

# BlazeVOX 2k9

Fall 2009

Hugh Behm-Steinberg

**What is more worth having than love and a great city in which to dwell? Or an address to all prophets.**

Oh Daniel, you say they will never stop bombing,  
their children, their grandchildren, but Daniel,  
as if we are given birth to give the needfulness  
to someone else, of building trust, of getting close,  
to get close,  
but still no heaven, no house either,  
it's frustrating, each touching each other,  
out of you and yours  
no house, no subject, no rule,  
what is the surface that will sustain you? You pick stones from,  
you've torn down enough already  
build, build, build, engrave and enchant and enfold  
making upon making  
love and a thousand  
leaves; can't you feel your own wristhairs  
growing up like weeds? Your own body around you,  
bare equivalent skies, your body tracings  
impressions or outlines, your nose  
your memory, your hands cupped, as she  
walks into your bedroom, and climbs all day as if the two of you were cities,

and these cities grew until they touched. A nation.  
Is all so ragged, is so intricate and stunning. Within its borders is  
whatever you want but you don't know what to do with it.  
Maybe make a deal. Or you can hold the heart you lack  
inside you, and in that heart let the water run out  
leaving what is most precious even more  
concentrated. Or you are all men,  
you undermine devotion and no kinds  
of discourse can stop you. In a city time becomes visible. You become part of  
crowds, for that is what is  
done in cities, as a prelude to work, so that the question,  
who are you, is answered  
by who is next to you, who doesn't  
of course, know you. What we call love  
is hardly anything in the midst of so many people,  
(Mary says that's not true,  
what is better, what is more worth having?).  
I saw hospitals, a man  
who staggered leaving one, well enough,  
but not fully healed. The city convulses like him. Or to get away from work,  
a place to be before you're home. Elemental forces, which lets  
you dance amidst people who can  
no longer see you. That is some drift, we call it essence and claim it  
for ourselves, and these pleasures are made artful, like in a city  
where you're not supposed to walk, unless you are a tourist,  
between living and life itself, which wrenches you out of  
yourself. I said Who are you? Who are you really?

## **Hating Both Choices. Instead, Becoming.**

Carl Schmitt argued that we can never be political.

That if we are optimistic about human nature, if we believe in the possibility  
of neutral rules that can mediate between conflicting positions,  
that there exists something independent of the state, then we can never  
be political because if we were political then we would be destroyed  
by those who were (are) more ruthless than us.

To this dead man there is no such thing as neutrality, and no real state  
would ever allow other forces to contest its power.

If we are uncomfortable around power, others are not, and they will use it against us  
without stopping. They are better at fighting wars than us.

They dispense with notions such as “the common good” or “the interests of all humanity.”

They use that against us. They are not bothered by injustice.

They use it for their own purposes. Politics means

maximizing your side’s advantages,

not giving them away. If unity can be achieved

only by repressing dissent, that is how they will achieve it.

What is most horrible is that this pattern

is always successful and it never works, it increases no happiness,

brings no peace, turns friends into corpses and people who want to murder us.

Either exhaust them or become them. Hating both choices. Instead, becoming.

Restless, an opening that is slender and the end of which cannot be seen.

So it is fragile. Leaping from one to another as poetry would,

or as other forms of reversed, interlocking systems. Margins, and shifts

which crash into one another like waves. Lightshedding surfaces, mirrors,

mirrors are snares, a city that is around, coiled,

not readily known, find out, don’t stay home at night, go out,

find new companions, people who disagree with you, drink, argue, drink coffee,

buy what you want, believe what you want, change your mind,

become intricate and reveling, become sexy, think sexual thoughts,

occupations, be occupied, be nightish, have pursuits.

What difference does it make

to know a city mostly by driving is to

know not just surfaces, but smudging, smudged ones,

with signs, so at some point you realize that you can stop,

that you can get to know someone when you stop. What is so

difficult is discovering what is parallel and getting it to cross

over, become skew, so that there are intersections, and not

just playing with the same, the same small space they'll stick you

in clear apartment units and cemetery plots,

the boring parts, the known (being poor, such as being poor,

going to work creating new impoverishments), into a locked down space,

to ignore the cameras as you play a game you know you'll

eventually lose, like you think you can hold onto your

body when you make it to heaven.

Or to know a city by its borders, the borderlines where suburbs lean into us

with promised, more private spaces, to live in a house with a wall around it.

From above the streets at night resembled rivers coiling around

many hundreds of small fires. To be against walking, which encourages

you to tie knowledge with exhaustion.

Going into less accessible spaces.

Going into what I used to know.

Tracing the delta of two fingers.

My wife sleeping next to me on the plane back from Chicago.

## A Real City

Then argue that the city is near, the real city is near,  
    that there is a purpose behind all these buildings, even  
though there are no intentions. The clouds above us are few, they float  
    like sleeves, we can see all the places we hope to. The beauty  
    in broken things, which allow renewal, rebuilding soft floors where  
children can fall and no one will worry, oh and the people, all the people, lovely  
    and crowding, alleys and stairways, the smell of kisses  
and cooking and water arcing from hydrants.  
I got to the point where I couldn't walk, talk and think at the same time  
    I was so happy to be in a real city again  
        I pushed the furniture around.

## All This Smoke Comes Pouring Out

“It was just like war, it was a dangerous city to be in,” said Xu Bing, who worried that he would be unable to take a bag of twin towers dust through US customs, so he cast the dust instead into the shape of a child’s doll. Who knows the actual components of said dust, though it is unlikely it contains the remains of actual children, most likely construction waste, concrete, gypsum particles. In Cardiff he ground the doll back down to powder, blowing it onto the gallery floor. In the middle he wrote “As there is nothing from the first, where does the dust collect itself?” Which is stupid and cruel, on so many levels, the act itself and the words, the space was always full, and now we stand around it with the other tourists against the fence that reaches above us and the signs that explains where the land itself came from. I come to you when I am in need. I come to you without any rights at all, I submit myself entirely unto you, I hold nothing back. You can describe the night sky even when you can’t see it. But what good is it? What good is it when there are so many buildings where good is kept hidden, when you go out on the street and realize there are no women there. There are quotes, you should know them. There are phrases, they are ironic. They were enormous, they spread out. She said I dreamed I had a purse (I don’t normally carry a purse), so I opened it up to see what I would bring, what I thought I would need, and when I opened up the purse all this smoke came pouring out.