay at being mentally ill is still fresh [?]" (34, your emphasis). And the first-draft-like confusions: "the layers of asserting and then hedging those assertions to assert slightly more emphatically and imaginatively that would constitute Wallace's style are beginning to form" (34). DFW dramatized our interior experience and the horror of trying to articulate such in meaningful, sincere English for another person—for the lonely pleasure of the other. The fiction is not an AutoCAD rendering of DFW's mind or motives or anything, you say.

Ultimately, however, Daniel T. Max has changed the way you think about David Foster Wallace. The book is a revelation: you discover more than you ever wanted to know. And much of what you thought you knew about him through his sculpted public persona—"both affected and genuine in some way," for the

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<sup>20</sup> You know that publishers' PR flaks scan reviews for just such clipped phrases that can be manipulated to promote future printings, but you can't help but say it anyway because it's true.

novelist Robert Boswell (57)—was a bit wrong.<sup>21</sup> DFW was a sick man. And he did what all writers do: he wrote what he knew: his sick self.<sup>22</sup> You see that he was a sex addict like IJ’s Orin Incandenza (especially with the whole MILF-thing), and an alcoholic—who yearned in sobriety for “just one tall cool frosted bar-glass of Wild Turkey” (146); that he was “jealous” of “that fucker” William T. Vollmann (316 n. 19), “so sickly searingly envious” of “Vollmann, [Mark] Leyner and even David Fuckwad Leavitt” (143); that he was a whiner (who bitched about velvety teaching jobs, which people’d got for him); that he could be vicious, once snarling at Harvard professor Stanley Cavell in a seminar to “make himself intelligible” (133)<sup>23</sup>; and was cripplingly insecure—an occupational hazard, sure, but not for this guy, you’d always felt. Worst of all, you discover that DFW suffered from “black-eyed red-outs” (151), and rammed a car in anger (150), and contemplated murder (162). Former girlfriends, a long list of temporary occupiers of his heart, are to be felt the worst for; DFW was not the

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<sup>21</sup> Including some sugary stuff you’d said in the *Rain Taxi Review of Books*.

<sup>22</sup> It’s not surprising that “The Planet Trillaphon” ends with a readerly fill-in-the lacuna—“Except that is highly silly when you think about what I said before concerning the fact that the Bad Thing is really [you]”—considering that DFW saw himself as diseased/sick and admired Norman O. Brown’s work (he dedicated “Girl With Curious Hair” to N.O.B.), and whose *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* posits for its broad thesis that “the disease [is] called man” (3). You felt like you saw DFW’s figurative fingerprints all over this book when you first read it, especially the chapters “Art and Eros” and “Language and Eros,” as they’re like a guide to DFW’s mature aesthetics. Highly recommended.

<sup>23</sup> Stanley Cavell, replying to your email query, shared this anecdote: “I was told several years ago [. . .] that Wallace came to a seminar of mine once and was offended by something I said or the way I said it, and never returned. Since I don’t regard myself as careless of other people’s feelings, I was pained to learn of my bad behaviour, and can only hope that it was an aberration on my part. I do not recall the incident” (26 January 2002). It seems that DFW was behaving badly.

type to let the grass grow under his relational feet, and always had a spare GF. He never really considered that he was hurting them, either, which surprised you, considering that his fiction is centred on empathy. Although not initially. Part of the intrigue of this book is observing his writerly maturation. In a letter he writes that he did “not feel even the hint of an obligation to an entity called READER” (145). But later you witness his softening: “I feel like I have changed, learned so much about what good writing ought to be” (158), as he ultimately breaks forth into, as he writes to Little, Brown editor Michael Pietsch in, you presume, 1992 (uncited letter), a statement of artistic faith: “I want to improve as a writer, and I want to author things that both restructure worlds and make living people feel stuff” (173).

Infinite Jest was the result of his restructuring of worlds, and you feel it to be the finest present any reader of this dark age could ever hope for. But it is his *felo-de-se* that has given rise to the sillier worlds orbiting him and his fine work: the academic careerism; the quest to publish his Post-It notes; the happy coincidence of finding more material for *The Pale King* just in time for the trade-paperback; publishing a 3,500-word speech as a book; the pilgrimages of tenure-jockeys and amateurs to his shrine at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas<sup>24</sup>; and the constant *gedenkschriften* and conferences where wince-inducing honorifics like “Our Man” mated with laugher terms like “post-post-

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<sup>24</sup> Qv. for two takes on the Wallace Industry: (1) “David Foster Wallace: the Death of the Author and the Birth of a Discipline,” the *Irish Journal of American Studies* (June 2010); and (2) “The Afterlife of David Foster Wallace,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 6, 2011.

modern” are bandied about.<sup>25</sup> And sometimes you feel like you can almost hear him, faintly, buzzing in your brain-voice, saying in his slow and deliberate way, it’s okay, and but so just abide.

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<sup>25</sup> By academics at “Footnotes: New Directions in DFW Studies,” a conference held at CUNY’s graduate center, November 2009. See Scott F. Parker’s delightful account of the conference, “Notes from Footnotes: New Directions in David Foster Wallace Studies,” with its snoring moderator, psychotic philosophy professor, and that poor hurt guy from the City College of NY, whom you wish all the best.

## NOT NOTHING: A REVIEW OF ARTIST'S STATEMENTS

BY CINDY BLAŽEVIĆ

[British artist] Damien Hirst: What do you mean, an artist's statement?

[Art writer] Sarah Borusso: Just a statement of purpose or... it's up to you really, we run them just to give a context to your work... It's kind of up to you.

DH: OK, I can do one now.

SB: OK. It's a kind of separate thing from the interview.

DH: No, I can think of a really good one.

SB: Oh, you can?

DH: The only interesting people are the people who say, "Fuck off. This is what I think."

SB: [Laughter].

*"Artist's Statement" originally published as part of an interview with Damien Hirst, Sarah Borusso, Hotwired magazine (1997).*

Few tasks strike fear in the heart of a visual artist so much as writing an artist's statement, that most dreaded summation.

In essence, it's just a written description of one's work. Though not required reading, it has become a necessary cost of doing business, a way for artists to help viewers (or curators, peers, critics) understand and discuss their work. It sounds simple but is actually a painstaking process that makes artists

uncomfortably vulnerable. Writing such a statement requires a difficult introspection that lays bare the often insecure train-of-thought that was going through your mind when you positioned the paintbrush just so on the canvas, your subject just so in front of your lens, your sculpting knife just so on a lump of clay. It sets the tone. And, often, art does not speak for itself.

As illustrated by Hirst above, an artist's statement can take pretty much any form. Though there are no hard and fast rules governing the practice, most will agree on a few guidelines.

Writer and curator Shannon Anderson instructs acolytes on the finer points of creating artist's statements at Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography. She distills the process down to these basic elements: why you make your art, what it signifies, how you make it, what it's made out of and, perhaps briefly, what it means to you. She says an artist's statement "summarizes your overall practice, translates what you do visually into words, and explains, contextualizes and justifies your approach to your work."

Canadian artist Ron Martin feels so strongly about the subject that he offered an "Artist's Statement As a Model for Artists" in his 2011 solo exhibition at Christopher Cutts Gallery in Toronto. Like Shannon, who insists that the language of an artist's statement should not frustrate the reader, Martin warns that an artist who doesn't "mind his Ps and Qs" could set off a chain of events that will ultimately lead to unhappiness for himself and anyone who has had the misfortune of reading his flawed artist's statements.

He's right. A badly written statement can blanch faces and curdle baby's

milk.

In their book *Art/Work* (Free Press, 2009), New York City gallerist Heather Darcy Bhandari and art lawyer Jonathan Melber caution against using the following phrases:

“My work is intuitive.”

“My work is about the macro and micro.”

“My work is about the organic and synthetic.”

“My work is a personal journey.”

“My work is about my experiences.”

“I pour my soul into each piece.”

“I’ve been drawing since I was three years old.”

Unless your soul produces Picasso’s *Guernica*, you should never mention your soul.

Croatian artist Mladen Stilinović knows that language is everything. Stilinović, who has made a career of language limitations, learned from Wittgenstein that “the limit of my language is the limit of my work.”

The Zagreb-based artist offers an excellent example of an artist’s statement. As a follow-up to the 1978 piece titled “Artist at Work” (see photos), in which he photo-documented himself in various states of sleep, Stilinović wrote “The Praise of Laziness” (1993), in which he offers a very reasonable explanation of his “lazy” method:

As an artist, I learned from both East (socialism) and West (capitalism). Of course, now when the borders and political systems have changed, such an experience will be no

longer possible. But what I have learned from that dialogue, stays with me. My observation and knowledge of Western art has lately led me to a conclusion that art cannot exist... any more in the West. This is not to say that there isn't any. Why cannot art exist any more in the West? The answer is simple. Artists in the West are not lazy. Artists from the East are lazy; whether they will stay lazy now when they are no longer Eastern artists, remains to be seen.

Laziness is the absence of movement and thought, dumb time – total amnesia. It is also indifference, staring at nothing, non-activity, impotence. It is sheer stupidity, a time of pain, futile concentration. Those virtues of laziness are important factors in art. Knowing about laziness is not enough, it must be practised and perfected. Artists in the West are not lazy and therefore not artists but rather producers of something... Their involvement with matters of no importance, such as production, promotion, gallery system, museum system, competition system (who is first), their preoccupation with objects, all that drives them away from laziness, from art. Just as money is paper, so a gallery is a room.

Artists from the East were lazy and poor because the entire system of insignificant factors did not exist. Therefore they had time enough to concentrate on art and laziness. Even when they did produce art, they knew it was in vain, it was nothing. (excerpt from *The Praise of Laziness*, Mladen Stilinović, 1993)

Stilinović's work is strongly influenced by the politics of his country and the war that followed the fall of socialism. His statement suggests this historical context, his philosophical influences, and the motivations behind his work, even as he concludes the text by proclaiming that laziness is "the mother of perfection" and that "there is no art without laziness." I'm convinced. Here is an artist's statement that is not in vain, not nothing.

**EVEN THE POOR WILL  
BURY THEIR DEAD**

**BY EMILY HOLTON**



*Even the poor will bury their dead.*