

OBDURATE EYE #7

JANUARY 2021



THE OBDURATE EYE #7 (November 2020) is what Garth Spencer does at 4240 Perry Street, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V5N 3X5 if nobody stops him. You can send complaints and kudos and rants to him by mail, or by email to garth.van.spencer@gmail.com.

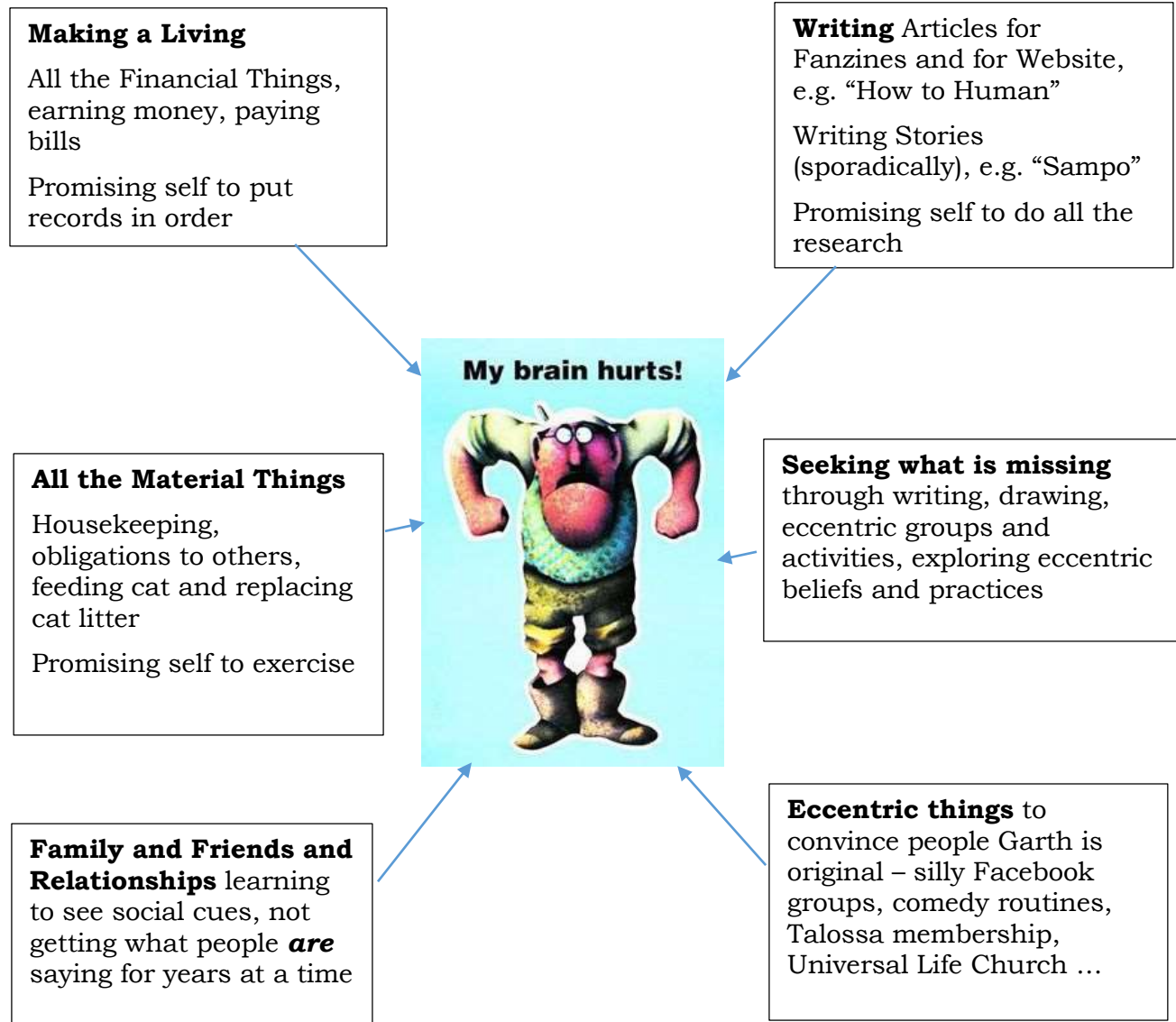
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Art Credits

Cover.....	Al Sirois
Page 1.....	Internet clip art & Garth's layout
pp. 4, 5, 6.....	Pictures of my cat
page 10.....	William Rotsler
page 14.....	Burrard Inlet Fan Fellowship (my photo?)
page 16.....	Internet cartoon
page 21.....	Internet clip art

What It's Like Inside Garth's Head



Fannish News

Moss Whelan, a published author, has become Chair of the B.C. Science Fiction Association, and has thrown himself into new club activities with enthusiasm. Among other ventures he has opened the “BCSFA Coffeehouse”, which I gather means holding open house at his home, and started the Rainshine Awards, with a specific focus on First Nations SF writers. Since there are an increasing number of SF publications from other languages and nations besides the Anglosphere – stories, anthologies, and collections in translation, from Russia, Asia and Africa and South America – I guess this makes sense.

I’m bringing myself up to speed on this age. Either my age or my white privilege is showing.

Well. The first time anyone brought up the issue of Canadian identity with respect to science fiction, some people must have been baffled, as if someone began leading a conversation into Hydraulic Ballet, or a worldwide conspiracy led by Belgians. The first time Moss Whelan, the new Chair of BCSFA, brought up the issue of First Nations representation or Canadian genocide with respect to science fiction, I had a similar sense of bafflement. But I can well imagine that there are Micmac, Cree, Blackfoot and Salish writers and stories that should be represented in SF.

#

My friend R. Graeme Cameron won an Aurora Award at When Words Collide last August, for his small-press magazine *Polar Borealis*!

The Aurora Awards are fan-voted awards for Canadian SF, and related categories of Canadian work. A recent convention, When Words Collide in Calgary, hosted the awards ceremony.

Graeme wrote:

“Very pleased my Aurora Award arrived in the mail today... my 2020 "Best Fan Writing and Publication" Aurora (for editing *Polar Borealis*) ...

“So, am inspired to finish my review of the When Words Collides Festival for tomorrow's Amazing Stories column.

“Then on to preparing the September issue of *Polar Borealis*!

“I'm telling you, being a fannish/semi-pro publisher and editor is a heck of a lot of fun!

“(Yes, I know, writers are only allowed one exclamation point per lifetime, and I've exceeded my quota. Mark it down to enthusiasm!)”

Ruminations

R. Graeme Cameron also edits *BCSFazine* these days (a local clubzine/ newsletter). In a column I write for him, recently I posed the question: can we, indeed should we, start a few more BCSFA activities? Find a clubhouse? Or set

up an online fannish display of memorabilia? Or offer VCON T-shirts, program books, and other things for sale? Or set up a fanzine lending library?

Maybe even start our own fannish press, like NESFA and LASFA? (Or at least I can get off the pot and do something with my own “imprint”, Stop Press.)

I don't expect a great enthusiastic response, but people could surprise me. Different groups of fans have different levels of energy and enthusiasm at different times, and the B.C. Science Fiction Association has been fairly laid-back, not to say low in energy, in recent years. Then again, I probably keep suggesting oldfart activities that don't really motivate people now.

#

We had some controversies this year in eAPA (an electronic APA that I edit).

For one thing, a member offered pictures of clothes-optional costumes. Apparently some costumers engage in art mostly composed with body paint, and one of our new members wanted to display some samples. We decided to be stick-in-the-muds. But I can imagine there are other places for this kind of art, and arguably there should be. Actually I don't really know to evaluate this.

For another thing, in early summer we have had an issue with the availability of mailings. Apparently, some of our members had difficulty unzipping the zipped PDF files archived at eFanzines.com, so I stopped using passwords. This generated some complaints that without passwords, the APA lost the exclusivity, or privacy, that people expect in APAs. I don't know how to evaluate this, either – I didn't know that “privacy” in this sense was a necessary feature of APAs.

The matter struck me again, while composing my contribution to this mailing, and while reading *Purrrsonal Mewsings*. R-Laurraine Tutihasi presents this both as a contribution to Stipple-Apa and as an independent fanzine, with the result that her mailing comments may be seen apart from this APA. Is the “privacy” of APAs not a universal fannish convention, then?

I am constantly tripping over “norms” that some people expect everyone to conform to, but that others have never even heard of.

#

This segues to another issue that may be a non-issue to others. I saw in Stipple-Apa #35 that Bill Thomasson, S. Rayne, Cy Chauvin and Maetta Odum have been talking about the formal instruction that used to exist in etiquette, in conduct, even in how to walk.

In one way I sort of wish I had some formal instruction in our culture's accepted behaviour, because I sure God didn't absorb it subliminally. This doesn't just include maintaining a normal social distance (three to four feet, before the plague appeared), waiting to speak, opening doors for women, or waiting for a phone to ring X times before hanging up. (I was once told that X equalled 10, in business practice. More inconsistent expectations.) There is also the little

matter of how to detect and interpret tones of voice, stance, facial expressions, and gestures. I can't even detect this stuff most of the time, much less interpret it accurately. John Bartley has kindly sent me a work that documents body language extensively.

In another way I realize kind of instruction generally lags behind contemporary social norms by at least 20 to 30 years, and is distorted by classist value judgments. At least that's how I explain the attitudes in my home town.

But you've heard all this before.

§

The chapters of *The Sampo* novel I have written so far have mostly appeared in Stipple-Apa. Now, I have to figure out where the story goes from here.

My fiction writing was stalled for weeks, even months. After an initial burst of enthusiasm when I just wrote what occurred to me, I start trying to figure out logically what should happen next, which kills the sense of fun and invention and imagination. *The Sampo* is set in a post-earthquake scenario in the Pacific Northwest. It is not really a post-apocalyptic scenario, but the story lines focus on several survivors in a region oddly cut off from the outside world; work and food and medicine are oddly regimented in the cities; oddly, because it takes longer than it should for emergency responders and foreign aid to come in from elsewhere in the continent. I know what developing conflicts, and comic relief, I want to write. But I feel now I *should* read through Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine* to figure out what is probably going to happen, and I *should* do my homework on rural B.C. and First Nations reserves, so that the interactions and events are not utterly absurd.

This writer's block, in my experience, is the normal result of worrying about What I Should Be Doing.

The story also features a minimal science fiction maguffin (a sort of 3D printer and chemical reactor, modified to produce from waste wood some of the things people most need, filter paper and fibreboard and even a starchy tofu-like food product, for example). It begins to feel like an unnecessary intrusion in the story.



Yvette being cute

Things I Said on Facebook

Effects of social distancing and lockdown isolation:

My soulrot and mental shrinkage proceeds apace. Comfort me with flagons, stay me with apple cider, for I am sick of pandemic restrictions. Life, like a tin of sardines, bears all its sons away. Dust on the floor. Sloth consumes me. I have no goal. From the state which is above and beyond, from whimsical nihilism and old school sitcoms I forge my goal. God is the Three Stooges. The fire that through the green fuse drives the flower. Ocelot mangrove. Albatross.

Remembering failures, or lessons in life:

At first I valued communication above all, because I wanted to find out what the hell I had to do to be good enough to live with my family, or at least overcome their disgusted exasperation. Later I valued responsibility and a sense of duty, partly because I felt I had to live up to something, if I could just figure out what it was. Later yet I valued giving what I could contribute, to whatever community or interest group I joined, hoping I could figure out how to be a part of something, and hoping that would make me whole. Now I value emotional self-reliance, figuring that you have to be good enough for yourself, because you cannot live on being good enough for anyone else.

(Comment to myself: is this a life?)

Remembering accomplishments:

I have babysat two-year-olds. I have invented mocha tea, and the Royal Swiss Navy. I have been an amateur editor for my own zines, for club zines, for convention progress reports, and a national newszine. Several times I almost mastered a foreign language. I have given blood more than 75 times. I have erected a website, twice. I have loved and lost, alienated at least 500 people, determined why social engineering attempts are overwhelmed by complex chaotic systems, and discovered that English is becoming a family of mutually unintelligible languages. Also I taught a cat to say "woof".

(Comment to myself: is this a life?)



Yvette wants to snuggle but is feeling miffed

Tao Teh Zine (a parody)

O loneliness, how long will you last?
All fen are so shining-bright
As if they were going to the great convention,
As if they were ascending to the hotel venue in spring.
Only I am so reluctant, I have not yet been given a membership:
Like an infant, yet unable to laugh;
Unquiet, roving as if homeless.
All fen have disposable funds for travel,
Only I am as if forgotten.
I have the heart of a neo: so confused, so dark.
Fen of the world are shining, alas, so shining-bright;
only I am as if obtuse.
Fen of the world are so clever, alas, so clever;
Only I am as if locked into my apartment,
Unquiet, alas, like the TV news,
Turbulent, alas, unceasingly.
All fen have their purpose,
Only I am futile like a mundane.
I alone am different from all fen:
But I consider it worthy
To seek nourishment from the zines received in trade.



Yvette notices something

**JOIN EAPA
AND LEARN
QUAINT AND CURIOUS FORGOTTEN LORE!**

eAPA, one of the longest-running electronic Amateur Publication Associations, is a great place to find and learn Things Fans Were Not Meant to Know! Words that rhyme with orange, for instance, or the curse that sank Atlantis, or the REAL reason why the British Empire is no more!

YOU, TOO can share your Forbidden Knowledge of the Lost Civilization of Sitnalta, why the fabulous city of Temlaham was buried under a landslide, and the Hideous Sign now covered by the Site C Dam! JOIN the international quest to save humanity from the approaching Belgian mind control threat to us all!

Or just have fun writing fannish contributions to a monthly APA.

Write Garth Spencer at garth.van.spencer@gmail.com for the eAPA Guidelines, and check out the password-free October 2020 mailing on eFanzines.com today!

My Comedy Routines

There are a number of flights of fancy that I thought would make good stand-up comedy routines, and some are merely amateur philosophy that bores other people. In retrospect they need a bit of workshopping. How funny do they actually strike you?

Night Thoughts: Is economics a version of astrology? Why didn't the European Union adopt Esperanto as a working language? How many Americans would vote for annexation by Canada? Have you ever wanted to distribute Frequently Asked Questions sheet about life skills to people who really need them? Should judges who issue death sentences be required to carry them out? What does "should" mean? Why are the laces on sneakers usually too long?

Purpose of civilization. Is the purpose of civilization to create a world that produces musical comedy?

Religion. Is the function of religion simply to restore emotional well-being to stressed and not very insightful people? Especially when they can't do anything about the reasons they are stressed? Is the rival to religion, for the beliefs and devotion of people, not rationalism or materialism or "scientism" - but organized professional sports?

Alien Abductions. Have you ever set up a silly Facebook group just for fun? Some time ago I set up a Facebook group which I titled Alien Abductees Anonymous, which I clearly described as a support group for *abducted aliens*. Naturally, a lot of people joined who remember abduction experiences. I haven't quibbled about it, there has to be a place for people who have such experiences, but their numbers raise a question -what induces people to have abduction experiences, and if that constitutes a public mental health issue, what can be done for them? On the other hand, if and when there is anything like solid evidence enough to convince skeptical sciences, or policemen, or judges that citizens are being interfered with, how do we put a halt to alien abuse?

Life as a Simulation. I think we've been living in a badly-run virtuality for decades. You can tell there's no continuity control because things have been getting more and more absurd.

Mad Science. Why don't we have any mad scientists in Vancouver? Other world-class cities have mad scientists, why can't we? Well, I'll tell you why. It isn't the start-up costs for a secret laboratory. As intelligence agencies are painfully aware, the capital costs for biological or chemical labs aren't outstandingly high, not compared to other technologies. The real stumbling block in Vancouver – famously one of the most expensive places to live – is the cost of land, not to mention built structures. So, probably, abandoned buildings are the best sites for secret laboratories, if any are still available after the film and television industries have booked them. Besides, superheroes probably start monitoring abandoned buildings as soon as they have a masked crime-fighter outfit. By the way, who are the superheroes of Vancouver? Other world-class cities have superheroes, why can't we?

Original Presents. In 2015, because I received a lot of hospitality and support but was unable to return it, I sent everyone a belated Christmas present by email. It was a collection of amateur fiction titled, modestly, *Boring Mundane Stories*. This is sort of a companion volume to *Confabulation*, an anthology of fannish humour and stories. (Both are posted online at www.vcn.bc.ca/~garth2 for you to evaluate.)

Complexity and Overload. A number of complaints about hospitals, and utility companies, and public services, and Internet service providers make it sound like all the services are overcomplicated, or the public demand exceeds the level of attention and service they can supply. A number of complaints about earning a living wage, and supporting a family, and owning a home, or building a business made it sound like a citizen can be defined now as “someone overloaded with taxes and appointments and licensing fees”. Several experiences at work, and online, and struggling with tax forms made me wonder if life is just getting too complicated. Not only for me, but for everyone. What do we need, then? A campaign to simplify everything?

Conversation and Comedy. Is conversation the basis of stand-up comedy? Should we have a social expectation that everyone comes up with new and

original material every year? What routines are you sick and tired of hearing/seeing?

Making a List. Several times I have succeeded in making a nearly complete list of all my obligations, and activities, and projects I want to do. At last I could start prioritizing them, and allocating time to them. Of course, I found that most of my time goes to the least important and productive enterprises ... like listing all my obligations, and activities, and projects I want to do. You all know how that goes, right?

The Thinking Gap. One of the things that exasperated me about older people, as I was growing up, was their tendency to dwell on the past, to launch into tangential boring stories about things that somehow came to their minds whatever was happening or whatever was said at the moment, and usually lose whatever point they were driving at. Now, I realize that it's the *job* of someone with a longer baseline of experience to relate current events to the past – but very few people are actually taught to observe, to remember, or to keep a chain of reasoning in your mind, much less to be concise about it all. Perhaps this lack of training accounts for the forms of senility and dementia in the senior population.

Another thing that exasperated me was the fossils' expectation that I *already* knew the Edwardian and Victorian things they cared about, when they obstinately refused to *teach* these things. Now, I realize this wasn't just their foible; people of all ages forget that not everyone *already* knows what they know and care about. It's called theory of mind (or lack of it)¹.

Yet another thing that exasperated me was the seniors' tendency to lump all Young People together into one mass of indistinguishable protoplasm, as if that simplified the task of dealing with anyone younger than 60.

And now time has revenged itself on me; now I find myself doing the same things. I am as disgusted with myself as I was with my elders. *This is not progress.* This is no improvement. What do we need, then? Smart pills or something?

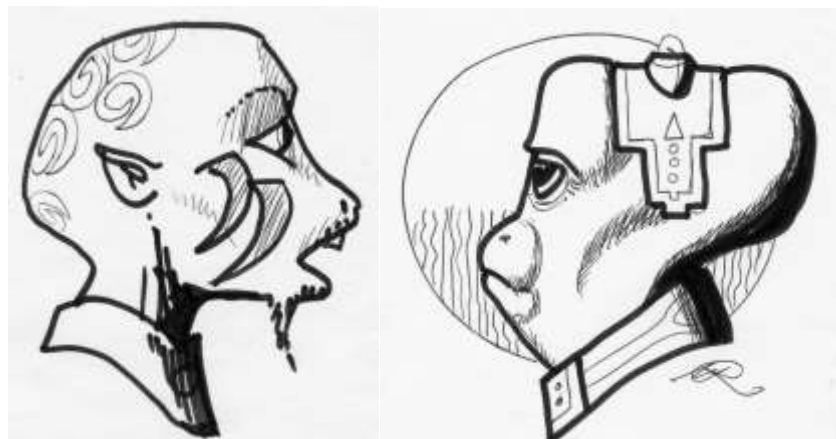
Unpopular Opinions:

1. Modern civilization, or at least our economic mode of subsistence, is defined by claiming most land and water and food as someone's property, and by leaving most of the productive work to the least-rewarded people, leaving most of the paid work to more or less underpaid people, and reserving most of the rewards to those who do little or no work.

2. The main function of government is to act as a security blanket for people who need reassurance that life is, ultimately, under control. It may also absorb the attention of people who really want to be in charge, but they have to occupy themselves somehow.

¹ I thank Michael Bertrand for pointing this out.

3. Many of the popular causes that we call political, or economic issues come down to inventing excuses to create bureaucracies, just to invent administrative work to employ people.
4. Defining politics in terms of left and right wings is a clumsy 19th-century model that doesn't work any more.
5. Many of our problems come down to being trapped in paradigms or business models that prevent us from seeing life whole, or accurately.
6. Devoting your life to the accumulation of symbolic units of exchange which, really, don't have inherent value anymore, is by definition insane.
7. Armed violence is really just a worldwide sport, which doesn't accomplish anything and is not intended to accomplish anything; and neither its players, its fans, its distributors nor its sporting goods manufacturers will admit it.
8. Most of our concerns, such as sports, fashion, protests against industrial activity, condemning homosexuality, condemning abortion, or art are simply diversions from real problems that we don't feel we can solve.
9. Divinities don't actually care what you eat, how you dress, whom you poke or how, or how much you change your environment. That's not their jurisdiction.
10. If we were interested in surviving as a civilization, as an economy, or as people, we would work out what modes of subsistence our environments could support, and restrict ourselves to them; or create new habitable environments, and clean up polluted areas into the bargain. I don't expect that to happen.



Letters

Lyn McConchie, farside1946@yahoo.com, July 1, 2020

If you want to discuss quakes at any time, I'm available. We get a steady stream of them here as you'll know. Largest local one in my years here was 6.7 in 1990. Most recent noticed was about 2 weeks ago, around 4.9 I believe.

And another good issue thoroughly enjoyed as usual.

And re - usually busy, sometimes I am watching at the right time - as I was today...

I was watching my hens this morning, and observed one of them performing strange manoeuvres. I have around twenty hens at the moment. They live - as my hens have always done - completely free-range, and old hens develop intelligence; I have seen Fawn Girl (15) and Mrs. Black (13) doing quite bright things to get food, and I think that where a hen lives to be old and had always been free-range, they build on instincts, adding information, and learning things they actually remember. This does NOT apply to the younger generation (something that may even apply in humans). And thus it was that I glanced out of the kitchen window and observed said strange manoeuvres.

I have a wood shed that holds, if properly barriered, about five cords of wood. I wait until there are around four cords, after which the wood starts to fall out of the doorway as the stack grows. I have a large sheet of heavy plywood for that, and once the stack reaches tumble-height, I place that across the inside of the doorway. The sheet is about four feet high, and the next lot of wood can be tossed into the shed, fetching up against the plywood sheet now, until the shed is almost completely full. So, as my last firewood had arrived, I placed the sheet in position. Then the weather chilled. I started taking dry wood from the shed, and to do that I removed the plywood sheet, leaving it conveniently placed at a slight angle to the hay barn door, and leaning against that. I'd brought in wood, stayed inside to do a few things, and was about to go outside again when I saw the young hen.

It was clear she intended to lay in the hay barn. She approached, passed between the hay barn door, and the plywood sheet - and emerged by the woodshed door looking puzzled. She tried again - and again emerged by the woodshed door. What she was doing, of course, was going between door and sheet, and not into the barn, but that refinement was beyond her. An hour later as I took out mail to leave in my mailbox for the rural delivery to collect, I saw that she was still trying. And an hour after that I heard despairing cackles, echoed by triumphant egg-song. The hen, desperate - and desperately confused - had done the only thing she could. (A hen's gotta do what a hen's gotta do.) I peered out, and smothered laughter. After almost three hours, junior hen had been caught short, and her egg lay without nest or shelter right in the woodshed doorway while Fawn Girl strutted out of the hay barn door, having successfully navigated the maze and laid her egg where it should be - in warmth, shelter, and comfort. Yup, it certainly pays to be an old hen.

((Does this resemble some of the behaviour in SF clubs, at conventions, in the workplace, or on the news?))

Ahrvid Engholm, ahrvid@hotmail.com, July 2, 2020

Thanks for *Obdurate Eye*, even if had to look up what "obdurate" means...

A little comment to the interesting article "The World of First Fandom". Mr. Amsbury wrote:

"Regardless of what Fred Pohl wrote in *The Way the Future Was* about fandom not yet existing in March 1933, un-organized fandom was already nearly fifteen years old. Organized fandom began in the spring and summer of 1928 in Boston, Atlanta, Chicago and, perhaps first of all, in the Eastbay area of California."

I wonder what he means with that an "unorganised fandom" existed 15 years before 1933, i.e. in 1918? The "Lovecraft Circle"? Harry Warner writes about it and called it an "eofandom". Or did he mean something else?

((Fans before there were clubs, obviously! Not everyone realizes this, but fandom has always been a demographic phenomenon, and predictably some few people in any community will develop a taste for science fiction, fantasy or horror fiction, rather before they organize clubs, much less conventions.

((But some fans are oblivious to this fact. In fact, one guy in 1980s anime fandom was so oblivious, he kept declaring there were no fans in some cities - or at least no clubs, anymore - just because he hadn't seen their publications for a while. That was Fred Patten, specifically in the C/FO Japanime organization.))

As for "Organized fandom ... in Boston, Atlanta, Chicago and ... Eastbay area of California", as far as I know the first organised fandom which included people meeting in person was the NEW YORK club The Scienceers, founded the 11th of December 1929. A lot has been written about this and 11th of December has been treated as "fandom's birthday". AFAIK other claims of fannish activity prior to the Scienceers consists of people only *corresponding* with each other.

((Which demonstrates my point.))

Hm, gotta finish. I hear that an unearthly virus is attacking mankind. We must prepare the planetary defense!

John Purcell, askance73@gmail.com, July 16, 2020

Thanks for the zine, which I finally have skimmed through for a quick ego-scan and saw your review of *Askance* #48. A quick correction in your review is in order, though: only one non-attendee actually called in sick. Joe Siclari had a very nasty head cold and didn't want to risk flying, fearful that he and his wife Edie Stern wouldn't be allowed to board the plane because of his cold. The airline might have said, "Sorry, sir, but you can't board due to possibly having the coronavirus." It turned out Joe did not have the dreaded C-virus, but merely a vicious head cold. Thank Ghu for that, and he's been healthy since mid-March.

All the other folks who called in as non-attending members had various reasons ranging from "possibly exposed to someone with coronavirus" to "just can't afford to go." As it turned out, absolutely no attending member of Corflu 37

came down with this damned disease, for which I am eternally grateful. Everyone had a good time, and the danged convention actually turned a small profit, which is being forwarded to next year's Corflu in Bristol, England. Keep your fingers crossed for that one: it's currently scheduled for late March 2021.

Well, once I finish re-reading *Obdurate Eye* #6, expect to receive another email from me with additional commentary. From what I've seen already, this issue has plenty of comment hooks.

Take care and stay healthy!

Lloyd Penney, 1706-24 Eva Rd., Etobicoke, ON, M9C 2B2, August 3, 2020

It has taken me some time, but I am yet again catching up with a pile of zines, and *The Obdurate Eye* 6 is at the top! Here come some cogent comments, I can only hope...

Looks like you've been catching up, too. I have seen a couple of stream-of-consciousness zines, but readers never seem to know what it's all about, and the faneds don't seem to know when to stop and publish, be it paper or electrons.

I haven't lived in BC for about 43 years now, but I still miss it because it was so different pre- and post- move there from BC. Arbutus trees, funny planes (propellers on the back) and Ickybicky². Probably none of that applies any more. I spend a couple of summers there, and never found it all that warm... Not only does Vancouver Island get horrifically hot temperatures, England does, too.

((Depends on which city you're in, and on the decade.))

Projects? I make a big list, and take great pleasure in crossing them off. Some of those projects have been on that list for several years, and I do intend to get to them. At least I don't take the projects off the list without doing them. It's a gentle reminder.

The idea of a fandom for just about any interest under the sun is a good one, for it brings us all together to see that we're not the only ones who are interested. Unfortunately, we also tend to build ourselves up by putting others down, so there are rivalries and feuds. I see the phrase 'toxic fandom' too often these days, and the Hugo mess from the virtual New Zealand Worldcon illustrates that idea just a bit more. One fandom I have had a look at had one young fan appear to threaten the life of the creator if he didn't make his characters fall in love with each other. Discouraging in many ways. I could be a grumpy old coot, and say that fandom wasn't like that in MY day, but every generation wants something different, and some have better manners than others. After the afore-

² **ICBC**: The Insurance Corporation of British Columbia. At one point in the late 1970s or early 1980s, British Columbians were dissatisfied with increasing auto insurance fees and limited awards for MVA injuries, from the several private insurance providers, so ICBC was created as an alternative. Now, in the early 21st century, British Columbians are dissatisfied with ICBC's auto insurance fees and limited awards for MVA injuries.

mentioned Hugo mess, I declared on Facebook... “The more I read about what happened at Worldcon every year, the more I don't want to go back... Sexism, racism, politics...it's got it all, and more. No thank you, and sorry to Washington and Chicago.” It used to be a very good time for me, and Yvonne and I had some good times, rand some good parties, and helped to win a Worldcon. No more. I suspect SF fandom and me have generally parted company, and other projects do beckon, like steampunk, and working on the various magazines and books arising from the modern incarnation of Amazing Stories.

My loc...yes, steampunk can be fun for us, because Yvonne and I have always had an interest in costuming, which is half of steampunk right there. But, I am still fanwriting, as you can see, and I've recently won an award as Best Fan Writer of the year from the N3F, something I never expected would ever happen to me again at my age. Once again, I walk the edges of various groups, never quite fitting in. Chris and Martin now live in the Corktown area to the east of downtown Toronto, and have indeed settled in.

I have discovered that there is always a bit of rivalry between the actors of any given series, and some of the crew/staff who are trying to do their jobs as best as they can, but are sometimes thwarted by increasing actor salaries. A popular Canadian period detective series has suffered from that, but it has continued on, with a 14th season yet to come.

Just made it over to page 2, and ran out of zine, so I think my job here is done. Thanks for this issue, and I hope you've got another one on the go. See you then.

We Also Heard From:

Steve Fahnstalk, MichaelAnn Dahlmann, The StarWolf who was once known as Marc Gerin-LaJoie, John Thiel



Random fan faces #203: Burrard Inlet Fan Fellowship

A Look at Ninth Fandom

John Thiel

Science fiction fandom has been developing numbered fandoms since the early days, when attempts were being made to organize fandom. First and second fandoms were seen as distinct, and fandom was seen by some as a thing a-building. Many were the controversies which arose as various interests tried to assert their own conceptions of what fandom should be like, and finally there were some who set these various identifiable parts of fandom to numbers. When a new numbered fandom moved in, the earlier ones still remained, with no need to change their standards. Involved in these fandoms were builders and shapers, while the rest of fandom either looked on or ignored them. A person could move from one fandom to another if he wished. This building effort was seen to have culminated in Eighth Fandom, somewhat presided over by the NFFF, which had been rounding up knowledge of fandom. General matters of fandom seemed to have been settled, and the magazines were discussing fandom. However, some held that Eighth Fandom seemed somewhat inert, as might be expected if all matters were settled. But what if the Eighth Fandom citadels fell, as was portrayed in the poem "Ozymandias"? This question was asked by Colin Cameron, and he and Vowen Clarke set about discussing a Ninth Fandom, which would progress into the future, and carry the torch if the present fandom started disintegrating in feuds, bust periods, or disinterest. They would come through the next period of bust in the boom and bust cycles that science fiction seemed to suffer, and reignite the spark of fandom.

Now Ninth Fandom is being brought into view. Facebook has a Ninth Fandom page. There are a few Ninth Fandom fanzines. We are considering the re-ignition of fannish activities, and some of our work is being channeled through the N3F Fan-Pro Coordinating Bureau. Some advertising is being done at efanzines. More can be learned about Ninth Fandom as our work progresses. Those who are active fans foreseeing and pursuing a future for science fiction fandom might want to join with these Ninth Fandom activities.



Amsbury Speaks

“Patterns” by the late Clifton Amsbury (written: May 1997)

The self-justification of patron-client systems is that patrons protect their clients.

In the midst of the war for freedom from the Spanish crown, the Prince of Orange, the hereditary general of the Republic of the Netherlands, declared himself Protector of the Netherlands. This began the pattern that the first republic established by each modernizing revolution would be ended by a dictatorship under the commander of the revolutionary army.

Within the year the protector was assassinated. This began the pattern that the dictator would rule until his death.

Neither of these events solved any of their problems. The war of the Netherlands Republic for freedom from Spain continued for eighty years.

“But”, says the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1945; 251), “a new element was making its appearance in history: the burghers began to show a heroism with which the Spaniards could not cope.”

In 1815, upon the defeat of Napoleon by an interventionist coalition, the House of Orange was made the ruling family of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This followed the pattern of a restoration of monarchy after a period of republican politics. In some cases, especially in France, the cycle was repeated in whole or in part, two or more times. In most cases there was outside intervention. Outside Europe, this was certain and massive colonial repression.

The history of the Russian Revolution followed the pattern closely, although it also had several new features. For instance, since it was the first modernizing

revolution since development of imperialism³, it was the first anti-imperialist revolution.

There are other patterns involved in these modernizing revolutions. The most important thing to keep in mind is that a revolution is not an instant thing. It takes centuries to work itself out. The next in importance is that up to now, neither the leaders nor the troops of the revolutions have known what they were fighting against, nor what they were fighting for. That is why it was so easy to set up dictatorships, and eventually, to restore monarchies.

Most general anthropology texts have discussions of “modernization”. For the most part, it is treated as a matter of “technology” and “industrialization”. For me, the social transformations have been the important aspects.

The Pattern

I have often pointed out that neither the revolutionists nor the reactionaries in these struggles knew what was going on. The revolutionary leaders and partisans knew their grievances. The defenders of the monarchy knew they were defending their place and duties and the “proper” places of members of the various classes. And, of course, their own lives and those of their families, agents and hangers-on.

The revolutionary cry was for “freedom” or “liberty” for all. It was an effective rallying cry, but to each level of society, it meant something different. And it did nothing about guaranteeing food and shelter.

There were slogans to take care of that. In Russia, it was “Peace, Land and Bread.”

But once the warehouses were opened, they were emptied. The Germans occupied, and later, the interventionists took over the best lands, and it took five years to throw them out. Then it became clear that the real issue was the social organization to follow. Lenin proclaimed that they were now in territory Marx had not charted, that they must take stock and decide where to go. Then he died and left them to fight it out⁴.

It took Stalin until 1936 to get full control of the army. Then he made himself dictator and remained so until his death, thus fitting into the patterns.

Also in the pattern was the restoration. In the early days, what was overthrown: the aristocracy, poverty (by Russian standards), and the penetration by foreign imperialism. In the 1990s we have in full flower: Imperialist penetration by foreign investors; poverty (by anyone’s standards); and a parasitic class. Yeltsin was ruling by *ukase*⁵, like the Tsars, though they were still arguing over his right to do so.

³ Hobson, John Atkinson: *Imperialism*. (Allen and Unwin, London: 1902).

⁴ Draper, Theodore; *The Roots of American Communism* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1989 [1957]), pp. 249-250.

⁵ *Ukase* (n. Rus): an edict both unilateral and unanswerable.

Also involved in the restoration was outside intervention, albeit not by overt military invasion, but via the arms race and rather high-placed agents.

Definitely within the pattern.

Organization of Civilization

Civilization may be said to be co-eval⁶ with the state, though some may claim that status for an earlier phase. In that earlier phase, whether civilization or not, the temple would have been the centre of storage of harvested crops and for dispensation of justice.

When raiders stole the stores, the villages and towns had to organize self-defence forces and denote a leader of these (as the Old Testament calls them) “mighty men”. How many generations this lasted I cannot say, but eventually the war chief took over, set himself up as king, with his gang of toughs as both standing army and police. And he sat in the gateway and held court: i.e., judged the people⁷.

From that time on, his gang ran things. By the time history informs us, society had become what anthropologists call a patron-client system. Everyone has patrons, almost everyone has clients, even if only one’s own children. Because several on each level have the same patron, the structure is pyramidal, sloping swiftly to a peak. Above is the chief deity and the heavenly hosts. Below are the imps and devils and Satan himself.

It is an aristocratic system. The aristocrats are a military officer-caste. All interactions are described as one-on-one: by twos, dyadic. Thus the system is peasant-based, military-administered, dyadic patron-client. And in each dyad there is assumed to be a power-difference. When this is clear, then the more powerful is of patron grade and the less powerful of client grade.

The aristocrats act through agents and patronize hangers-on. Prominent among the latter are merchants and scholars. Numerous among them are servants and soldiers, especially soldiers serving as police.

The clearest examples of this in our days are the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Serbs (Orthodox Christians) and Croats (Catholic) were the peasantry. Over in Croatia, Croats were also merchants, landlords and scholars, but most of the aristocrats had been German.

When their restoration period came, the Muslims tried to make it complete, with the results we now know. Both peasants and aristocrats have generations-long memories, and total restoration may be impossible.

Reformation

For centuries, “hedge preachers” and Levellers, though not yet under that name, had been spreading the doctrine of equality. Then in the 1500s,

⁶ Co-eval (adj): simultaneous, contemporaneous.

⁷ See 1 Samuel 8:10-10, *et seq.*

reformers like Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and Michael Servetus, with Francis David over in Transylvania, preached competing reforms. There was some memory of John Ball's verse "When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?", but the nobles, gentry and rich merchants who led the Reformation were not that interested in equalities.

Some of them, like Orange and Cromwell, were already generals. To their armies came not only old soldiers, but runaway serfs and "masterless men". At least in the armies, they ate. On the other hand, Orange's battle-losing armies were of German mercenaries.

"Freedom", they cried, "Liberty," and they fought for freedom for all, but all they won was to loosen the patronage burden upon the leadership levels. The leadership may have been fully sincere, but when they were free, they no longer felt the pressure. And to keep their own powers, they had to double-cross their followers and restore the clientage relationship.

People had been brought up to live under kings. They expected patrons to protect them. So William in his century, Cromwell in his, and Napoleon in his became pseudo-royalty: Protectors and Emperors. Now we call them dictators. But neither the new republics nor the dictatorships solved the problem, so in England and France, kings were restored – and deposed; and replaced.

Each time, another layer of higher clients was freed from clientage. Each time, another layer of lower clients was inspired to aspire. And still, no one knew what caused the intolerable conditions: why the lower social levels were so easily led to discontent, why lower and lower levels of leadership came to raise the cries for "Freedom".

Scholarship Learns

In the late 1950s, anthropologists became to study peasant communities as social units within larger societies. Some of them were also practitioners of Applied Anthropology. This means that they accepted positions and commissions from people of patron grade to put over "development projects" upon people of client status. They found a similar set of attitudes among the people they dealt with. John Honigman noticed it among Moslems, Sikhs and Hindus in Pakistan; George Foster noticed it in Mexico, and others found it elsewhere. They called it "The Image of Limited Good". It assumed that all things good are in limited supply. Varying amounts are allotted to each social order. Though more per capita is allotted to the upper ranks, they need more. Very little is allotted to the lower ranks, but within each rank, people must compete for a share. What one gets is not available for others. Thus, luck, as in treasure trove or gambling, is the only way to get more than your neighbour or relative. It is assumed that what one wins, another, or others, must lose.

During the Seventies, and especially the Eighties, we began to hear much about zero-sum games. It became the economic and political doctrine of the time, part of the build-up to attacking the humanitarian and social programs left over from the New Deal and the War on Poverty.

Recognition of the Image of Limited Good/zero-sum game as the basic philosophic position of the peasant-based, military-administered, dyadic patron-client systems of civilizations tells us the other aspects of modernizing revolutions: what they are revolting against. We can make a list.

1. The patron-client system. An authoritarian, hierarchical class system with very little chance for advancement and only crumbs left for most of the people to fight over;
2. Military authoritarian control, leading to factionalism and conflict;
3. "Pie" for a few and increasingly, crumbs for most.

Anything which leads away from those conditions is progressive and modernizing. Anything leads to them is regressive and can properly be called reactionary.

Reaction

The Monday after Dole's acceptance speech at the San Diego Republican Convention, KQED, the Bay Area Public TV station, ran a show on the Great Depression. On Tuesday, a man said to me that everything Hoover had done had been right out of Dole's speech; everything Dole said, Hoover had done.

I begged the man's pardon. Recalling those days, I said, "No, it's the other way around. Everything Hoover did, Dole was telling us he would do." The proper word for a policy which has been tried in the past and which has failed and been discarded, is reactionary.

Reaction means to stage a restoration. In the Goldwater campaign of 1963 and 1964, the reactionaries stole the name of conservative, calling true conservatives "liberals". Then, of course, true liberals like Eleanor Roosevelt were dubbed "radicals". The media, being mostly owned by reactionaries and some by conservatives, were happy to go along with this. Now it is standard. True conservatives, and even many less rabid reactionaries, are often referred to as moderates.

I don't see them as moderate at all. They still believe in a policy of Limited Good, and that the employer/employee relationship should be one of patron/client, where the patron claims to protect the client, but where the patron makes the decisions and the client is first to be exploited, and second, either to be hoarded or discarded, as the patron decides.

There is now no excuse for saying we don't know the origins of our own grievances. We do know.

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Ideas in Recent Fanzines

Spring 2020: *Christian New Age Quarterly*

This two-volume small publication features two cover articles, one about “The Theology of *Preacher*” (by Robert M. Price), and the other titled “The Sixth Sense and the Signposts” (by Catherine Groves).

Apparently I missed nothing by not seeing the TV series *Preacher* regularly: it presented many of the same problems and inconsistencies that turn up in a close reading of the Christian Bible, regardless of which edition you read – or in a close reading of Philip K. Dick’s more esoteric, theological works – but Robert Price arrives at one conclusion I hadn’t seen before:

“... I think the point is that it doesn’t really matter who the Supreme Being is, or even if there is one. Divine Providence produces the same results as the lack of it. The claim of God’s influence is, in the end, unfalsifiable, compatible with any and every state of affairs – and thus meaningless.”

In “The Sixth Sense and the Signposts”, Catherine Groves explores the distinction between faith and belief. I am not sure how to interpret the conclusion of her article. This volume of *Christian New Age Quarterly* also reprints “Distinguishing Faith from Belief”, by Robert Arias (from 17:2, April-June 2005). Faced with incomprehensible, pointless catastrophes, ranging from the thousands of people destroyed by a tsunami in Southeast Asia to the preventable deaths of his own family members, Arias concludes:

“Faith is the silent knowledge that surrender to the incomprehensible designs of truth will lead to the ultimate good.”

July 2020: *BCSFAzine* #542

Editor R. Graeme Cameron observes a bit of online controversy about possibly holding conventions entirely via Zoom meetings. Graeme adduces several persuasive reasons for holding virtual conventions, some of them being compelling reasons even before the current epidemic arose.

Robert J. Sawyer expresses an apprehension that virtual conventions will assume the niche that actual conventions occupy, and virtual conventions will prevail.

Do you know which idea struck me most? One of Graeme's points:

“Pre-pandemic the cost of holding a convention in a hotel rose astronomically (at least in the Vancouver/Lower Mainland Region). Plus hotel head offices were increasingly opposed to such fannish concepts as room parties, fan-run bar and food services in hospitality suites, nude hot tub sessions, etc. These two factors meant it was difficult for fen to find a venue they could afford, and near impossible to find one that would allow them to run a convention according to fannish tradition.”

Now, people have observed that radio didn't destroy newspapers, and television didn't destroy radio, any more than photography destroyed pictorial art or typewriters eliminated handwriting. What happened was that each new medium of communication assumed a niche, and pushed older media into a different niche, or market segment.

We *may* expect something similar to happen in the convention field – some gatherings will be actual, and some will be virtual, and either they compete, or they complement each other. But “may” is the operative word. (After all, our experience in Vancouver has been that special-interest conventions – for comics, costumers, gaming, and media franchises – generally outcompete the general-interest VCON.)

July 2020 (?): *This Here* #31

Nic Farey is involved in fandoms that you may not have heard about, and writes about them in his fanzine. One is the fandom surrounding the FAAN Awards, about which news is sporadic; Bob Jennings comments in the letter column on the scope for more publicity of the awards. This issue also discusses the No. 1 Fan Face Award, which I had never heard of.

In a previous issue, commenting to Leigh Edmonds on the Hugo Awards, Nic Farey suggested dividing the fanzine awards into categories for “little, middle and big fanzines”. We learn this from Jerry Kaufman's loc in the letter column. Nic points out that the Hugo definitions are based on word counts, not page counts, not body content, nor the intent of a zine. This can be mistaken.

This raises a question: Is fanzine fandom itself turning into several specialized fandoms, somewhat out of touch with each other? Just as fandom in general,

and indeed mainstream culture seems to have divided into several subcultures since the 1970s, each withdrawing from the others at an accelerating pace as the mediasphere of communication expands ...

Nic Farey also features articles about soccer, and Jamaican music of the 1960s, which may be of interest.

July 2020 (?): *TommyWorld – Redux*, Tommy Ferguson

A compendium of Tommy Ferguson's letter substitute from 1997, 1998 and 2002. Tommy Ferguson wrote about a wide variety of topics – his contrasting experiences of Seattle, Toronto and Belfast, the recurring violence in Northern Ireland, Vincent Clarke's locs, Sad Bastard fandom, the loneliness of being a runner in fandom, his difficulty and defeat in explaining fandom to a friend – in an engaging style.

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