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외국인

egugin
外國人



화성역

Mars Station



Foreigners
& Foreign
Culture in Korea!



One of the most bugged out people I've ever met in Korea is a guy from Toronto, Canada named Andrew Owen. He's always spazzing and freaking out and going off on tangents. The first time I met him

was about a year ago in Insa-dong, when I was out selling my first volume of Bug on the main drag there

one sunny Sunday afternoon. He was with his (then) girlfriend Helen Cho. The first thing I noticed about him was that he was wearing an extremely loud, buttoned-down purple print shirt, topped off with a handkerchief tied 'round the neck in the manner of an improvised ascot. He was fairly tall and lanky, almost to the point of gawkiness, and had curly black hair going sort of this way and that. As soon as he saw Bug, he started freaking out like a madman, saying how great it was and stuff. He was all, "Wow!! You've made your own artzine! How cool!" I mean, he was totally raving. I think his eyes were actually literally bugging out just a bit. I was flattered and all, but I was also kind of freaking out a little myself, since he was so, uh, effusive. Anyway, they both said they were artists, and they both bought a copy of Bug, and we all exchanged pager numbers and everyone was happy. All in all, the vibe was cool.

About an hour later, I saw him racing down the street, man on a mission, waving a large screwdriver in the air like some kind of conductor's wand. He stopped just long enough to tell me that he was in the middle of moving into a beautiful new room right next to Chogyo Temple, which was the largest Buddhist temple in Seoul, and you could hear the big brass bell being rung every morning at four and then again at six in the evening, and they served really great, incredibly cheap *bimbap*—although there was no meat or garlic, since they were Buddhist, of course—and his room was right on the top floor and it got tons of sunlight and anyway, he had to put a new lock on the door—hence the tool in his hand. Before I could say anything, he was off again like a shot, screwdriver waving wildly in the air. I remember thinking two things at the time: a) That guy has incredible jaw muscle definition, and b) What a nut.

After that, Andrew and I became more like passing acquaintances than actual friends. We both spend a lot of time hopping back and forth between Korea and Japan, and on several occasions, we've randomly bumped into each other on the streets of both Osaka and Seoul. One time, shortly after we met, we did go down to the ancient capital of Gyeongju together for the weekend, but that turned out to be kind of a disaster. I think part of the problem was the fact that we tripped—fortunately, Helen came along too, and she proved to be a very soothing, stabilizing force. Basically, Andrew's a pretty intense guy normally, but when he's tripping, he goes into full-on rave mode. Talking with him then was the verbal equivalent of netsurfing: he was like a human incarnation of the web, spitting out endless streams of information and discoursing on all manner of arcane subjects with only the most tenuous of links and connections. One minute he was like the guy on that radio program "Ask Mr. Science," explaining all about how depth perception works, and about how there are in fact six primary colors instead of just three, as is almost universally assumed. The next minute I was being subjected to a half-hour lecture on how the plastic water bottle I had in my hand was connected to the huge mountain of garbage behind

a hotel he once stayed at in India and the general degradation of the ecosystem by mankind. This went on and on, for like 8 hours straight. I'm not exaggerating. It was often fascinating, but it got to be a bit much after a while. The only time

BOOK REVIEW: *Edge of Centre: Collected Essays*, by Andrew Owen. AOI Creative, 117 pages.

he quieted down was when we went to Seokkrum Grotto to see the famous granite Buddha there. It's way up on the mountain behind Pulguk Temple, and by the time we got there, the sun was already setting. People say it's one of the most beautiful carved statues of Buddha in all of Asia, and I certainly can't disagree. Helen and I admired it for about 10 minutes, but Andrew stayed inside the cave for a good 45 minutes. He sat down right in front of it on the floor and assumed a very rigid, straight-backed half-lotus position—he was concentrating on it so hard, it looked like he was actually trying to levitate it. The attendant kept coming outside and telling us he wanted to close, and that it was time for our friend to take leave of the Buddha. We went back inside about four times and told Andrew the place was closed, but he was on some other planet—it would've been easier for us to move the Buddha himself. When he finally emerged from his reverie, it was way past dark, and there were no other cars or taxis left on the mountain. It took us three hours to walk back down into town.

Actually, I look back on the experience now with fond bemusement, more than anything else. The main thing I learned is not to dose with Andrew Owen, since he's the kind of guy that can only be taken in small doses anyway. In a way, he's sort of always tripping naturally, which is really the best of all possible worlds. The main reason we haven't become friends is simply because when I've been in Japan, he's been in Korea and vice versa. I think we've both discovered that the secret to enjoying and fully appreciating Korea and Japan is to alternate between the two, rather than losing one's self in either culture completely.

Anyway, shortly after I came back to Korea this past February, I went to the Log-In Seoul cafe and happened to notice an ad for an upcoming book launch party there: the title of the book was *Edge of Centre: Collected Essays*, and the author was none other than Andrew Owen himself. I literally did a double take, just like they do in cartoons, since that was just about the last thing I was expecting. I have to admit that I was half skeptical initially, mainly because I wondered what kind of book an oddball like Andrew could possibly write. But I was also intrigued, and immediately proceeded to track down a copy for myself. When I finally did, I read the whole thing in one sitting. I can honestly say without compromising myself that it was a very enjoyable experience. *Edge of Centre* is a wild, funky excursion into the mind of a very wild, funky individual. If you feel like tripping out for a while, then it'll

definitely set your head spinning.

Sample essays: "Stomach Mind Culture," in which he argues that we all have a second, underappreciated brain rumbling just above our belt; "The Secret of Invisibility Revealed," which offers various plausible, technical solutions towards becoming truly invisible; "The Venus Suit," which ruthlessly and systematically deconstructs the three-piece suit, concluding that it symbolically represents a woman's open vagina; "Freddy the One-Eyed Dog with 3-D Vision," which patiently elucidates the process of "synthetic depth perception from monocular pseudo-stereopsis," specifically in relation to canines; "Resist the Rectangle!," in which he eloquently sermonizes against "the tyranny of expressed structure and urban rectangularization"; and "In the Future," which opines that some day soon, "new schools will be formed where children teach adults," "the period of car culture will be viewed as a dark chapter in the history of the world," and "live baby arms protruding from the forehead will become fashionable amongst teenagers." Man, oh man, what is this guy on? When I first read *Edge of Centre*, I thought that Andrew was still tripping a full year after our visit to Gyeongju together. This book is proof positive that my first impression of him was right on the money: Andrew Owen is a complete nut.

I guess I shouldn't exaggerate the general wackiness of the book too much, since in many respects, it does have a serious, earnest thrust to it. Andrew is primarily a visual artist, and one of his main obsessions seems to be how we



A Portrait of the Artist as a Total Nut: this is a picture from the "Equator Art Experiment," in which Professor Owen (left) and Doctor Cho (right) traveled to central Sumatra to conduct tests on the precise direction that water flows downward when directed on the Equator. Their findings are detailed in *Edge of Centre*.

physically see and apprehend the world. In the essay "Eyeballs and Ice Cream," he refers to art such as he creates "visual software," and the mechanism of seeing "visual hardware." Many of the essays in the book approach the art and science of seeing from various angles, be it the dynamics of 3-D imaging, or the relationship between scale perspective and Oriental painting. In Seoul, he even tutored a fair number of ophthalmologists, and class reading material apparently included such required classics as *Binocular Vision and Ocular Motility*. *Edge of Centre* also includes two very interesting essays on the primary colors, which he divides into the additive primaries of light (Red, Green and Blue) and the subtractive primaries of pigments and paint (Magenta, Cyan and Yellow). Some may counter that his interest in vision is mere dilettantism, but he seems to have been thinking about these issues for some time now—his essays on the primary colors, for example, date from 1990. For lack of a better word, I personally found them very enlightening.

Andrew is also something of an unreconstructed radical. He hates the domination and rape of the planet by faceless corporations, he hates the insidious banality of advertising, he hates cars and he hates the sterile, dehumanizing uglification of the urban environment. A lot of other people

do too, but the manner in which he directly confronts these issues is both imaginative, and certainly amusing to read about. A good personal motto for him might be "Think globally, subvert locally." In one essay, he proudly recounts how

he used covert, nighttime guerrilla action to cause the abrupt cancellation of a national advertising campaign by McDonald's in Canada. In another, he discusses the personal risks he faced trying to properly dispose of organic waste in Singapore, where there is a shortage of natural locations and public littering is a \$500 criminal offense. He and Helen would have to go out late at night, scout for a suitable spot, and then quickly dump their fruit scraps and other organic refuse from the day when the coast was clear. What I like about Andrew's political attitude is that he seems very concerned about finding real, practical solutions to the problems he sees around him. It's one thing to be a radical academic or whatever railing against the injustices of the world, but if you've been travelling in the real world for any length of time, you know that a single, concrete action is often worth more than a thousand lofty words.

In general, I think that one of the reasons why this book is so readable is the fact that Andrew's been traveling for so long. The other reason is that he's an artist. A number of the essays are quite theoretical, but they're saved from undue abstruseness by his very practical outlook on life. A lot of people who write theory tend to get too wrapped up in it all, and take themselves a bit too seriously. Andrew uses theory in his writing, but he seems to have a fairly playful attitude towards it. As a result, even when he's making serious points, he balances things out with a certain silliness that makes him an engaging read. He also writes from a very personal viewpoint, which is why his piece on Jang Sun-Woo's film *Timeless, Bottomless Bad Movie* is ten times better than any movie review I've read in the local papers. Actually, that's my favorite essay, along with "Stomach Mind Culture" and "Command Module Lifestyle," which describes and celebrates the art of being a rootless cosmopolitan. I dare say it may one day become a classic of a kind.

There are a few things about *Edge of Centre* that I have minor problems with. I'll admit that I'm not a big fan of poetry, but anyway, the small selection of poems in the book didn't really do a whole lot for me, mainly because I thought they were a bit too obscure and rational, or sometimes just too obvious. I also felt that since he wrote most of the book in Korea, he should've written more essays about Korea than he did--there are only two that really count, out of a total of more than 30. I guess it's the prerogative of the artist to be self-focused, but even so, I would've liked to know more about what he thinks of this country. What, for example, was going through his mind for those 45 minutes that he sat inside Seokkuram Grotto? After all, it's one of the greatest works of Buddhist art in Asia--surely it must've been an important experience for him. And one last thing has to do with a group of 8 mini essays which originally accompanied an exhibition that Andrew had in Seoul last fall. If reproductions of the original artworks were included as well, I think the essays would have a much stronger impact on readers. Anyway, if there are future editions, then hopefully these last two points will somehow be considered.

Edge of Centre is a strictly do-it-yourself affair. Andrew wrote, designed and published the whole thing himself, which is not exactly the easiest thing to do when you're a lone traveller living in a foreign country. He didn't, for example, get a cushy university grant, and he certainly didn't get an advance from a big publisher. He also had to deal with printing costs that are double what they were six months ago. Nevertheless, he pulled it off, and I have to say that I'm impressed. I especially like the cover jacket, which is actually a recycled, complex proof print sheet with metallic, silvery lettering embossed on it. Apparently, he found a pile of them in the garbage of a printing plant near his place, and then refashioned them into wild, brightly colored book sleeves. Not only is each one different, but they're also environmentally conscious, since they're a recycled material. I think they're really funky and cool.

I wrote Andrew a letter asking him where people can get *Edge of Centre*, and he told me that in Seoul, it's available at Log-In Seoul, as well as at Indeco in Insa-dong. I think he'll be in Japan for a while, so if you send him 1000 yen c/o Osaka C.P.O.'s Poste Restante desk, then then he'll mail you a copy himself (the 1000 yen includes postage). Outside of Japan, do the same, but enclose \$10 instead. Once you get it, be sure to fashion your seat belt, 'cause it's definitely one far-out trip.



Stomach Mind Culture

by Andrew Owen

I started to draw the shape of my morning ablutions because they looked like letters or Chinese characters. I thought that perhaps my ass was communicating with graphic symbols. Then I got to thinking about the Stomach Brain. Neuroscientists have recently discovered that there is a large amount of neurological tissue in the stomach lining.

This mass of neurological tissue is large enough to develop a form of cognitive ability. So we have two brains, three if you count both the left and right ones in our head. Recently I've become interested in this gut brain. We all know about it, if not always consciously. Everyone is affected by intuitive "gut feelings." One of the main motivations in life is to eat. We move so that we can eat and drink. I've travelled all over and one of the main reasons is to experience exotic foods, at their origin. *Stomach travel*. So I started to think about the other behaviour we exhibit that could be directed by the stomach brain and realized that it was larger than I first imagined. How much time do we spend working to buy food--at our jobs and shopping? How much of our time do we spend cooking, eating and at the toilet? How much time do we spend talking and reading about food?

Babies are fascinated with their first stools because these are some of their first creative acts. *Stomach sculpture*. Many people look at their shits to determine their dietary health. The colour and transparency of one's urine is also an indication of one's health. Farts and belches also communicate to us the state of our intestines and what we have eaten. When you travel or change your diet, the form of your shits, the color of your piss and the smell of your farts change too. *Stomach doctor*. Farts also make a great range of sounds. Although farts can be offensive, fart sounds are almost always funny. *Stomach comedy*.

When I think about it, my father is motivated to a great extent by his stomach brain. My father is a great cook and eats very well--and is also masterful at all the incidental activity leading to eating like shopping and cooking. He wakes up early to eat breakfast and then goes shopping at the huge Italian grocery store. Upon returning he starts to prepare both lunch and dinner. Lunch is something made incidental to the main dinner which is always an ongoing production from early afternoon on. Meals always include a lot of meat and are usually followed by tea as an excuse to eat a sweet. Talking about food and compliments on his culinary ability are important to him.

But he would also eat cheese or drink milk late at night and this would make him burp and fart. My father is the greatest burper and farter I've ever known. He can let rip the most loud and elaborate belches and crepitations. He would wake up several times a night to perform a grotesque burp and fart symphony, go to the kitchen and consume some more gas creating substance and then go back to bed.

It's like a dialogue between his head brain and his stomach brain. His conscious mind makes him plan meals, drive, buy food and cook interesting dishes. Then his stomach brain responds some time later with a chorus of approval or rather, some kind of complex communication--a kind of aural feedback--understood only by him but heard by all in the immediate vicinity. I disapproved of this behaviour before, but now that I know about the stomach brain, I understand better. My father's stomach brain must be large and content.

There are many types of eating habits and many types of eating disorders--the most common being hunger and the second being gluttony. Two others being anorexia and bulimia. Now I suspect that many types of eating disorders are neurological problems manifesting from the stomach brain. Psychologists and neurologists must now learn to treat the stomach brain and the stomach mind rather than the head brain and mind in order to treat eating disorders and other neurological ailments. This could also include the treatment of ulcers, obesity and anxiety.

But to go beyond stomach mind psychological problems and toward an understanding of stomach culture. Cuisine is acknowledged as an art form at one end. But at the other end, the stomach in concert with the trachea and intestines can also create an incredible range of expressions, including: health prognosis, sound poetry, music, comedy, scent, colour and opacity variation, graphic and sculptural form, calligraphy and yes, even literature.

--from *Edge of Centre*