

Mark Creyton

PERIPHERAL VISIONS

"A harsh dry heat smothers the city. As I gaze across the cityscape the buildings look as if they could be snapped in two. Even the air is brittle. Toss a rock at the azure sky and the sky will shatter. Fortunately no one has the energy. The heat is an enormous haversack strapped across my shoulders. Humans and animals are reduced to a torpid stagger. Walking down the street I saw an old man's legs buckle under him. His head hit the ground and his skull fractured on the concrete. The blood dried so quickly. There are news reports of many old people dying and many young people going insane. This they attribute to the heat. Department stores are choked with people. Air conditioning has a price. Two dollars admission, refundable on any purchase over five. Circulated air is finally owned, a commodity, as everything in the end is tied to capital or history. It can be no other way. I grow tired of the waiting." Notebook entry, January 21.

She has recently moved to a flat not far from the southern end of the city. Cream brick and blue guttering make this building indistinguishable from any number of flats in the suburb. Inside the flat there is a noticeable absence of a personal touch. There are no posters, photographs, books, ornaments, postcards or trinkets. There is not even a stolen ashtray or beer glass. On the wall, above the kitchen table, a number of newspaper and magazine clippings are stuck with cello tape. She works at this table. It is here she makes copious notes in a black notebook which she carries with her at all times.

"Allegations were raised in the national parliament yesterday that a chain of coffee shops and video games parlors called **Downtime** had been supplied with confidential papers on future sites for Commonwealth Employment Offices and Social Security offices. It is alleged that a senior minister was paid \$ 4000 to supply the details of seven future office locations. The chain has made a point of aiming its marketing strategy at the

unemployed who now account for some 20% of the market." *Courier Mail*, August 28.

She has no trouble purchasing a semiautomatic rifle. The fact that she can do this without registering the sale, giving her name or feeling it necessary to obtain a licence, is a tribute to the free enterprise spirit of this government and the success of its policymakers in countering any move to tighten gun control. The fact that she finds it necessary to disguise herself as a young man, 5'10", thin, with long blonde hair, dressed in jeans and a sweatshirt, shows her understanding that this is a pioneering state with the preciously held notion that every man needs a gun to protect himself and every woman needs a man to protect herself. A woman buying a gun is certain to raise a good deal of suspicion, even rancour.

"I have always seen things differently. It is difficult to explain my peripheral visions. I am drawn to the image which I perceive out of the corner of my eye. My focus is fixed on the marginal, on the fringe. I imagine it as existing separately. It becomes the central entity. I have found that seemingly unrelated fragments from different times and places are fraught with connections and similarities. I can develop convolutions upon convolutions. If I could photograph these newly entwined aspects of my reality, it would be a further step away. I could understand even more. Simply put, I can not look at the new gardens and riverside settlements without noticing the dim outline of the land rights mural now painted over, and this in turn reminds me of marches and friends, of conversations and words I have read. I can not walk through the arcade of shops and community buildings brightly painted with funds from the local chamber of commerce, without noticing that the corner store keeps the methylated spirits in the fridge next to the lemonade. At first I felt cursed that everything around me was tainted by my own observation. Now I realize it is this way of looking which is essential to my very self image and my very existence." Notebook entry January 23.

It is a city she is fond of walking through. She is equally at ease wandering amongst the moreton bay figs and broad leaf palms of the botanical gardens, as she is striding down the narrow paths which connect one housing commission block to another. She had, in the past, even strolled through the opulent river estates, now inaccessible to the outsider. Her most frequent walk is through the city past the Parliament and the living quarters of the ministers, to a small cafe which services the amenities

workers of the vast government complex. She always orders a long black coffee and takes her time sipping the coffee slowly, seemingly preoccupied with some thoughts or troubles of her own. The Italian proprietor believes this young woman is suffering from a broken heart and he ensures she is always given her favourite seat by the front window. His belief is further strengthened when late one evening he sees her pacing outside the government offices. "Such is love," he thinks to himself.

"My fashions have been greatly influenced by the recession. My creations have grown out of my fascination with poverty. The challenge for me is to imagine a dress found in op shop, with all its previous owner's life worn into it. I follow the dress with its present owner. I watch the material worn by hard work, perhaps torn by a drunken husband. I take that and give it style. It becomes uniquely Blackman. My pieces are bought by the liberated woman. Liberation has been too much for the modern miss, or should I say ms. Her fantasy is to experience, just for the night, what it is like to be impoverished and beaten down. To feel her breasts poke out of the dress, not because it is beautiful but because it is necessarily ugly. Hard times produce great works of art. My designs are revolutionary." Anthony Blackman on his latest collection **Black and Blue**, in *New Fashion News*, Issue 12, No. 3.

"On the outskirts of the city, fires break out. Patches spurn patches, and their progeny are fiercer and more unmanageable. The fires are frenzied as if driven by some grandiose malevolence. The sharp heat of the flames is trapped in the stolid heat of the day. The fire fighters are growing weary. They gulp tea during the infrequent breaks and mutter that they ain't seen anything like it before. A piece of graffiti appeared some weeks ago on a wall across from the Administrative Services building. It stated – "hey rich man. your city is surrounded. we will burn it down." I am sure there is a connection. Urban existence is lived within a series of juxtapositions and tenuous casualties. It gives structure to mundane lives. The fires and the heat are strangely appropriate. I see them as a portent for what is to come." Notebook entry. January 24.

It is 4 o'clock in the morning. She has completed her preparations. She peels the articles off the kitchen wall. One captures her attention for the final time.

“The state attorney general has announced a high court challenge over the New South Wales government’s abortion legislation. The state will be arguing that children aborted in New South Wales could well have chosen Queensland as their place of residence as adults, and hence abortion is depriving the state of public servants and revenue in the form of taxes. It will be basing its case on a little known article of the constitution which implies that each state government must make all efforts to facilitate the economic well being of its fellow states. The Queensland Premier, confident after his high court victory over pulping Mount Tamborine rain forests, noted the following, “History will judge Queensland as the promised land. Future generations of unborn fetuses will look toward this state, as Jews look toward Israel.” *Northern Bulletin*, October 19.

She burns each of the articles in the sink before washing the ashes down the drain.

The Premier takes his afternoon stroll on the balcony. It is a habit which his security people have warned him about many times. He is sweating profusely in the terrible heat. It is the hottest day yet. Black clouds of smoke hang like atomic mushroom clouds in the sky to the west. The fires are still out of control. This morning his Police Minister informed him that crowds of people are gathering around the edges of the city. The Premier was unconcerned. His thoughts, at the moment the bullet rips into his chest, are remarkably inconsequential. He is thinking whether he should have chosen the barramundi rather than the venison for lunch.

“International airports are almost identical, especially late at night. If it weren’t for the token cultural emblem, the Charles and Di plate, the set of chopsticks, the stuffed koala, it would be difficult to distinguish between Heathrow, Changi, Sydney. Here is the new

internationalism, with its consumption of vast tracks of land and millions of dollars, without providing any sense of an aesthetic or a culture. The multilingual symbols, the silence of the air conditioning, the frigid white of the walls and the ceiling further evoke this barrenness. This is the face of international politics and business, in a rare moment when corporate advertising executives and image consultants are not prettying up its image. It is this which draws the terrorist to splatter his or her ultimate statement across its clean endless white. A desire, misdirected I think, to desecrate. Misdirected because you can not kill the machine only the men who program it. The airport is also a place in which all economy class travellers are treated with equal condescension and inconsequentiality. No one notices a thin woman, 5'10", with cropped red hair, disappearing into passport control." Notebook entry January 26.