

PLACES OF THE MIND

*The Life and Work of
James Thomson ('B.V.')*

TOM LEONARD

To my friend Jim Ferguson
- with admiration and respect
for your work

Tom

Tennants Bar

January 26th 1993

Tom Leonard (1944 -2018) – 'Notes Personal' in Response to his Life and Work
an essay by Jim Ferguson



JONATHAN CAPE
LONDON

1. How I met the human being named 'Tom Leonard'

I was ill with epilepsy and post-traumatic stress disorder. It was early in 1986. I was living in a flat on Causeyside Street, Paisley, with my then partner. We were both in our mid-twenties and our relationship was happy and loving. We were rather bookish with quite a strong sense of Scottish and Irish working class identity and an interest in socialism, social justice. I think we both held the certainty that the world could be changed for the better in myriad ways, I know I did and I think my partner did too. You feel as if you share these basic things, a similar basic outlook, and this is probably why you want to live in a little tenement flat with one human being rather than any other.

We were not career minded and our interest in money only stretched so far as having enough to live on and make ends meet. Due to my ill health I wasn't getting out much and rarely ventured far from the flat, though I was working on 'getting better'.

In these circumstances I found myself filling my afternoons writing stories and poems. I had a little manual portable typewriter and would sit at a table and type away. I was a very poor typist which made poetry much more appealing and enjoyable because it could be done in fewer words with a lot less tipp-ex. Nevertheless I persevered with the prose writing and took great pleasure in the poetry.

I'd sometimes post poems or a story to friends I corresponded with: someone wrote back to me saying that the poet Tom Leonard was writer in residence at Paisley Library and if I wanted to take my writing further I should show some of my 'stuff' to him as it seemed like the kind of thing he would be interested in. I had a very vague idea of who this Tom Leonard person might be and hadn't read any of his work. I was still pretty much under the impression that you waited until a poet was dead before you read their work; something that school and society had instilled in me without my consciously thinking about it. Until I received that letter I'd never thought of analysing what set of assumptions and received wisdom my 'dead poet' impression had arisen from.

Other than working out an understanding of my own creative process, I understood little of literary history, and nothing of the politics of language or what might be termed the 'cultural politics of the super-structure'. In these latter spheres of intellectual endeavour, or mind work, I was completely naive. Meeting Tom Leonard irrevocably changed all that. In the course of changing the scanty assumptions I had about literature meeting Tom Leonard was to change my life entirely.

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*contemplate in timely measure the rolling tide of history.
ebb and flow of desire, disappearance and death.
the end and end of time.
where ever did the big-bang spring from?*

*

I handed an envelope addressed to Tom Leonard, containing two stories and some poems, in to Paisley Library and he replied by post with an invitation to meet in his room there. We had a very engaged discussion. He said he liked one of the stories and the poetry was awright: this felt very positive to me at the time. He asked me what writers I liked; I mentioned Brecht, Kafka, Beckett and J. P. Donleavy, maybe Edna O'Brien. Tom started talking about Brecht's poetry and this was news to me as I had only known of Brecht as a dramatist until that point. I told him my favourite piece by Beckett was 'Not I' and Tom smiled.

He struck me as alert and intellectually fierce: a kind and sensitive listener, quick to understand what I was saying and where I was coming from. It was to me a strangely calm and relaxing conversation, yet at the same time intense and exciting. Tom suggested that I come to his Monday evening writers' group because there were folk there close to my own age and with similar interests. I said that I didn't like to go outside at night could I attend the afternoon group instead? We agreed on this. He never once even hinted that writing was not for the likes of me. He took me on face value as a writer no bona fides necessary. After about 2 or 3 months going to the afternoon group and with my health improving I started to go to the Monday evening group. It was there that I met Graham Fulton, Bobby Christie and many other good people. And so began my education in literary art which has continued since the day I met Tom Leonard in 1986.

2. *Intimate Voices*

We live in a limited form of social democracy which enables and allows to a limited extent shifts in the balance of economic power and so the balance of ideas, values, culture and social practices can shift too. However, we must be constantly convinced and re-convinced by capitalism that ‘we’re all in this together’ even if it is as plain as can be that we are not all equal participants at the table of power. The dominant cultural narratives, dominant ideas and ideology belong to the powerful. This is what Marx was getting at in *The German Ideology* when he stated that: “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.” This of course is one view and it is a kind of economic reductionism but there is nevertheless some truth to Marx’s general principle here.

In a class society or society in conflict this “ruling intellectual force” becomes problematic because the values, interests and priorities of the ruling class do not necessarily correspond with those of the rest of us. In order to bridge this gulf of alienation the ruling class impose their narratives and intellectual priorities relentlessly until the rest of us find it difficult to distinguish our priorities from the priorities of those in authority, our betters, our lords and masters. This is where ‘the cultural super-structure’ and ‘cultural consumables’ become vitally important in maintaining the economic status quo. Certain exercises in democracy can mitigate this alienation; but the ruling classes never let their guards down for a single moment, as they must dominate ideas if they are to continue their economic domination without the use of actual brute force and terror in order to keep the populous compliant.

Part of the nature of being a human being is that other human beings recognise and validate our existence. This validation is required by most people to greater or lesser degrees and is hugely important in relation to mental and physical health, to social functioning, the ability to sympathise and empathise, and to constructive introspection and reflection. Sharing communal experiences with friends who have something in common with ourselves helps us feel healthy and happy. If the actual narrative of the lives of most people is seen to be fundamentally at odds with the ruling ideology then this is a major problem. People might want to feel free enough to develop habits that our rulers have not approved, which in turn could lead to a chaos of anarchy and happiness.

One of the great achievements of Tom Leonard’s book *Intimate Voices* (Galloping Dog Press, 1984) is how it exposes some of the untruths within the narratives that capitalism tells us, and the mechanisms by which it does so. The general concepts I have tried to express in the three

There are also conclusions regarding psychology and philosophy but I leave these for others to investigate. Neither should it be forgotten that *Intimate Voices* has a depth of humour, satire and irony that makes its reading a sheer joy. There were few things as enjoyable in this world as hearing Tom Leonard read sequences from that book in live performance. Few poets and few pieces of poetry could hold a live audience so spellbound and exhilarated. Still fewer could fill a room with the kind of raucous laughter and seriousness of intention that Tom could do.

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The poems and essays in *Intimate Voices* do other things too, they entertain, they challenge stereotypes and they make you feel that it is ok to be a working class male from the West of Scotland. The writing is an antidote to the ‘Scottish cringe’: to the dislike, self-ridicule, loathing and self-loathing, of my own working-class culture that the British imperial establishment and Capitalist/Unionist politics encourage. This was the first poetry I read that specifically validated one’s existence while retaining artistic integrity and at the same time avoided male-working-class heroics and tartan sentimentality. It is truthful, ‘open and honest’: most of us don’t wear kilts. It chimes harmoniously with how many working-class people feel, people of every nation and none. It is possibly the most important book of poetry I’ve ever read. Even after thirty-four years the impulse of creative energy I received from reading *Intimate Voices* for the first time has still not worn off.

3. The Great Wall of Prose

Leonard's two major prose works are *Places of the Mind: The Life and Work of James Thomson (B. V.)*, (Jonathan Cape, London, 1993) and *Definite Articles: Selected Prose 1973-2012*, (Etruscan/WP Books, Devon & Edinburgh, 2013). The 'Preface' to the latter opens with the sentence: "The prose in this collection falls mainly into three categories: literary, topical-political and personal. They overlap." This is true of all of Leonard's work, all of it overlaps. The title I have given to this section is mythical hype and bunk. There is no 'Great Wall of Prose' in any sense that Leonard's prose stands separate or apart from the poetry and drama. They do indeed overlap. The first sentence in the 'Preface and Acknowledgements' of *Places of the Mind* is: "The debate between the behavioural determinist and those who believe in the universal democracy of the individual consciousness, is not of recent development."

Places of the Mind is a highly complex and structured text. It is a remarkable narrative guide to 19th century, literature, politics, philosophy, theology and morality. It is, if you will, a map of that century. All maps have to be made by someone and on one level it is Tom Leonard's map of the 19th century, and Leonard looks back at that century through the lens of the life of James Thomson but the eye that is looking through lens is a post-World War II, 20th century eye, attempting to understand where the debate between 'behavioural determinism' and 'the universal democracy of the individual consciousness' now sits.

Places of the Mind is a porous structure: Leonard's primary concern is not causality, but process and the development of ideas: what such developments might mean, "If one loved one's self, body and all, one might even be able to love one's neighbour, body and all, without feeling too guilty about it, or without thinking there must be something wrong with them if they felt the same way about you. But whilst loving one's own body, one should nonetheless clear one's mind and heart of what was contrary to love: anger or the desire for vengeance" (PotM, p.xi). Of course, it is not that simple, if we accept the existence of an afterlife only to find that, "Admission to Hell was denied me, since I had no Hope to abandon at the gate" (p.156) and "the weirdest things seem least strange, and the soul is too outworn for wondering" (p.157).

ANGEL

WARRIOR

UNARMED MAN

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

Two Postscripts

There is much in *Places of the Mind* that concerns love, literary art, suffering and existential pain. There is social, millenarianist-theological and political history: and there is the story of James Thomson (B.V.) himself. Thomson was deeply immersed in the literature of his time as both a poet and critic of great talent. He translated work by Novalis, Leopardi and Heine, and if I remember rightly proof-read George Eliot's *Silas Marner*, among much other literary work. According to Henry S. Salt, Thomson's first biographer, Karl Marx "expressed his delight at the versions from Heine, which he [Marx] described as 'no translation, but a reproduction of the original, such as Heine himself, if master of the English language, would have given.'" Eleanor Marx, finding Thomson's Heine translations at the back of her volume of 'The City of Dreadful Night' had copied them out and given them to her father (See PotM, p.240, 311).

Born in Port Glasgow, 1834, Thomson spent the latter part of his childhood in London's Royal Caledonian Asylum, spent time in the British Army in Ireland, and worked sometime in America. Thomson wrote reviews, articles and essays, mainly for the *National Reformer*, *The Secularist* and *Cope's Tobacco Plant*, securing his international reputation as a poet with 'The City of Dreadful Night', which opens thus:

PROEM

Lo, thus, as prostrate, "In the dust I write
 My heart's deep languor and my soul's sad tears."
 Yet why evoke the spectres of black night
 To blot the sunshine of exultant years?
 Why disinter dead faith from mouldering hidden?
 Why break the seals of mute despair unbidden,
 And wail life's discords into careless ears?

Because a cold rage seizes one at whiles
 To show the bitter old and wrinkled truth
 Stripped naked of all vesture that beguiles,
 False dreams, false hopes, false masks and modes of youth;
 Because it gives some sense of power and passion
 In helpless innocence to try to fashion
 Our woe in living words howe'er uncouth.

Surely I write not for the hopeful young,
Or those who deem their happiness of worth,
Or such as pasture and grow fat among
The shows of life and feel nor doubt nor dearth,
Or pious spirits with a God above them
To sanctify and glorify and love them,
Or sages who foresee a heaven on earth.

For none of these I write, and none of these
Could read the writing if they deigned to try;
So may they flourish in their due degrees,
On our sweet earth and in their unplaced sky.
If any cares for the weak words here written,
It must be some one desolate, Fate-smitten,
Whose faith and hopes are dead, and who would die.

Yes, here and there some weary wanderer
In that same city of tremendous night,
Will understand the speech and feel a stir
Of fellowship in all-disastrous fight;
“I suffer mute and lonely, yet another
Uplifts his voice to let me know a brother
Travels the same wild paths though out of sight.”

O sad Fraternity, do I unfold
Your dolorous mysteries shrouded from of yore?
Nay, be assured; no secret can be told
To any who divined it not before:
None uninitiate by many a presage
Will comprehend the language of the message,
Although proclaimed aloud for evermore.

Thomson’s last years were a struggle with mental health issues, poverty and alcoholism, during which he mostly lived in lodgings in London. He died on June 3rd 1882.

Leonard describes *Places of the Mind* as “a shape, containing a biography, made slowly in response to the shape of the Art of another” (p.xiii). It is that and much more besides.

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against the floodings of histories.
cities and minds.
against rapacious marketeers.
those who would strangle the breath of imagination.
and honest voices shouting or whispering.
sane or deranged?

*what is gained in the living is lost in the dying if in between we do not speak.
but cower silently at the last lonely resort.
dejected, bitter and sad.
better to speak and be done with it.
life is the thing.
living is the movement.
for word and against history with history, with contradiction.
with a unity of opposites. with industry and toil and worthlessness and pleasure.*

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In almost any other country with pretensions to a literate and literary culture, this work, this ‘shape containing a biography’ would most likely have received much critical attention, public debate and media coverage. It is for me an outstanding piece of work that should have given Tom Leonard a more than deserved reputation as a word-class literary talent.

The level of literary criticism and engagement in Scotland’s so-called national newsprint and in literary magazines in general, cut a groove of almost utter fuck-all-ity, when placed beside work such as this. This is work of the highest standard. It is accessible and intellectually rigorous. It is thought provoking and it is opinionated. It is committed, open and democratic. It stands as an indictment of our media, our culture and our society that such a work is so under-valued; and that is a sign of faith in ignorance. It is, frankly my dears, a fucking outrage that *Places of the Mind* didn’t even make it into a paperback edition and remains available in hardback only.

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*songs of life in every breath, in every breath a human scale.
a democratic voice in the pub. full of people.
all kinds of people telling their stories and singing their songs.
alive and honest.
outwith the business of business or strange hierarchical systems.
control over knowledge leaves experience of knowledge buried in land-fill
... we are land full of language ...
powerful bastards with megaphone mouths line their pockets and their nests with the joy of owning
the experience of others.
and the knowledge of others. they suck the life out of your marrow, out of neurones.
leaving you nowhere.
lost in a world of pain and addiction and you probably canny fix it.
not the one person.
not just one person alone.
other people are required.*

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Definite Articles is a selection of Leonard's essays, articles and blog pieces which covers the period 1973 to 2012. It is not quite full and exhaustive with regard to his essay work. Right away I can think of a significant piece on W. S. Graham which is not included and it would be good see to a complete or nearer complete edition of essays and articles. I guess that Tom thought this selection was representative of his work as an essayist and was happy with what was in the book. Nevertheless, there is a job of scholarship to be done in this regard. Also, it would be useful to see a complete bibliography of all of Tom's work, if such a thing does not exist already.

Essay writing was a very important way for Tom to work out his ideas and thoughts on what he liked and didn't like, and why. In essays like 'Proof of the Mince Pie' and 'What Happens in Rezinkoff's Poetry' Tom shows us how he and why he has come to the views that he holds. There is very little that is slapdash or ill thought out. Tom liked to take his time over essay writing. He was an extremely careful and attentive writer, and chose his language, layout, and presentation of conceptual development with precision: some of his reasons for being so are explained in the essay called 'The Common Breath: a poetic tradition' (DA, p.162).

The politics of space on the page is a politics of democracy, of transference from world of text as "the" to that of reader-subject as "this". It is the universalisation of the author-reader experience away from the world of passing-the-parcel to those fit to open the parcels of cultural referents of supposedly universal value (which opening of parcels has been the industry of literary-academic exegesists this past hundred years); towards the structuring of a system of common breath, the integer of the universal human.

The basis of poetry is line, the basis of prose, paragraph — most of the time. Three types of basic poetry line: as unit of metre, as unit of meaning, as unit of articulation. The politics of space belongs to the last.

The preface to Williams's 1946 *Paterson*: Book One begin colon, space.

: a local pride;

It is a little like the opening chords of Beethoven's third symphony of 1806. (DA, p.162)

The essay goes on to argue the case for democracy of form, for freedom to experiment, or as Leonard puts it: "a democracy of breath, actuated by the eye and ear in the private *agora* of a page shared between reader and writer." (DA, p.173)

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a person feels inclined they must work out for themselves what they think or feel about any art work: it is 'the universal democracy of the individual consciousness' made flesh, made practical.

Beyond the literary, *Definite Articles* deals with topics ranging from the 'Mass Bombing of Iraq and Kuwait', to sexual abuse, to appreciations of RD Laing, Edwin Morgan, Tom Raworth and the often homeless Glaswegian artist and writer Alex Aitchison, some of whose paintings can be viewed at the rear smoking area of the Laurieston Bar near Glasgow's Bridge Street Subway Station.

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*if you
won't join in
with the sinews
of business
then you won't
belong in
official history.
even though
your voice
exists. it won't
belong in the
history of the
great men and
great women
of officialdom.
you will
be the
rabble.*

*

4. *Life and Work 1986 to 1990*

As far as I recall Tom Leonard worked as writer-in-residence at Paisley Central Library for three years during the period 1986 to 1990. James Kelman had preceded and Agnes Owens followed.

Tom ran at least two weekly writers groups, Monday evenings and Tuesday afternoons. Organised and hosted several Paisley Writers' Festivals. Selected, edited, and wrote the introduction for the anthology *Radical Renfrew*. Published two pamphlets: *Situations Theoretical and Contemporary* (Galloping Dog Press, Newcastle 1986), and, *Two Members' Monologues and A Handy Form for Artists for use in connection with The City of Culture* (Edward Polin Press, Glasgow 1989). Completed the poem 'Nora's Place' and wrote other essays and articles. Tom was incredibly hard working and the 1980s was, I think, an extremely creative decade for him. Though for all I know the 1970s probably was too. As well as being hard working he was fun to be around, generally witty and humorous with occasional bouts of grumpiness and a searing intelligence. He was alert, aware and alive in every way. It was an absolute pleasure to get know such a person as Tom, especially for me as a young writer.

Tom was also doing quite a lot of live performance. It was during this period that he did a show called *Lentil Soup* at The Third Eye Centre. *Lentil Soup*, featured sound poetry, some wonderful comedy, poems from *Intimate Voices* and *Situations Theoretical*, and performance of a version of *If Only Bunty was Here*, in which James Kelman and Alasdair Gray had roles to great comic effect; there was a mock 'football phone-in' regarding the Scottish Cup and a Scottish budgie. Tom made a pot of lentil soup live on stage and everyone was given a little medicine bottle of lentil soup when leaving the show. It also featured a set from the singer Peter Nardini. It wuz rare fun, it wuz right fuckin good. Tom also performed live at 'Poets Against the Poll Tax' and 'Scottish Friends of Palestine' events, to mention but two overtly political literary happenings he took part in.

At this time Tom very generously introduced me to a host of other writers and artists from all walks of life, levels of 'success' and backgrounds. A few became close friends, some I formed good working relationships with, while others remained people with whom I'd had a fleeting meeting. Life and work for me were becoming difficult to disentangle. In fact, Tom and I quite often had lengthy discussions about different artists and the effect their personal life choices might have had on the reception of their work and so on. One such case was Ezra Pound in regard to his support for Benito Mussolini yet his brilliance as a literary critic, editor and poet. How was one to assess the life and work of Pound?

At Paisley Writers' group Tom Leonard was a fierce critic, a great encourager and fine teacher. He took peoples' work seriously. We looked at poems line by line as a group and Tom gave the work full and rigorous critical attention, which could at times be upsetting. He occasionally suggested that one must 'murder your darlings' in order to make the text function better as a piece of literary art. This was in effect a way of encouraging group members to look at their own writing critically, to develop self-reliance as the editor of your own work. His teaching method, or general pedagogical principles were, in brief and simplified terms; to point out by example the following:

1. To try to diminish the feelings associated with personal ego that one has about one's own writing and see it, in as far as it is possible to do so, as separate from the self. That is to see one's writing as **by the self or of the self but at the same time existing on its own as text**, is what I took him to mean. (A hard, perhaps necessary, lesson for artists who wants to improve, develop and grow.)

2. To nurture your 'own voice'.

3. To read as much as possible.

4. To do the 'mind work' that enables you to understand at least some of the many ambiguities and interpretations that others/readers can put upon your work when they encounter it: to be aware of literature as dialogue.

5. To treat the reader as an equal across the page. (A point I think touched on in Tom's essay, 'W. S. Graham: Journeys', *Edinburgh Review* #75, Ed. Kravitz, 1986.)

6. To have fun experimenting with style, irony and humour, and never be afraid.

7. To never forget your humanity.

I don't remember Tom ever explicitly outlining such a programmatic view (or list) as I have expressed it here. But the above is what I took from my experience of being at the Paisley Writers' group with Tom as 'tutor'. Others may have found it different. And there was more besides the seven basic points outlined above: stuff to do with methods of literary criticism, awareness of sub-text, value judgement, authorial intrusion and so on, all of it related. Dare I say, it all 'overlapped'. And taken as a whole it was extremely useful guidance for a writer learning their craft. Interestingly, grammar, punctuation, spelling and prescriptions of that nature didn't feature much at all.

1990 saw the launch of *Radical Renfrew* which was accompanied by a series of broadcasts on BBC Radio Scotland. The radio programmes were thematic in structure based on the section at

5. In the manner of a conclusion

It seems to me that in Scottish Literary Culture, and in global culture generally, (where identity politics is twisted into racisms and sexism, and the poor and other minorities are demonised, divided and oppressed through deliberate cultural policies and language usage), sufficient space has not yet been won that would let Leonard's ideas breathe easily within the mainstream of cultural life. There are indeed "those of us who have to remain outside the narrative". In spite of the efforts of artists such as Tom Leonard and many others, we remain, in general terms, trapped within the confines of the ruling ideas of our rulers: though this does not preclude artistic interventions which challenge the ruling ideas. Indeed, many such interventions are held up as examples of how broad and accommodating our limited form of social democracy actually is: most such interventions are, however, trashed, sidelined, ignored, and/or invalidated in the mainstream. They form part of what novelist Jeff Torrington was fond of calling, the expansion joint in which capitalism allows us to let off a little steam. Capitalist ideology, even its liberal forms, (with its underlying base the exploitation and appropriation of the fruits of the labour of others) ultimately will not allow 'the universal democracy of individual consciousness'. In this respect Leonard's life and work may be seen as a formally brilliant anti-capitalist intervention which, by its own nature, can never be comfortably accepted within a capitalist mainstream.



6. reprise: outside the narrative

On January 27th 1993 I met Tom Leonard in Tennent's Bar on Byres Road. I arrived first and was sitting sipping a pint when he came in and removed his rucksack, bunnet and scarf. We said our hellos. I assume we were meant to meet the day before because after we'd both got our pints he opened his rucksack and took out a signed hardback copy of *Places of the Mind*. He took out his pen, altered the date on the inscription from the 26th to the 27th. I have no idea what happened the day before but I remember clearly Tom opening the book and changing the date. It was before tea time, about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. It was a cauld, damp day. We talked for an hour so, drank three or four pints. Tom went home for his tea, I think. I remember being on the corner outside the pub on my own in the dark waiting to cross the road with the book in my bag. It was cold. I don't remember much else.

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those who will not be told by the establishment that our voices are contemptible

our existence is real.

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Whatever my circumstances were and where ever I then lived, I imagine I went home and read *Places of the Mind* quite quickly. Maybe over three or four days and did a little of my own writing and some drinking while I was about it. But I canny be at all sure.

I do know that by this point Tom and I were quite close friends. And from that point forward until Tom's death we were rarely out of communication for more than three or four months at a time over all those years. I say quite close friends because we always tried to respect each others' boundaries of privacy and personal life. But we did on the whole enjoy each others' company and drank and socialised together. Went swimming and shared meals.

Tom, Bobby Christie and I went to Govanhill Baths quite a lot in the 1990s. We also made wee journeys to Tollcross Baths and Scotstoun Baths. Our conversations mostly revolved around four topics, literature, football, politics and cookery. During the actual swimming we didny usually talk much ataw. In the later 1990s Tom and I went to the pool at Glasgow University. Which for

reasons I canny quite work out I didn't enjoy as much. Maybe because Bobby was there. Anyway, I probably last swam with Tom in 1999 or 2000 at the Glasgow University pool.

Late in 1993, or early 94, I read *Places of the Mind* for a second time, slowly, making annotations in the margins. I made some, kind of unmediated, stream of consciousness, notes in the blank pages at the back of the book. I had dismissed these notes as useless until I came to write this essay. Whereupon I decided to re-work that text and use it in the style of found-poetry for the pieces in italics that break-up and divide some of the sections. I thought it appropriate to include with this found material the quotation "for those of us who have to live outside the narrative" which comes from a poster-poem Tom made. A copy of which he gave to me (I think) in the late 1990s on three landscape sides of A4. I loved sharing work with Tom in this way; and we had several back and forths, by which I mean he'd give me a piece of work and I'd give him a piece of my own work by way of reply. It wasn't a formalised or structured thing. There was no planning or deep thought. It was just something that happened now and again for the fun of it.

The last alcoholic drink I saw Tom imbibe was in Edinburgh sometime in the early 2000s. Tom took the poet Graham Brodie (1970-2019) and myself for a curry in an Indian restaurant at the top of Leith Walk. It was rather comical and a bit surreal. We were the only customers in a pretty large dining room and the waiters, one of whom was Glaswegian, were very chatty and friendly. After the meal I walked with Tom up to Waverley Station and seen him onto the train. Just as I had waved cheerio through the glass I bumped into Brendan McLaughlin's son Kevin. 'Tom Leonard's in that carriage, make sure he gets back to Glasgow safely,' I said to Kevin. I remember Kevin laughed at me and made a cheeky reply. That was that. I never saw Tom partake of alcohol again. I don't know where Graham went. I walked back to my flat near the top of Leith Walk; my dwelling from around the summer of 2000 until April 2004.

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Reports from the Present: Selected Work 1982-94 was published by Cape in 1995. It contains essays and poems and is a useful edition. Tom didn't seem as pleased with this volume as he had been with *Radical Renfrew* or *Places of the Mind*. I don't think this was to do with book's content or what it was saying, perhaps he felt he could have given a better shape to the book or ordered the individual pieces in a more coherent way. And there was something about the cover that bothered him. These are but memories of impressions and feelings I had at the time, so I wouldn't bet my

wages on their factual accuracy. I lent my copy to Graham Brodie as I already had most of what was in it, either in pamphlets, magazines or bits n bobs I'd been given.

Forward in time from this point Tom's poetry changed somewhat in tone. When there was anger over politics it was perhaps less ironic and a little less humorous. Of course politics is serious not funny. Of course politics is funny, football is serious. Of course, of course, of course not of course

not of course at all

publication of *access to the silence* (etruscan books, 2004) involved:

leaning forward

partly the
inside maybe

the outside
of it, who knows

which
is the which

of it, the real
base line

the hologram
liveable within:

it changes
so readily,

the sense
of

the place
you come

to a constant
gone, no

coming back
again, maybe

all in the head... (atts, p.105)

And

the selfreflective ways
of becoming / against the emasculated husk
that lurches into alcoholism
(from 'not-him', atts, p.109)

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outside the narrative: poems 1965 . 2009 (Etruscan/Word Power Books, 2009) brings together work from *Intimate Voices*, *Reports from the Present*, *access to the silence* and other work. It presents Tom's poetry, on the whole, the way he wanted it.

It is disappointing that no one has saw fit to fully stage Tom's final published work, his translation of *Mother Courage and her Children* (Smokestack, 2014). It is one of the finest anti-war plays of the 20th century. Written by Brecht in collaboration with Grete Steffin and Ruth Berlau, Tom renders the drama wonderfully into Scots, 'in a land where diction is an index of class' (MCAHC, back-cover).

It's springtime noo! move on your way
the snaw's aw gone, the deid lie deid
but you that huvny died as yet
the powers that be, they still do need.
(MCAHC, p.119)

*

About the last words Tom Leonard said to me were, 'Remember, it's about the work Jim.'

itll just huv tay be
thaht wey coz it

canny be any other wey
thi noo. no

fur thi moment.
(from 'Hesitations', atts, p.28)

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where ever the big-bang did spring from.]

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