MEETING ANDY PATERSON

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Although I demurred, saying I didn't have a full picture of Andrew James Paterson's work, just admiration from a distance, the very persuasive curators of Never Enough Night *at the plumb assured me that my ignorance would be forgiven and that I should just write something personal.*

Truth is, I feel I've known Andy forever, though we've never exchanged more than a few words. I've seen him mainly on occasions of mutual interest and noticed how he seemed to see beyond the art and the speechifying – a witnessing presence that I appreciated. That was before I met with him recently and realized how much there is to learn. Here, then, just getting to know the man and his work, is a very partial, personal view.

ANDY/AVATAR

Andy always struck me as a man of secrets. His private, self-contained public demeanour, in contrast to the candour in his music, writings, and videos, suggested much going on backstage, so to say.

Turns out I was wrong. He no doubt has his share of secrets, but after having had a chance to meet him, it became clear that it's his practice that carries the secrets. Enigmatic, hide-and-seek, ironic, sometimes wilfully misleading, his work, once entered, is layered like an inverted Matryoshka. Its nested elements start quite simply from the smallest element, their implications growing larger, stage by stage, as one travels further into the work.

Andy's indifference to received ideas, his impatience with administrative garbage, and his dismissal of the marketing fervour of Toronto's art world and beyond are welcome traits, and in an artist who isn't always state-supported, they require courage. It also seems that despite his well-known collaborations with other artists, Andy remains independent, outspoken, and undeterred by fashion, and is seen as a respected, iconic presence. Rare is the artist who follows his own star to this extent.

Thinking about poet and printmaker William Blake, his chief biographer writes, "One of the merits of working outside the conventional network of print shops and booksellers is that he never suffered the experience of being 'taken up' and then forgotten … he had his work around him always and could entertain the possibility of future success and renown." (Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (London: Folio Society, 2008, 201). A similar self-sufficiency suggests why, in describing his exhibition *Never Enough Night*, Andy prefers the term 'survey' *("I'm still working!")* to 'retrospective.'

As for his presence in the city, Janine Marchessault during her interview with Andy for the *Visible City* project remarked, "I see you at so many different events … you're a very generous person!" Andy's reply: "I try to be." (Janine Marchessault Interview, https://visiblecity.info.yorku.ca/andrew-paterson/).

When I mentioned how often he appears at events of all kinds, he said "I get around," in that Nero Wolfe voice, the voice, spoken or written, that serves so well to connect the layered meanings that his work unfolds.

Born in Toronto, Andy inhaled the city's paradoxes, contradictions, and euphemisms/dysphemisms, knowing that whatever the challenges, as his voice-over says in *The Walking Philosopher* (1999) that "philosophers have to walk that walk, as well as talk that talk."

As a skilled witness, someone who notices things and people, his combination of reticence and multi-directional awareness suggests that he has become an embodiment of the Toronto he has absorbed, and that beyond his long-standing, iconic status, there is the possibility of an Andrew James Paterson avatar. In *Of Toronto the Good: The Queen City of Canada as it is* by C. S. Clark (1898), there are passages from over a century ago, both optimistic and critical, that Andy could have written. Clark almost anticipates the need for an Andrew James Paterson avatar, an entity that might reflect and embody the best in us.

ANDY/ANTHROPOLOGIST

While his gaze captures an overview of a situation or artwork, Andy can at the same time spot a pixel or centimetre out of place, a skill perhaps attributable to his childhood obsession with schedules, grids, and calendars, a respect for numbered sequences that measure time and dimensions that he has carried forward and allowed to inform his work.

We are in my studio drinking tea during the eclipse. We are discussing his relation to numbers, and he is remembering a range of feuds and fusses in the Toronto art world from half a century ago to last week, and talking about the men and women he has loved. In mid-sentence, the room suddenly goes dark. He pauses. I turn on the TV.

We catch the retreat from totality. The surrounding flares bring to mind moments in his videos *Framing Device* (2019) and *Elemental* (2022), as well as William Blake's *The Ancient of Days*, a God-like figure blocking the sun, aiming a sharp-pointed compass down at the waiting world below (William Blake, *The Ancient of Days*, etching and water colour, c. 1794, Bridgman Art Library, University of Manchester). Andrew Paterson doesn't need a celestial encounter to be reminded of the miraculous yet arbitrary nature of his being here. He knows just where he stands in relation to the cosmos.

Light returns and our conversation continues. It reveals a man whose considered assessments of the habits, motives, and

stakes of his compatriots indicate the social science insights of a gifted anthropologist. I listen and learn.

Drawing on his unusually rich archive of dates, places, and personae, he describes decades-old encounters, both forgivable and not, and provides a perceptive analysis of the cultures and subcultures at work. It becomes clear how this memory reservoir fuels his commitment to community rather than to "scene."

In regard to community, Andy has been an active participant, contributing both locally and nationally, helping to co-found artist-run centres, publications, and festivals, and, as time passed, serving on their boards, and to this day assisting with rescue strategies as they face a fifty-year crisis.

Crises tend to reveal participants' opposing beliefs. Resolution is not always possible. About a former friend, Andy says quite simply, "We haven't spoken to each other in ten years." Yet, should the not-for-profit organization or artist-run centre in question need help, as increasingly seems to be the case in Canada, he acknowledges, setting aside his previous observations, that he will provide support alongside all those who share the community's concern, whatever the past histories, bringing to the matter his anthropological study of human nature.

ANDY/ARTIST

It's the man who is candid. It's the work that has secrets. And deaths.

Whether by natural causes or murder/suicide, the uncertainties of life and death thread through the verbal, spatial, and narrative explorations of Andy's book *Collection/Correction*, his video *The Archivists* (2021), and his novel *Not Joy Division*. In each case, the viewer or reader is invited to face the challenge of deciphering the manner of the death and its meaning, its uncertainty raising key questions. Death being the one absolute, a certainty that permits no absolutions, what tweaks Andy's interest is how and why it happened and what can be deduced or learned from it.

These same issues, though perhaps more abstractly, also seem to arise when considering the gateway of meaning that opens between two words bound by a slash, the ambiguity of the slash serving as both bridge and boundary. Here are a few examples from *Collection/Correction*:

word/work
safe/save
cage/rage
history/herstory
pressure/pleasure

show/slow/snow
socks/sucks
fuck/luck/lack
simple/sample
mail/male

"All just random typos," says Andy, allowing us to wonder about the meanings arrived at whether by human error or software spellcheck. Less casually, in a 2016 interview with the late, great, writer and activist, R. M. Vaughan, (*RM Vaughan Interviews Andrew James Paterson*, www. andrewjamespaterson.com/interviews/RM-Vaughan.pdf) Andy says, "I became fascinated by typos ... some time in the 80s, when I meant to write Freud but wound up with Fraud! Do the same with Jung, you get Junk, and so on." There is also Andy's succinct Facebook/Fakebook/Farcebook critical shrug. And again, from *The Walking Philosopher*, his voice declaring, "Binarisms such as teacher/student, master/slave, and top/bottom are not fixed ... All that left-brain mind and body separation crap must be jettisoned."

He plays in the same way with names as he does with paired words, and in the context of a murder, has William/Whitfield sharing protagonist status, their words and lives braided in a single narrative in *Collection/Correction*, bound with an invisible slash (Andrew James Paterson, *Collection/Correction*, Kunstverein Toronto and Mousse Publishing, 2016). In the book, we explore streams of partnered words repeated so often that they form a texture that fills geometric shapes on both bound and fold-out pages, becoming concrete poetry, endorsed as passports to the real.

Andy gives us access to an endless realm of speculation in both the videos and the text works, and possibly in his music too, though Derwatt's provenance is a bit different from the nested Matryoshka structures that we've encountered. With Derwatt, the secret isn't Andy's, though he feels an affinity with it. We're given all the parts – a doubly fictive persona, Derwatt, a painter who appears in Patricia Highsmith's Ripley novels. Though Derwatt never existed, he is nevertheless rumoured to have committed suicide, and his fictional presence services a growing cluster of murder/suicides during the four novels. His persona is kept 'alive' by those who are forging his paintings for profit, and he's said to be producing masterpieces while in retreat. I haven't yet read the novels, but whatever the fate in the last novel of this twice-fictive protagonist, Derwatt ends up in Toronto with the band that took his name and remains a source for Andy's music ("Derwatt," Bandcamp, https://derwatt.bandcamp.com/track/derwatt).

Re-reading *Not Joy Division*, a combination detective thriller and social media condemnation, despite its daisy-chain surface of everyday Facebook exchanges, pulled me into an investigative rabbit hole centred on one character's murder/suicide, a hole-turned-labyrinth, papered with intertwined histories of bands and their ambitions, wars, and legacies. The nested meanings begin to open. Facebook serves as the much-criticized mesh or communication net stretched taut by the frame of the novel, providing the condemned canvas on which "friends" are embroidering their inquiries, slowly going deeper and deeper into the mystery.

"I invented all the names," says Andy. "The bands, the Fakebook 'friends,' everything except *Not Joy Division* ..." and he succeeds in keeping the reader hovering in a silent, in-between state, following a sad and mischievous path through invented existences, learning to accept the unknown.

More than an investigator, Andy's an acceptor, even an embracer of the unknown, his practice rooted, among other dualities, in the shifting boundary between sense and nonsense, which is true for all of us if we're ready to believe it. Andy lives and works out there where the weather is unpredictable and unforgiving, where the lifelong task is to acknowledge what we long for but can't know.

In short, this exhibition and book honour the work of Andrew James Paterson, a gifted, multi-skilled, yet modest artist, writer, musician, and philosopher, who has an informed view and acceptance of the darkness of day and the luminosity of night. It celebrates several decades in which Andy has shared his insights with us, questioning assumptions, and identifying obstacles, just clearing a path.

Thinking back to that compelling walking philosopher's voice a quarter-century ago: "Philosophy is by definition mobile and philosophers are highly mobile creatures. If they're serious they get their asses out and about, no matter what might be the formidable obstacles." I'm reminded of Janine's reference to Andy's generosity, and his own comment, "I get around."

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