



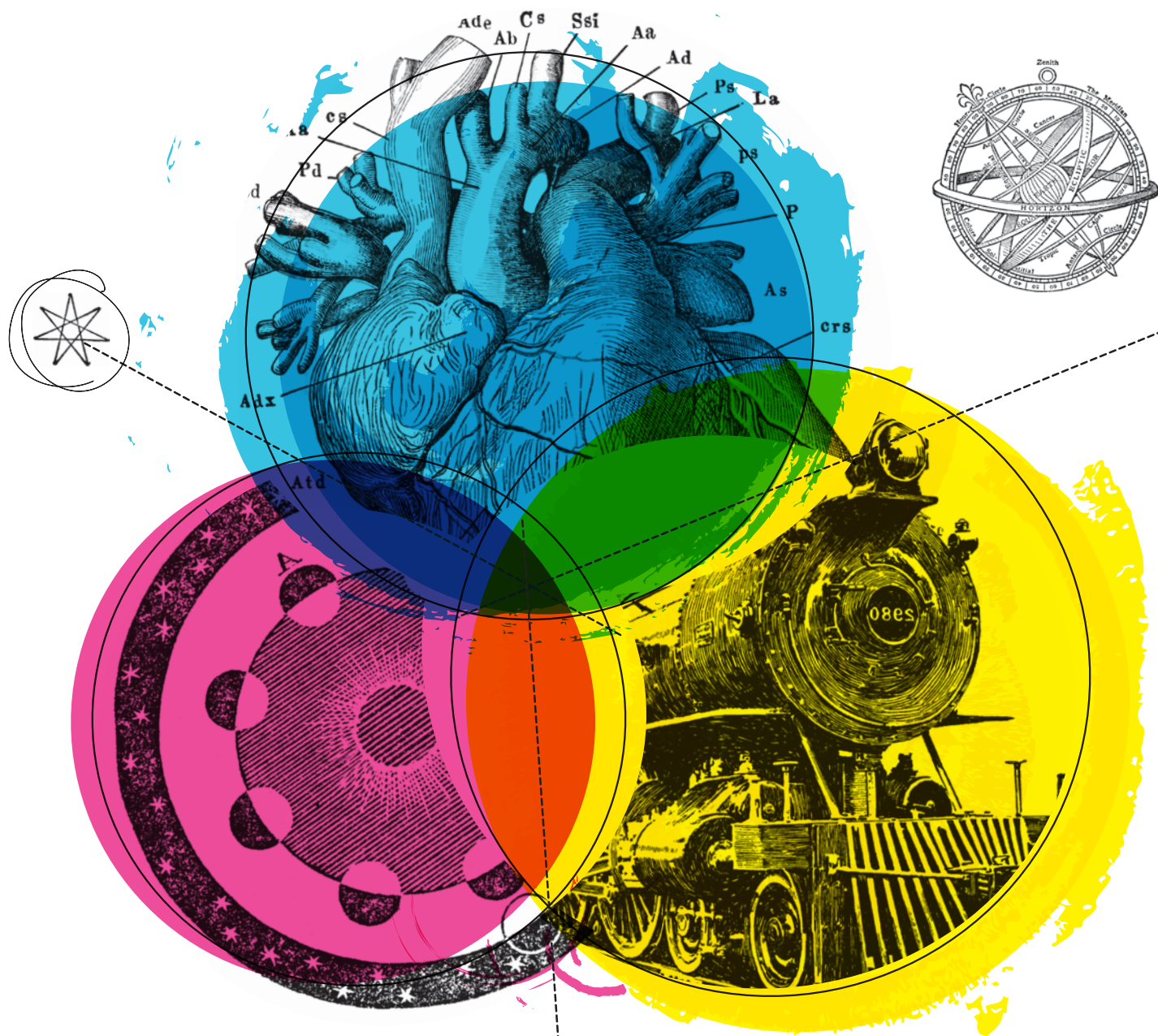
LITERARY REVIEW OF CANADA

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT



Vital Ideas for Canada

*11 ways
to build
a better
country*



Naheed Nenshi

Be a citizen hero

Marina Adshade

Rationalize romance

Vaclav Smil

Build faster trains

Robert Calderisi

Help Africa's farmers

Alanna Mitchell

Let go of carbon guilt

Samantha Nutt

Stop gunrunners

Diana Carney

Walk your climate talk

Judith Thompson

Embrace shocking theatre

Daniel Poliquin

Establish city-states

Kerri Sakamoto

Dream democratically

Andrew Coyne

Smash gridlock

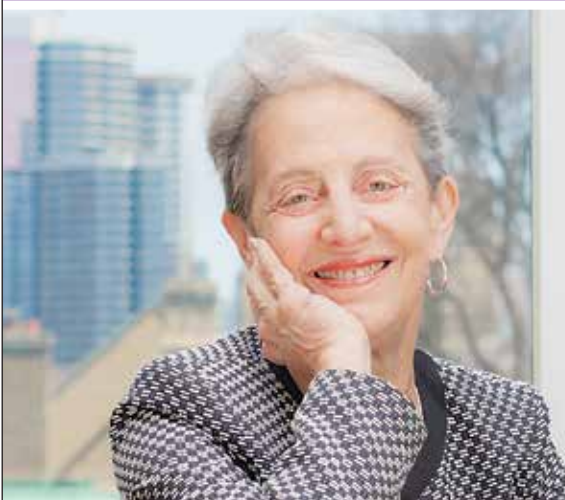
The GUELPH LECTURE

ON BEING CANADIAN

Fri Jan 9 2015 7 pm

River Run Centre, Guelph

\$20 \$15 students | Tickets riverrun.ca 1-877-520-2408 519-763-3000 35 Woolwich St Guelph



KEYNOTE



Janice Gross Stein AND Brigitte Shim IN CONVERSATION

MUSIC



Basia Bulat
AN INTIMATE SOLO PERFORMANCE



LITERARY GUEST

Miriam Toews
READING FROM *ALL MY PUNY SORROWS*



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VITAL IDEAS BROUGHT TO YOU BY: *Editor* ~ Alastair Cheng. *Designer* ~ Dushan Milic.
Contributing Editors ~ Bronwyn Drainie, Mark Lovewell, Graham Scott, Michael Stevens.
Copyeditors ~ Madeline Koch, Naoko Asano. *Proofreaders* ~ Miso Choi, Mike Lipsius, Guy Sewell,
Rob Tilley, Scott Young. *Circulation Manager* ~ Jon Spencer. *Development Manager* ~ Elizabeta
Ligurić. *Business & Production Advisor* ~ Sharon McAuley.

editor's introduction

“What’s the most urgent, exciting idea you can think of to improve the country?”

We asked each contributor to this special *Literary Review of Canada* supplement the same question, canvassing notable writers, leaders and thinkers for ways to make Canadian life better. While answers ranged from infrastructure to romance, some trends emerged: concern with cities, environmental sustainability and culture with a conscience—and the sort of defiantly impractical idealism required to actually change things.

You’ll also find recommendations inside for vital contemporary reading, from other LRC contributors: the quotes accompanying each pick are taken from their full rationales, available at reviewcanada.ca/vital-reading.

All this taps into the same passionate engagement with books, art and public affairs that drives both the LRC magazine and our national Spur festival (spurfestival.ca). So we hope you’ll likewise find ideas here worth mulling over, talking through and putting into action!

— Alastair Cheng

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11 ways to build a better country

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Start a rail renaissance

* VACLAV SMIL

I like to illustrate exceptionally irrational realities by a simple thought experiment.

Imagine I have to explain specific facts to a super-sapient extra-terrestrial whose ability to know all fundamentals and to understand all ramifications would make it easy for him to render an instant judgement. Here is just one of many ways to make him doubt that Canada is a

mature, technically advanced nation caring for the well-being of its people and the quality of its environment.

He would know that water turning a turbine is a superior way of generating electricity, with no carbon dioxide (or any other) emissions; I would tell him that no other affluent country generates more inexpensive and clean hydro-electricity than does Canada. He would know that the cheapest, the safest, the

least energy intensive and the most comfortable way of moving large numbers of people between major cities is a high-speed train powered by electricity; I would tell him that Montreal's Bombardier makes such trains for overseas markets and that its latest design (Zefiro, running at 250–380 kilometres/hour) is a leading choice for China's expanding network of rapid trains.

He would know that with common speeds of at least 250–300 kilometres/hour, rapid train travel is a superior choice to flying on all distances of less than 1,000 kilometres because (even after leaving unpredictable security control and technical delays aside) it takes less time than the combination of arriving at an airport at least one

Dream Democratically

* KERRI SAKAMOTO

I am now completing a novel about a developer who sets out to build a floating community in Toronto harbour in 1979.

The floating city is itself a harbour: from the storm of life for the destitute, the outcast, the lonely. The son of Japanese immigrants, Frankie Hanesaka—who cannily anglicizes his name to Hanes after the war—is an exploitative wheeler-dealer in search of redemption.

The idea of a floating community is fascinating material for fiction, but this story is drawn from fact. It was an actual plan proposed for Toronto by American architect Buckminster Fuller, the inventor of the geodesic dome erected

at Montreal's Expo '67. The plan was commissioned in 1968 by Canadian industrialist John Labatt, presented to a stupefied Toronto City Council and, of course, remains unbuilt.

Fuller was an iconically American kind of visionary: audacious and idealistic, passionately democratic and inclusive, even a little wacky-seeming. He was a dreamer of dreams extravagant only in their creativity. He pursued realizable realities and believed in doing more with less. His floating community was to be self-sustaining, self-sufficient, ecologically sound and affordable for housing. He proposed it at a time when Toronto was growing quickly, both within its limits and without. Highrises were rising and suburbs were sprawling. That such a study was commissioned back then seems astounding. That it might be commissioned today—in the face of such worsening problems as housing shortages and poverty—seems unlikely.

Frankie's early ambition to own Toronto's waterfront is engendered through boyhood experiences of poverty, racism and displacement. As World War Two rages, he

hour before departure, the flight itself, waiting for baggage, and then taking an interminable taxi or bus ride downtown. I would tell him that the greatest line-up of Canadian population is the corridor joining Toronto (metro is greater than six million), Ottawa (metro is greater than 1.2 million) and Montreal (metro is close to four million). With its nearby hinterland, it is home to about 13 million people, with about 550 kilometres between the outer city pair—almost exactly a two-hour ride (1:50–2:20 depending on the average speed) by a rapid train.

But, instead, I would also tell him Air Canada's Rapidair has 32 flights every weekday between Toronto and Ottawa and 76 flights between Toronto and Montreal, departing every hour or, during peak travel periods, every 30 minutes; that, in addition, Porter Airlines flying from Billy Bishop Airport has about 60 flights on these routes; that these flights burn kerosene distilled from non-renewable crude oil, emitting

carbon dioxide and other pollutants; and that they are packed by people who must spend at least three (from Billy Bishop) or four hours (from Pearson) getting from downtown Toronto to downtown Montreal, coping with the CATSA and late-arriving aircraft.

Of course, small minds devoid of any vision would object that the link would be too expensive. Nonsense: this country has wasted much more on many dubious, and ephemeral, projects. Building long-lasting infrastructure that will serve, efficiently and safely, hundreds of millions of people for decades to come is to create enviable technical patrimony. It is the very essence of nation building: did we not complete a rail project that was incomparably more costly for its time, and more difficult, in the 1880s? Japan and France built their rapid trains when their per capita gross domestic product was significantly lower than ours, and China is now doing it while its per capita income is a fraction of ours. Small minds

would say that the population is not large enough to justify the link. Nonsense: *trains à grande vitesse* run from Paris (metro is 12 million) to Rennes (650,000) or between Bordeaux (1.1 million) and Montpellier (550,000). And small minds would also say that the link would be too difficult and too risky in our climate. Utter nonsense: on October 1, 2014, the Japanese *shinkansen* celebrated 50 years of operation, in a country of earthquakes, landslides, typhoons and snowfalls reaching house roofs (yes, since 1997 a branch of that rapid train goes to Nagano)—all without a single fatality and with an average delay of 36 seconds!

By not acting as boldly as other (often less affluent) nations, indeed as its former, more determined, self, Canada has chosen a second-class status, and appears to be content with it.

Vaclav Smil is Distinguished Professor Emeritus in the Faculty of Environment at the University of Manitoba, and the author of 37 books on many aspects of energy, environment, population, food and the history of technical advances.

and his family are designated enemy aliens—in spite of being naturalized citizens or citizens by birth. The camp is a dystopic community apart. It is the inverse of the floating utopic community that Frankie eventually aspires to build as his legacy. He envisions the floating city as a refuge for the outcast; as a home where new Canadians can look out onto water and imagine the lands they left behind, while embracing future promise.

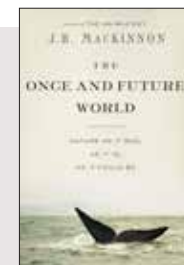
Buckminster Fuller himself makes several appearances in my novel. At one point, he challenges a disillusioned

Frankie to ponder what can be accomplished by one humble individual operating to advance all human life on the planet.

As Frankie searches for redemption, Bucky impertunes him “to feel, to dream.” Likewise, I would encourage Canadians to feel for those in need among us, and to dream of ways—no matter how outlandish, how unlikely seeming—to meaningfully improve our collective life.

Kerri Sakamoto is the award-winning author of The Electrical Field and One Hundred Million Hearts. Her next novel, Floating City, will be published in early 2016 by Knopf Canada.

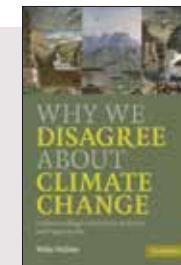
VITAL ENVIRONMENTAL READING



The Once and Future World: Nature As It Was, As It Is, As It Could Be, by J.B. MacKinnon

“Forces you to think, wonder and cry over what we have wrought.”

– KAMAL AL-SOLAYLEE



Why We Disagree about Climate Change, by Mike Hulme

“Argues that climate change is not a problem to be solved, but an opportunity.”

– JOHN ROBINSON