

EDITORIAL

VISION, WRITES LAWRENCE TAYLOR in this issue, is an essential element of policy-making – and it is equally vital, we would add, in steering a course through the swirling, often incompletely understood challenges of everyday existence. Seneca put the latter case nicely, many centuries ago, when he observed that there is no favourable wind for the person who does not know where s/he wants to go. But this vision thing is far from straightforward. The King James Bible offers a reminder that “without vision the people perish” – an aphorism that is quoted far more often than the normative phrase that accompanies it: “But he that keeps the law, happy is he.” Alternate renderings of Proverbs 29:18 suggest the complexities behind even the first part of this claim. For example, the World English Bible gives us: “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint”; and Young’s Literal Translation warns: “Without a Vision is a people made naked.” Vision is variously prophecy, revelation, image, eyesight, foresight, idea, apparition, hallucination, and dream, and it courses in these various forms (in sometimes almost phantasmagoric ways) through the pages that follow.

Our first two articles are concerned with ideas that shaped the ways in which earlier generations of British Columbians framed their views of the province and its resources as well as their hopes for the future. Writing of the Bowron Lakes east of Wells in the Cariboo Mountains as they were in the early part of the twentieth century, Mica Jorgenson reveals several competing visions for the area, particularly for the wildlife that was abundant there. Should the quadrangle within the lakes be made a sanctuary for game, especially moose, from which hunters would be excluded? Game officials and some sportsmen thought so, but others considered the entire debate misguided, lamenting that the government was being encouraged to spend large sums “to save the lives of moose &c, but next to nothing to save the lives of the people” who lived in nearby settlements. Moreover, Jorgenson notes, the dialogue around – the vision for – Bowron in the 1920s showed little sympathy for the preservation of untouched wilderness. The Bowron Lakes Game Reserve, established in 1925, reflected prevailing conservationist sentiments and turned on the idea that proper game management amounted to wise use of a provincial resource. By allowing moose and other animal populations to increase, the game sanctuary would enhance trophy hunting beyond its bounds. Creating a game reserve was not, in Jorgenson’s view, a step towards the creation of Bowron Lakes Provincial Park in 1961 because the park

rested on completely different intellectual foundations – a new vision of “wilderness” that emphasized aesthetic values and favoured recreational activities other than hunting, and that seized the popular imagination after the Second World War.

There is a tragi-comic quality to Lawrence Taylor’s discussion of the W.A.C. Bennett government’s commitment to extend a monorail line north through British Columbia and the Yukon Territory to Alaska in the 1950s; nonetheless, this is a revealing and arresting story. At its centre is Axel Wenner-Gren, the Swedish industrialist who hatched a grandiose plan to develop timber and mineral resources in the Rocky Mountain Trench of northern British Columbia. Ever anxious to promote economic development, Bennett and several of his close advisors were captivated by Wenner-Gren’s dream. At the risk of perpetrating a terrible pun, one might say that they were sucked in by the Swedish industrialist, who had made his fortune developing and selling domestic vacuum cleaners. Yet, as Taylor points out, the line between being hailed as a visionary and being dismissed as a dreamer is a fine one. Both Bennett and Wenner-Gren might have appreciated the comment attributed to John Sculley, president of PepsiCo and, for a decade after 1983, CEO of Apple Computer Inc., that “the future belongs to those who see possibilities before they become obvious.” Infatuated with the possibilities they envisaged, they were nonetheless undone, and their grand scheme brought to nought, by their neglect of the obvious – that mining wealth depends on mineral riches in the earth and that grand visions must necessarily be tempered by feasibility if they are to be more than idle dreams. Having invested a good deal of political capital in the Pacific Northern Railway plan, however, Bennett was less ready to walk away from it than the Wenner-Gren BC Development Company proved to be. Without the industrialist’s financial backing, Bennett re-envisioned the rail route as an instrument of Cold War politics, arguing that it was a necessary counter to Russian investment in Siberia. This was no more successful a ploy than the earlier joint venture had been, but the ideas behind the unbuilt (mono)rail line continued to influence patterns of transport development in the northern reaches of the province, and the whole PNR episode demonstrates the value of the past as a touchstone against which to evaluate visionary new schemes.

The other articles in this issue reflect upon more contemporary manifestations of the vision question, with particular reference to Vancouver. They provide much food for thought about the ways in which new means of communication play important roles in shaping

peoples' engagement with the world – how they see it, how they shape it, how they interact with each other within it, and how changes in these behaviours affect possibilities for action, means of understanding, capacities for surveillance, and, yes, even visions of the future. These are pervasive but under-engaged concerns. That things are changing seems certain, but perhaps the pace and magnitude of the transformations under way have left some inured to their radical dimensions and others uncomprehending and uncertain. A recent cartoon in a Vancouver daily newspaper shows a concerned father peering into his teenage daughter's room, where she has her gaze fixed on a computer screen. "I'm worried about you," he says, "you are far too old to have imaginary friends." To which she replies, resignedly: "It's called Facebook, Daddy."

Facebook is at the heart of the article by Christopher Schneider and Daniel Trottier, which reflects on the role of new social media in the aftermath of the 2011 Vancouver hockey riot. The bare bones of this story are likely well known to most readers of *BC Studies*, less than two years after large-scale violence and looting erupted on downtown streets. What Schneider and Trottier bring to it is a welcome perspective on the implications of the widespread dissemination of Facebook images and texts about the event. Their message is a sobering one. New social media facilitate what is being called "crowd-sourced policing." This operates in a grey zone, between the seemingly benign assumption invoked by civic planners and law enforcement agencies that "eyes-on-the-street" reduce criminal behaviour, through the mollifying claim that information collected from cellphone cameras is a modern-day form of the old "hue-and-cry" raised to track down fugitives from justice, to the more disturbing possibility that all of this opens the way to forms of vigilantism conducted with prejudicial fervour and in disregard of important safeguards enshrined in the criminal code. Facebook friends may not be forever true.

Nor should concern about these questions be limited to Facebook. In a brief essay in a recent collection of Fred Herzog's photographs, novelist, visual artist, and man-about-town Douglas Coupland expresses his disappointment with the low resolution of his cellphone camera, which he uses as a diary. The grainy movies he records with it are, he notes, indispensable to his recall of events. Given better and faster cameras and social networks, he writes, these kinds of "movie snippets" will "most likely replace my actual memories" – and, one assumes, allow recollection in high-definition! New sophisticated technologies are becoming evermore pervasive. Thousands of photos taken in Vancouver, and

elsewhere, every day are now automatically geo-tagged and labelled with innovations like FaceID. The data they contain are uploaded into the “Cloud” and an ever-evolving e-cosystem of social networking databases. Then they are used in sophisticated algorithms for targeted advertising, intensely focused on the Smartphone market (see photo essay).

“Vancouver in Slices,” a wide-ranging rumination provoked by a handful of recent books on the city, and the last substantial article in this issue, raises questions about the implications of these and like developments for city and society, but it provides no firm answers. Such is the pace of change that these may be beyond our reach, at least for the present. But the questions themselves are surely worthy of our attention. As social media infiltrate more and more deeply into everyday patterns of human activity, the prospects of widespread and intense surveillance of ordinary life rise exponentially. The growing prevalence of images without context, sound-bites, tweets, “mashups,” and pastiche surely makes it more difficult to find coherence in experience. And what if Coupland’s dream (our nightmare) is realized, and digital code replaces human memory? Will we still be able to find meaning in the world and craft the individual stories upon which we all depend to navigate our ways through its complexities?

As freedom and autonomy are compromised, how much more difficult might it be to develop clear perspectives on where we stand and what we individually and collectively wish for the future? In a world facing significant economic, environmental, social, and technological challenges and riven by injustice, these are questions of the utmost importance. We ignore them at our peril. If the articles that follow speak to issues larger than their specific substance, they do so by reminding us that, different and contested though they may be, visions ultimately lead people and societies to reflect on where they have come from, how they have shaped their worlds, and what they aspire to become, while encouraging them to be more than they are. At the same time, these articles also suggest that it is increasingly difficult to find the ground on which to rest an appeal to our better selves. If human life on earth is, as many would argue, at a point of impending crisis, created by the juggernaut of continued economic growth rolling over the vital needs of people and the planet, we would indeed be well advised to pause and deliberate on these issues, haunted perhaps by the King James phrasing of Proverbs 29:18.

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