

## Fred Wah

### Language in Revolution

We've just had a conference at David Thompson University Centre on the theme of "Writing in Revolution". As well as numerous readings and workshops there were two "panels". Frank Davey, Stan Bevington, and Dave Godfrey talked about the new "information" technology revolution and its relationship, primarily, to publishing. Stan Persky moderated a discussion between Margaret Randall from Nicaragua, Nicole Brossard, and Brian Fawcett on the role of writing in political revolution. I was interested in the particular extremities expressed or implied re "revolutionary" writing. One point of view has it that writing must use clear, simple, straightforward language structures. Others argue for new and experimental uses of language.

1. Old available syntax structure needs to be attacked and lifted into holding more of the close-cutting possibility of the present sensibility rather than the past event of "historical forms" endlessly perpetuated by the thought-paradigms language can carry. The struggle within the writing should be there too, in the transference of the energy of the writing through the culture. Edge structures at the edge of awareness rather than form structures contained within an inherited awareness. Some have even believed recently that the writer can and should control and manipulate the "mythology" of a people by intentionally using certain selected "stories". But story and history are verbs, "know", and it is more in the act than in the prescription, more at the edge than at the form, where writing revolves.

2. Brossard talks of the "surface" of language. When I am transing a language I don't "know" I work with the surfaces, the more visible activity outside the "intended" meaning and I find there a movement which reveals other, further possibilities. References and meanings hitherto unavailable through old language expectations show themselves and reaffirm not the selected stories but the true stories. At the

surface an attempt to break through to other planes of sensibility and quality where life happens — one is what one does.

3. In his introduction to "The Politics of the Referrent" (*Open Letter*, 3/7; 1977) Steve McCaffery says "Any fundamental change in reading experience that shakes the accepted functional roles, and questions the functional existence of a reader separate from a writer, has far-reaching political implications . . . Language is a huge support system for a particular method of production and distribution that reaches personification in the form of bureaucracy. To change the structure of the language is, in large part, to change the nature of the superstructure.

4. The problem with trying to make "sense" is the sacrifice of "negative capability". And usually only in order to make it easier for someone else who doesn't have the time, energy, or inclination to deal with the problem. It's much like the old projective verse notion of poem as energy transferred from where the poet got it all the way over to the reader. So if the intention is to make some little sense then the reader/writer share in the work of making that sense.

5. The new technology can change the methods of production and distribution of "writing" drastically. Godfrey argues for the writer being able to get closer to those methods due to the speed and structure of the technology now available. The values delimited by book-production publishing based on mass sales can again be challenged to the point where the reader can look for what he/she wants to read (and interact with).

6. Roy Kiyooka agonizing on the subject of adversary habits historically refurbished through established orders in creativity. He spoke of an energy prior to "history" which he felt more in touch with.

7. Next world, next language.

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