

# WING WINDOW

*Wing Window* #12, the fanzine of exploded subtext, is an obvious letter-substitute masquerading as the 10th – no, 11th – anniversary issue of this fanzine. It's published by John D. Berry, 525 19th Avenue East, Seattle, Washington 98112, and distributed by whim (mine and that of the several post offices through which copies will have to travel). Schedule is open to interpretation: the previous issue came out four years ago, which I hope isn't a definitive clue. This issue is being published in January, 1993. One size fits all! No waiting! *Abi Frost* for TAFF.

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YOU BITE IT  
YOU BOUGHT IT  
WALDO'S DISCOUNT DOUGHNUTS

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## *Procrastination*

Does this happen to you? Some friends call you and suggest having dinner. You've got a deadline and you can't do it this week; how about next week? They're leaving town next week; how about the beginning of next month? That's a long way off; why don't we just play it by ear? We'll give you a call next month. It seems like no time has passed, yet suddenly you haven't seen these friends in six months.

Sound familiar? How about this one? "We should write to so-and-so. Didn't we just get a letter from her? It must be around here someplace." A week later, in a fit of bravura efficiency, you tear apart all the piles of paper in your office 'til you find the letter. It's dated 1989.

That's the way it's been for, oh, at least the last ten or fifteen years. I know it wasn't always like this: I can still remember the energy and enthusiasm I brought to writing letters and publishing science-fiction fanzines when I was fourteen. (Of course, I didn't always get my homework done.) But I had so much less information bombarding me then, or so it seems: I could absorb all of it, find a place to put it in my mental attic. Now I think I've lost the key to my mental attic.

It doesn't help that this experience is common to everyone I know. (Those who work in the computer software industry have turned it into a way of life.) It's still frustrating. Time passes while you're not looking. Your attention wanders, and the inside of your skull is plastered with little yellow stickies that say, "While you were out..." Entropy nibbles at your toes, and you try to remember who it was you promised something to by this morning. You make another mental note to call so-and-so before the end of the year.

And that, dear friends, is why you're reading this now. (Don't put it aside to read later! You know you'll never get to it again.) I'm aiming a small blow against entropy (always a risky business), reaching out across the shifting sands of procrastination to say: *Hi! Gotta run! Let's do lunch!*

## *Entropy strikes back*

Ten years ago I did the first issue of this fanzine. It was a little different then: focused clearly on the world of science fiction fandom, which was in a period of ferment and high energy. I was consciously stripping away anything that didn't pertain to fandom and its concerns. When I reflected the rest of the world, it was in the funhouse mirror of fandom. I didn't do this because fandom was all that concerned me, but because it was what I wanted this fanzine to concern itself with. I aimed it at a particular community.

Now my aim is wider; the target is everywhere. But the fanzine is rooted in SF fandom, because that's the soil this form is native to. The community I'm talking to is simply the community of my friends – and near-friends and acquaintances and all the panoply of emotional and intellectual relationships, so hard to define – plus interested bystanders. (You are included in this community, of course.) I've always had the self-centered notion that everyone I knew and liked had something in common; with this fanzine I'm clothing that idea in paper and sending it out into the world.

## *Been there. Did that.*

So what have I done over the past few years? Well, I've gone over the hill – having passed the age of 42, I figure I'm definitely into the second half of my life now. I've always thought of my life as running in cycles of a dozen years rather than in decades, but



as soon as I turned 40, my body started giving me unmistakable signs of a new approach to aging. Cracks started appearing in the façade: the muscles didn't recover as fast, odd aches wandered in with no reason and stayed longer than seemed reasonable, a tooth cracked, and suddenly my eye doctor was recommending bifocals. Decrepitude creeps on tiny feet.

I've designed a number of books, from trade computer books to volumes of art and poetry, and won a few awards for some of them. I've edited, proofread, production-edited, and even written more computer-software manuals than I ever expected even to open, much less read.

I've increased my knowledge of typography enormously, and made it clear to myself that type, in its myriad forms, is the central fascination around which my professional life revolves. I've run workshops and panels and informal discussions on type, inveighed against lowered standards of typography (sound like a fanzine-review column?), written type reviews and essays, and built up a formidable library of books on the history and practice of typography and book design. A while back I got asked to drop everything and go to England for three months to do some highly technical type work for Monotype, which in prestige is the *Analog* of the type-manufacturing field (although without the clout, these days, at least outside of Britain). The deal fell through, but it got me a free trip to the Bay Area for some intensive training, and it certainly increased my street credibility in the world of electronic publishing.

Other stuff? Eileen and I bought our house, the house we'd been living in for several years already, when the landlord decided to sell it five years ago. By luck, this was just before Seattle's housing market took off; despite a slump in the last year or two, our house is undoubtedly worth a lot more than when we bought it. Of course, we didn't buy it with the idea of selling – we bought it because we didn't want to move, and especially because we didn't want to think about moving our books – but it's comforting to know that if we change our minds we'll make some money.

We've been on a few trips in this time. Of course we've been back and forth across the country a number of times, since both my mother and Eileen's parents live in the Northeast; one trip was even a harrowing journey driving a Ryder rental truck full of furniture and other Large Stuff across the continent the slow way on a tight schedule. But we've also been overseas. In the mid-eighties we started traveling again, after several years of being either too poor or too busy to go anywhere more exotic than Vancouver. We traveled to France and northern Italy in 1985 (I wrote a little about this in an earlier issue), then to

Britain for the Brighton worldcon in 1987. In 1989 I ran for and won DUFF, so we toured Australia for a month (trip report coming *RealSoonNow*), from the Great Barrier Reef to the Indian Ocean, and from Alice Springs in the middle of the continent to Tasmania off the southeastern tip. As a bit of lagniappe from that trip, through being bumped from an overbooked return flight in Honolulu, we got free tickets to Hawaii, which we put to use the following winter when Seattle started looking dismally cold and dank – the first time I'd ever seen anything of the Hawaiian Islands outside of Honolulu airport. (I've still never set foot in Honolulu itself; we spent all our time on the South Kona coast of the Big Island, harrowingly immortalized by Hunter Thompson.) And then, in 1990, when the world science fiction convention left the English-speaking world (at least nominally) for the first time in 20 years, we headed off to Holland for the worldcon in the Hague.

That was our fourth worldcon in a row, much to my surprise. I got out of the habit when I missed the first Brighton worldcon in '79 (through not planning ahead and saving enough money to go), and after 1980 we only hit one worldcon in six years. (Actually, Eileen attended part of the LA worldcon in 1984, because she was in the city for a business trip. She was insufficiently fannish for Rob Hansen to pay attention to her, apparently, when she relayed my greetings. I was disappointed that Rob didn't include Seattle in his TAFF traveling plans, and it wasn't really until after the Dutch worldcon that I finally had a conversation with the man.) We didn't make it to the worldcon in Chicago last year, but we did end up going to Orlando last September. I suppose one of the reasons for our increased attendance is that as Eileen has become better known as a short-story writer – she was nominated for a Hugo two years running – it's been important to her to be there. She regards SF conventions primarily as professional events, even though she also gets to see her friends there. I've found enough ways to regard them professionally that I can usually take off my expenses on my tax return, but in my heart I still think of them primarily as a way to mingle with my friends. (My ambivalence toward fandom is permanent, I think, and never more so than at a convention. But what else is new?)

### *The Hague, Oxford, and points east*

Actually, I attended two conventions that summer of 1990, a week apart. First Eileen and I flew into Amsterdam for a couple of days and attended the worldcon in the Hague. Then we split up and went our separate ways for a while, meeting up again back in Amsterdam for some more time in Holland at the end of our trip. The middle part, though, saw us going in opposite directions. While I crossed the



Channel for a type convention, called Typego, in Oxford the following weekend, Eileen grabbed a KLM flight to Moscow and then flew on to the ancient city of Samarkand, in Uzbekistan in what was, at the time, still Soviet Central Asia.

She was doing research for what should end up as a novel. She'd already read tons of books on Samarkand both ancient and modern, but it was time to actually go there and touch things. The trip to Holland provided a jumping-off point. She ended up spending eight days in Samarkand, wandering through the markets, strolling the streets, looking for traces of Ulug Beg and talking to the very friendly people she met. She got invited to an Uzbek wedding, which turned out to be a circumcision ceremony; she spent evenings chatting with two inept black-marketeers; she drank the water and got sick; she ate fabulous food, especially fresh melons of all different kinds (despite the illness); she talked to men and women and got a sense of what it was like to live in a secularized Islamic country today. She came back with tons of inexpensive Soviet books and records. On her way back, she stopped in Moscow for a couple of days: the city was muddy and depressed, but through a friend of Bill Gibson's (a film director from Kazakhstan who had been drinking beer on our back porch just a few months before) she met a couple of stylish and lively women in the Moscow film scene and had a fascinating time. (And yes, I would like to visit Samarkand, but for what Eileen needed to do it was better to travel by herself, so she could meet more people; and besides, Typego was an event that I very much wanted to attend.)

The closest I came to Samarkand was sitting in Judith Hanna and Joseph Nicholas's living room in north London, looking at the photos from their trip there earlier in the year. Joseph and Judith put me up both before and after Typego – luckily they're now living in a house with an extra room, unlike the tiny flat in Pimlico where they were living in '87 (though that was much more conveniently located) – and since we also stayed at the same very cheap hotel in the Hague during the worldcon, I saw quite a bit of them on this trip. They're among our favorite people. They've been planning on moving to Perth sometime in the next few years, since Judith grew up in Western Australia and both of them are getting fed up with Britain. I hope to visit them there, too, but it's certainly much more convenient having them in London.

But about those conventions... They were remarkably similar. All the dynamics of convention-going seemed to apply just as much to Typego as to ConFiction. This held true even though Typego was a quarter the size or less, cost ten times as much, and was ostensibly a completely professional affair. (I got into Typego for

free by arranging to cover it for *Aldus Magazine*; there was no way I could afford the admission fee of nearly \$800, which might have come to more after translating through Swiss francs. And I avoided hotel costs by staying in Reading with Dave and Hazel Langford, although this did mean that I had to cut out of late-night parties to catch the last train. Typographers party as late, and as foolishly, as science fiction fans.) Both conventions had too many tracks of programming, both were spread out so you had a hard time finding the things and people you wanted to see, and both seemed to have the same dynamics of BNFs, neos, private and public parties, and shifting groups going out to dinner. Typego had the advantage of being held in the heart of Oxford, spread among several of the university's colleges, rather than being spread thinly through a huge modern convention center on the outskirts of the Hague, as ConFiction was. At Typego I was a neo, knowing only a few people and often wanting to meet people whose names I knew but whose presence made me feel shy. By the end of the convention, however, I had found a group of friends – some British, some American – with whom to hang out, and we had an excellent time.

The worldcon was a lot of fun, despite the impersonalness of the convention center and the lack of a central place to find people. It wasn't as dominated by Americans as I'd feared it would be; it was instead dominated by the British, to the extent that one British fan, with no small irony, thanked the Dutch for letting British fandom put on its Eastercon over there. I was happy to see a lot of the Brits, although too many of the British fans I would have liked to see did not, in fact, show up. (And my time in Britain afterward was too brief, and too filled with typographic business, to go far afield and see many of them. In particular, I regret not being able to go north and visit Leeds, home of Simon Ounsley, D. West, and Mal and Hazel Ashworth, among others.) But the con wasn't just British or Dutch; it was quite clearly international. Although I didn't meet a lot of the Eastern Europeans and other visitors, I did spend time talking to a courtly Polish SF editor, and I met or remet various Dutch and other Western European fans. I spent a long time one evening talking about old fanzines and perennial Swedish fan feuds with John-Henri Holmberg. We also saw a good deal of the various visiting Australians, including the nouveau-ASFR crew (augmented by Peter Nicholls) and GUFF winner and typophile Roman Orszanski.

One of the highlights of the con was the very funny dinner conversation we had with Dave Langford and Patrice Duvic while waiting interminably for our meal in a Greek restaurant in Scheveningen, as the food didn't appear but more carafes of reitsina did.



We did vile and horrible things to the pretensions of various science fiction professionals and all our close personal friends, and we invented "cybertongue" ("to be used for the learning of languages only").

I enjoyed the Hague itself – or rather, Scheveningen, the seaside village on the other side of the woods where we actually stayed during the con. Scheveningen has more than its share of nursing homes and retirees; to my surprise, I actually saw old women in traditional costume several times, looking as though they felt dressed in their normal garb. The tram system was wonderful: indeed the trams and the entire transportation system of Holland are superb and very efficient. (The train system of the entire country seems like just a slightly enlarged city transit system. When we made a mistake and had to get off an intercity train one time, catch the next train back to the Hague, and then catch a later train to our destination, the entire episode cost us only an hour of wasted time. Now *that's* a train system! And the ubiquitous trams and buses in Amsterdam put that entire city within our reach, even on the day when my back went out and I could barely hobble from block to block.) We came back to the Hague at the end of our trip, at the invitation of Roelof Goudriaan and Lynn-Anne Morse, who live in suburban Rijswijk, and we got to see the city from the inside then. We hopped trams and gorged ourselves on Indonesian rijstafels and ate home-made Dutch pancakes and finally stayed up our last night drinking vodka and talking with Roelof and Lynn-Anne and Roman Orszanski while Lynn-Anne taped some of Eileen's Russian rock and Uzbek pop records.

I remember browsing through a massive Dutch-Frisian dictionary in Simon Joukes's elegant home in Delft, the day Roelof and Lynn-Anne and Eileen and I bicycled there on the big, single-speed Dutch bikes with the high handlebars. I remember sitting on the sea wall at Scheveningen right after the con, watching the waves and fighting off a cold, as Steve Brown came strolling along, killing time before his flight home. I remember watching fireworks in the Hague put on by a visiting Swedish trade commission, and waiting for those same fireworks while drinking beer in what Roelof called a "very old-Hague" café, full of stalwart and stolid burghers. (I also remember looking up from in front of the train station a day or two after the fireworks and spotting a hang glider flying a Swedish flag and leaving a trail of smoke in the sky.)

Then there was Amsterdam. I love that city; it's perfectly urban. Everything in the old central city is just a few blocks from everything else, and the trams will get you around it in no time if you don't feel like walking. It's cosmopolitan and cozy at the same time. When we first arrived, we lucked out: we'd gotten in

late, and instead of a tiny hotel room the tourist bureau booked us into a spacious apartment, overlooking the Amstel River just a stone's throw from the Waterlooplein market. The apartment took up most of the ground floor of an old building. It was one huge room, stretching from the front window back to a big tile-floored modern kitchen with a skylight. Everything was painted white. The bed was huge, flat, and comfortable. The kitchen even had matching pots and pans. And the apartment contained more consumer electronics than we had at home: if we'd owned any CDs we could have played them, and I could have gotten my first glimpse of CNN on Dutch cable TV. (In English.)

As it turned out, this apartment was also right near the university area, and only a couple of blocks from a very seductive bookstore specializing in art and design, which I'm amazed that I managed to escape from without dropping a fortune. We hung out in various stylish cafés, I checked out Dutch book design in bookstores old and new, and we delighted our palates with expensive rijstafel and cheap shawarma. People kept mistaking us for locals and asking directions. It's easy to make some headway in Dutch, but this is one city where it's really true that everyone speaks English; in fact, it's easier to understand the English of most Amsterdamers than it is to understand the accents of some of the British.

We couldn't get booked back into the apartment on our return to Amsterdam, but we did end up in a comfortable old hotel with the best breakfasts of our entire trip and a manager who looked and sounded just like Donald Sutherland. When the ceiling of our top-floor room began leaking in a thunderstorm one afternoon, he sent up buckets and pans and told us all about the ripoff landlords who will rent out a historic building like that one as a hotel but can't be bothered to fix the roof. The leak didn't hurt us, and it gave us a fascinating glimpse into the economics of the Amsterdam housing market.

The only thing I regret about Amsterdam is that we didn't know anyone there, so we bounced off the surface as tourists, no matter how many people mistook us for Dutch. Roelof grew up in Amsterdam; next time we'll have to persuade him to come with us and show us around. And there are connections with Dutch typographers that I failed to make in time for this trip, but that I can cultivate for the future. We'll be back.

### *The publisher's dilemma*

I keep thinking, off and on, about the subject of small-press publishing in the science fiction field. I particularly think about this when I'm confronted by a table full of small-press SF publications in the



hucksters' room at a convention. I pick them up, one at a time, and then I put them back, shaking my head. I spot one that looks like an exception, grab it, and quickly discover some awkwardness of typography or design that spoils the effect.

There is noble work being done, of course, all of it – or almost all of it – a labor of love, but still I'm hard put to think of exceptions. Most of the books published by small-press publishers in the science fiction field are not well made. Some are embarrassing; many are simply flawed. I'm not talking about the writing here, but about the physical book itself.

Too often, the problem is that the publisher has no idea of what a well-made book is.

I was looking at photos in *Locus* of the covers of two apparently well-made small-press SF collections, and I could see the contradiction that makes such books fail. The covers were clearly cloth, and the cloth looked like it had a pleasing texture. (The photos were black & white, so I have no idea of the colors.) There was a title embossed in the middle of each cover. But instead of title designs and lettering that reflected the traditions of well-made books, I saw title designs that, in their style and their aims, were borrowed from the visual language of mass-market paperbacks.

In a genre field, where the mainstream of publishing is entirely commercial, with a long tradition of lurid covers and cheap production values, it's no surprise that even a small-press book destined to be sold by mail or in person to specialist readers is graced with a garish dust jacket and punctuated inside with big illustrations. The colorful displays designed to attract a browsing potential customer in a bookstore or supermarket are taken to be the emblems of quality, without which no science fiction book can hope to be taken seriously. And so you get the strange hybrids between the fine edition and the pulp style that litter the hucksters' tables at cons.

### *Bored by bricks*

Is it possible that the reason people talk so eagerly about the death of paper and the rise of electronic books is that so many of the books they see are badly made? Most paperbacks are impossible to read, and even some of the hardbacks that you pay fancy prices for are so poorly constructed that they're physically painful to read. You have to hold them open with a brick, or by the constant pressure of your fingers and thumbs. The type curves into the gutters and disappears, so you're never able to read a line of type on a flat surface. No wonder people look forward to reading off a flat screen that they can control, one page at a time! Who would worship the "tactile feel" of read-

ing a book when that feel consists of sore thumbs and abraded fingers?

The ideal that some publishers seem to be striving for now is the "block o' book": a small, solid brick made of paper, easy to store, easy to move, easy to slap a colorful label on (that is, the cover). A thick brick is better than a thin one, because you can charge more for it; after all, the consumer can *see* how much value the book has by measuring the thickness of the brick, right?

Few book manufacturers (or their clients) seem to remember that a book is in use when it is *open*, not when it's closed.

### *Printing on demand?*

At the recent Orycon in Portland, I found myself in an argument in the huckster's room with a bookseller who turned out to be also the publisher of the small-press editions on his table. He was proud of his books, naturally; I was unimpressed. We argued about techniques of design and production, and about how a book ought to be used. His books were laserprinted at low resolution and then reproduced on a photocopier, and he bound the books using a technique called "library binding." (Library binding is like stapling, only stronger: you sew right through the book from front to back, which holds all the pages tightly together, instead of sewing through the *folds* in the signatures, as in a traditional sewn book, which attaches the pages to the inside of the spine. A library-bound book may last through innumerable readings, but it's so tightly bound shut that every reading is an effort.) We had genuine differences of taste, but the most interesting thing came out only late in the encounter: the biggest advantage he saw in his methods was that he could print up only as many copies as he actually needed at one time.

That's the trick that every publisher has been trying to pull off: printing exactly as many copies as they need, and no more. Who wants a big inventory of unsold copies, especially when the federal government lays a tax on that inventory every year? But who wants to underprint, and end up with not enough copies to meet the demand? Printing takes time, and it's only economical in large quantities (or if you can charge a high price for each copy).

What if you could print books one or a few at a time, on demand? Even better, what if the printing were done wherever the buyer was, instead of your having to print all the copies in one location and then ship them to your customers? That's the allure of printing-on-demand: electronic kiosks in every bookstore (or airline terminal, or grocery check-out line, or home) from which any buyer could browse the available



titles, pick one, enter their credit code, and have a copy of the book printed out for them right then and there. A commonplace detail in many a science fiction story.

Well, yeah, but how well made is this instant book going to be? As badly as a mass-market paperback? Worse? As badly as an office memo? Can reading it be as painful as trying to read the same book off a computer screen? Maybe those on-line electronic books wouldn't be so bad after all.

Can an instant book, printed on demand, be well made? The short answer is easy: no. The long answer, though, is wide open, and it requires a marriage of technology and design that draws from the long tradition of book making and the very short tradition of electronic publishing. The answer may still be no, but it's by no means clear yet.

### *Writers on the edge*

What do Jacques Ferron, Dino Buzzati, Jack Hodgins, Luisa Valenzuela, and Gregory McNamee have in common? I wish I knew – but it seems like they do belong together. Each is a talented short-story writer, and each hovers on the edges of categories, writing oblique fables that take our everyday reality on a joyride without ever leaving the familiar garage. All of them write stories that could be considered fantasy, but none of them is in any sense a genre writer, least of all in a gutter genre like science fiction. Yet don't they all belong, in the larger sense? Aren't stories like these, the kind that cannot be categorized, that follow no recognizable path, exactly the kind that we look for in the "literature of imagination"?

I thought about the common thread that runs between these writers several years ago, when the organizers of the world fantasy convention in Seattle were looking for topics for programming items. (I've added Gregory McNamee to the list since then; at the time I knew him only as an incisive book reviewer.) I felt there was something worth saying about them collectively, about why I thought of them together. The list is not exhaustive; I'm interested in what they have in common, not in drawing a boundary around them. I have no idea whether any of these writers – the ones who are still living, anyway – would consider themselves to belong with each other or not.

This musing of mine connects with another thought, prompted by too many glances at the racks of SF paperbacks and at the ad pages in *Locus*. Why is SF so hooked on adventure? To the point where in some critics' minds, "story" equals "adventure story," and the absence of a thriller plot brings on fits of denunciation? I enjoy a well-told adventure tale, too, but I don't insist on it. A really imaginative writer can

evoke a sense of displacement, of rearrangement, sometimes of *katharsis*, that makes the old "sense of wonder" pale. Isn't *this* the hit that we open a book looking for?

### *Short takes*

¶ In the world of the future, when nanotechnology has rendered everything permeable and mutable, will we solve office clutter by having *smart junk*? We'd have a sort of "sunset law" for kipple, by which, if we hadn't moved it or picked it up after a certain time, most of the junk would self-destruct, and the really important items would either find their way back to wherever they came from or, if they had never been properly filed in the first place, create a category and a place for themselves and leave a logical trail behind, so you could find them later. "It must be around here *someplace*..."

¶ Absolutely essential musical recommendation: the Oyster Band. They are my favorite band, bar none, and their most recent record (okay, CD), *Deserters*, is the best album I've heard in quite some time. They've got the drive of hard rock and the rhythm and coherence of a folk-based dance band (which they started out as, 'way back in the '70s, when they were the Oyster Ceilidh Band). And they've got something to say. These guys are mostly English (one is a Scot), and they've had it up here with Thatcherite Britain and the ethic of selfishness. John Jones and Ian Telfer, two of the members who've been in since the beginning, write scathing, poetic lyrics that reveal new connections every time you listen to them. The meanings are not always obvious, but they work on an evocative gut level. The Oyster Band also borrows from the best, such as Nick Lowe's "Rose of England" and Phil Ochs's "Gonna do what I have to do," which they give a driving beat that turns it into an anthem. One of their own songs has provided me with a credo that keeps me going at times (and may be just as apropos in the Clinton years as in Bush & Reagan's America or in Maggie Thatcher's Britain):

*Work like you were living  
In the early days of a better nation.*

And if you ever get a chance to hear them live, don't pass it up. You won't be able to sit still. You won't be able to make out the lyrics (for that, you'll have to buy the albums), but you'll come out of it energized like you've never been before.

¶ Seen on a toilet wall in the Broadway Arcade: "Strike for Indolence and Spiritual Beauty."

¶ Next issue out RealSoonNow. You know the drill.