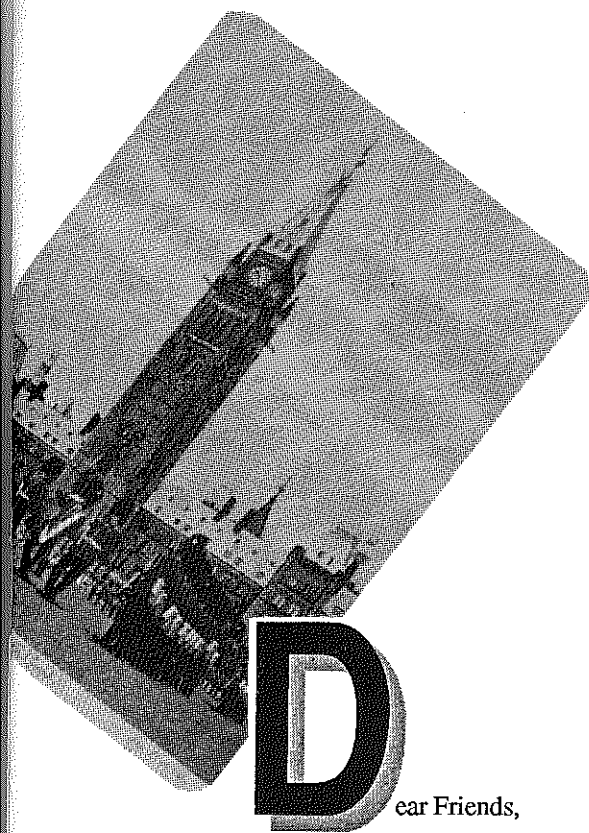


LETTER FROM

O T T A W A



Dear Friends,

In Ottawa it is always 5 degrees colder at least.

It's not always clear what the comparison is with, necessarily, but it is still always 5 degrees colder, and there's still always a comparison.

It must be very Canadian.

A lot of people ride bicycles here and often you can't tell by looking at people what they do. There is a kind of gentleness about the edges. People seem to be disregarding the fact that this is a risky business, that it is better to know exactly what and where people are if you want to know that about yourself. After all, this is the capital. In fact, it's not that they really forget at all, because insofar as there is a cafe culture it is still based very much on a class system which is based very much on knowing who people are and what they do. But this knowledge is more esoteric than in other places. You can't tell by looking at them, so perhaps the riskiness lies in identifying the more esoteric (less visible) with the more gentle (less dangerous). This would never happen in Toronto. I'm not even sure it really happens in Ottawa. People seem to spend a lot of time at home, theirs or somebody else's, not in cafes.

But Ottawans like art. There is a big regional art fair about to happen and the paper has given it a big centrespread advance schedule. Everything is anticipated very positively and equitably: performance poetry, new art, curated crafts, very different kinds of music. It is truly regional and yet there is a certain degree of variety, and everything seems to be very interesting and promising, and it is evident that it will all be very enjoyable. It is clear Ottawans like art.

Feeling homesick and observant at the same time, I found this item pretty interesting:

... Unlike the capital, the metropolis has no identity to preserve: it is only concerned with promoting certain proportional relations. In the name of these relations, which are sometimes confused with relations of equality, the metropolis feels free to exploit all regions of the world.

The capital, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with subjugating the national territory and population to a common heritage. Consequently, whereas the metropolis is more readily maritime than continental, the capital is necessarily bound to its hinterland. Even as the capital drains the resources of the hinterland, it must protect it, for it is on this guarantee of protection that its legitimacy depends . . .

The center of the capital represents the political power by which it has subjugated its territory. This center, sporadically alive with the comings and goings of representatives, is often apparently vacant, especially at night: it is never the heart of metropolitan life. The metropolis meanwhile is the place where people congregate . . . The metropolis puts an incongruous mix of beings into circulation; it offers its own mode of space-time to those for whom the principles of a sovereign people and a nation-state do not apply. It is a place of experimentation, where new operational propositions can be made concerning current practices - as long as capitalization does not set in. As soon as it does, the metropolis begins to be eclipsed.

Anne Querrien: "The Metropolis and the Capital", *Zone*, No. 1/2, 1986.

I have used my new computer to render the above information in proper form. I have now truly joined the School of Journalism with this equipment. At university, journalism and mass communications co-exist on one floor of the building. Journalism students are trained to produce things, while mass communications students are trained to analyse them. Recently there has been a shift of emphasis, they tell me; not that there is a shortage of good journalism students, but that mass communications is growing so much faster; they have to limit student enrollments, even turn people away. Putting aside self-interest, this is a strange situation, if only in juxtaposition with other recent events. During the first week of classes, Pierre Juneau was recorded as claiming that the CBC was being underfunded because the government doesn't like what CBC journalists are saying about it. In fact the CBC has always been underfunded; perhaps that's been one of the reasons. But of course it's much worse now, because of Mulroney. Otherwise I'm sure Juneau wouldn't say anything about it. So it worries me that there might be a gradual geological shift from critical journalism (criticism as intervention) to critical analysis, a kind of meta-media. Like this. Perhaps it means that the hard-hitting CBC public affairs reporting tradition really is

going to go to the dogs. This is purely conjecture. But it is an important issue here on the third floor. I will be paying close attention, of course.

My bank manager, upon learning that I was teaching mass communications, asked me, while appending his signature to a form, why the press was so hostile towards Mulroney. Well, I said, because there is a relationship between press and government, and Mulroney has misused it by thinking too much about his own image and not enough about political negotiation and direction, and has thus insulted the press, and they know it. I didn't use those words. (I didn't call it a "failure to communicate" - thank god I have some dignity left.)

But it was a very superficial and sloppy answer, really. Add to this: Mulroney wants to model himself after Thatcher (who commands) and Reagan (who communicates). He wants to be that kind of political leader. He imagines some sort of national destiny in that direction. He imagines putting punch into the annihilation of the public sector, he imagines the thrill of military bravado, he promotes government by advertising its retreat. But this doesn't work in Canada at all. It doesn't work in terms of style. Even more it doesn't work in terms of social policy or political orientation. He isn't smart or principled or aggressive enough to solve this contradiction (or not to solve it but to go ahead trumpeting regression) so he tries to play across all the fronts at the same time. He puts his face where his head should be, he puts tone of voice where there should be an answer. Have you heard him being interviewed? It gives me vertigo, truly. What looks like a psychology of weak ego and image-obsession is actually a logical ploy for solving political problems through non-political means, which is what that sort of psychology is about, largely speaking, anyway, all the more so surrounded by cameras and mirrors. Most people are aware of aspects of this larger explanation for the shorter answer. But in Ottawa, answers tend to become very technical. I realized this walking away from the bank.

Happy second birthday, *border/lines*. Many happy returns of the day, and don't forget to write.

love, Jody

Jody Berland has recently moved to Ottawa to teach Communications and Popular Culture at Carleton University. She is a contributing editor of border/lines.