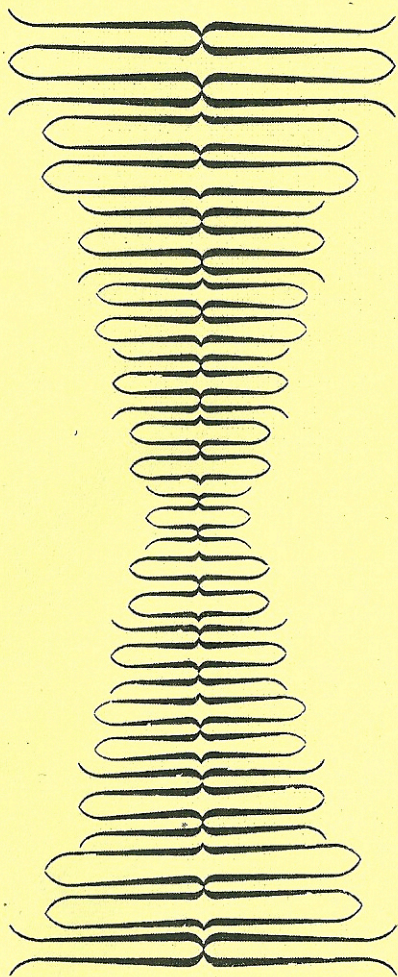


ECONOMIES OF SCALE:



derek beaulieu interviews rob mclennan

***ECONOMIES OF SCALE: rob mclennan interviews derek beaulieu on NO PRESS
/ derek beaulieu interviews rob mclennan on above/ground press***

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isbn 1-897224-63-X

13 digits: 978-1-897224-63-2

published in Ottawa by above/ground press, February 2012

a/g subscribers receive a complimentary copy

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cover image, rob mclennan interviews derek beaulieu: "dream poem for dieter roth 2," by
derek beaulieu

An earlier version of the interview with derek beaulieu originally appeared on rob
mclennan's blog (robmclennan.blogspot.com) as part of his ongoing "12 or 20 (small press)
questions" series on January 3, 2011.

rob mclennan interviews derek beaulieu on NO Press

Author of five books of poetry (most recently the visual poem suite *silence*), three volumes of conceptual fiction (most recently the short fiction collection *How to Write*) and over 150 chapbooks, derek beaulieu's work is consistently praised as some of the most radical and challenging contemporary Canadian writing.

In 2007 beaulieu was named the Alberta Magazine Publishers' Association's *Volunteer of the Year*. He has also been nominated as part of *The Calgary Herald* / Calgary Public Library *10 Calgary Mavericks* (2010), Avenue Magazine's *Calgary's Top 40 Under 40* (2009) and Alberta Magazine Publishers' Association *Lifetime Achievement Award* (2009). beaulieu is the youngest writer in Canada to have his papers collected *in extensio* by Simon Fraser University's Contemporary Literature Collection. He has just been nominated for the position of Calgary's Poet Laureate.

Beaulieu is co-editing *The Selected Fiction of John Riddell* with Lori Emerson (Wilfrid Laurier University Press) and a critical re-issue of bill bissett's *Rush: what fuckan theory a study of language* with Gregory Betts (Bookthug). In 2013 Kit Dobson is editing *No more poetry please: the selected poetry of derek beaulieu* for Wilfrid Laurier University Press's poetry series.

beaulieu is the visual poetry editor at UBUWeb and publisher of the acclaimed smallpresses housepress (1997–2004) and NO PRESS (2005–present), and editor of several small magazines in Canada, beaulieu has spoken and written on poetics internationally. His first volume of criticism, *Seen of the Crime*, was published by Snare Books in 2011. beaulieu teaches at the University of Calgary, Alberta College of Art + Design and Mount Royal University.

1 – When did NO Press first start? How have your original goals as a publisher shifted since you started, if at all? And what have you learned through the process?

NO PRESS started in 2005. I had shut down housepress in the Fall of 2004 after 7 years of publishing and was feeling disenchanted with the direction the press had been taking. Over the seven years, I had begun to feel that the press was no longer needed or desired by a poetic community as sales were extremely low and in many cases the authors themselves were no longer acknowledging the publications. So, I thought that the best way of putting some distance between that dissatisfaction and myself was to shut down the press. In the Fall of 2004 I announced the press' dissolution and deposited all the materials relating to the press at Simon Fraser University's Contemporary Literature Collection (which means that SFU has the only complete collection of the almost 300 publications by housepress).

By Spring of 2005 I missed publishing but wanted to continue that distance between the press and my own reputation. I had sworn when I shut down housepress that “no, I will no longer publisher”, and for the first few months (maybe even a year) NO PRESS was published anonymously. I’m sure that no one was particularly convinced that the press wasn’t me; but the break gave me a chance to refocus my energies and hone some of my design skills.

NO PRESS started with the mandate of no promotions, no sales, no ISBNs, no worries—and the press does include modest bending or breaking of all of those rules (except ISBNs), I still give away more copies than I sell.

Like housepress, NO PRESS reimburses authors with copies—for each edition the author receives 50% of the copies to give away, sell or keep as she sees fit (and can keep the proceeds) with the other 50% going to the press (I usually keep a few copies for myself out of that allotment). The average print run is between 30 and 75 copies, and sells between \$1 and \$15 (depending on the format), with prices rarely covering the cost of producing the books.

My mandate has always been to publish work that challenges my own reading practices—these days that means a concentration on concrete poetry and conceptual writing.

Poetry is the last refuge of the unimaginative. Poetry has little to offer outside of poetry itself. Writing—on the other hand—is a much more dynamic space. Poets chose to be poets because they do not have the drive to become something better. Readers are a book’s aphorisms.

2 – What first brought you to publishing?

My first publication was a collaboratively written piece entitled *William S. Burroughs: Ghost of Chance*. I was inspired by small presses I had encountered, most particularly bpNichol’s Ganglia/grOnk, Damian Lopes’s fingerprinting inkoperated, jwcurry’s empire of small editions (*1cent*, *Industrial Sabotage*, *Spider Plots in Rat Holes*, etc.) I had a collector’s mentality after having read and collected comic books for years, and the idea of making books was right up my alley. As I delved deeper into the small press community I started to discover more and more, including your above/ground press, Jason Dewinetz’s greenboathouse books, Christian Bök’s CrO₂ and lots of others (most of whom have fallen by the wayside).

3 – What do you consider the role and responsibilities, if any, of small publishing?

I see my own responsibility with NO PRESS as numerous; but above all should be a focus and a dedication to quality. Bob Cobbing once stated that there is more than enough bad poetry being published; if you are not going to add to the quality, then please do not add to the quantity. Coupling that opinion with Creeley's dictum that "form must always be an extension of content", I believe that the small press—in its ideal—must publish the highest quality work in editions which compliment and extend the poetic content of the work.

The small press is a great place for manuscripts-in-progress, for attempts and for event-related ephemeral publications but I think that what is also needed is a culture of reviewing and discussing small press editions—an opportunity for feedback and discussion. Quite a few of my early housepress and NO PRESS publications were ephemeral in form and content; brief missives meant to prompt discussion.

The small press is not something to be graduated away from as author's become more established. It is a place for discussion, but also for mentoring.

The small press culture here in Calgary has shrunk somewhat—there used to be a great deal of ephemeral publications being handed-out and passed around the literary community here. I think that NO PRESS should not be the only voice here and I strongly encourage other writers to publish thru their own imprints.

If writing a poem is inherently tragic it is because it is hard to believe that the author had nothing better to do. It is inherently tragic because we still chose an outdated form as a medium for argumentation. If we had something to say would we chose the poem—with its sliver of audience and lack of cultural cache—as the arena to announce that opinion?

4 – What do you see as the most effective way to get new books out into the world?

Poets in ostrich-like ignorance of the potential of sharing—as opposed to hoarding—their texts, are ignoring potentially the most important artistic innovation of the 20th century: collage. What's at stake? Nothing but their own obsolescence. If you don't share you don't exist.

5 – How involved an editor are you? Do you dig deep into line edits, or do you prefer more of a light touch?

I prefer a lighter touch. That said, I rarely solicit from people who I think will need a stauncher editorial stance. I tend to be very particular about who I publish, and shape the direction of the press by focusing on a tight mandate.

All bad poetry springs from genuine feeling. To be natural is to be obvious, and to be obvious is to be inartistic. Poetry, sadly, knows its poetry, while writing doesn't always know its writing.

6 – How many other people are involved with editing or production? Do you work with other editors, and if so, how effective do you find it? What are the benefits, drawbacks?

NO PRESS (like housepress before it) is driven by my own (evolving) editorial focus. I would rather not share that responsibility. I have found that the benefits are that I do not have to compromise in my editorial stance (or acceptance/rejection policy) and I can make the books the way I want them to be. The drawbacks, of course, are the same.

Poets are now judged not by the quality of their writing but of the infallibility of their choices. Having been unpopular in high school is not just cause for book publications.

7 – How has being an editor/publisher changed the way you think about your own writing?

It has taught me that poetry has more to learn from graphic design, engineering, architecture, cartography, automotive design, or any other subject, than it does from poetry itself.

8 – How do you approach the idea of publishing your own writing? Some, such as Gary Geddes when he still ran Cormorant, refused such, yet various Coach House Press' editors had titles during their tenures as editors for the press, including Victor Coleman and bpNichol. What do you think of the arguments for or against, or do you see the whole question as irrelevant?

I think the entire question is irrelevant. Would an architect only be respected if she did not build her own designs? A doctor if she refused to operate on her own patients? Ridiculous.

9 – Do you hold regular or occasional readings or launches? How important do you see public readings and other events?

NO PRESS had its first launch in December of 2010 and featured Natalie Simpson (launching her chapbook *Swish Sizzle Fizz*), Paul Zits (launching *Massacre Street*, his first publication) and Oana Avasilichioaei launching her chapbook *Spelles*. The night concluded with a screening of Emma Rouleau's short film *1115 / 2:47: Pages*.

I do feel that public readings are important; especially for younger voices to hone their skills at performance. As a community, the immediacy of reading/performance compliments small press endeavours as they share an ephemeral nature. We look to readings to create immediacy, especially when the text presents challenges for readers. Our audience, when confronted with challenging work, would rather be read to than read for themselves.

10 – How do you utilize the internet, if at all, to further your goals?

The internet is not something that challenges who we are or how we write it IS who we are and how write. Poets—being poets—are simply the last to realize the fact. At its base, the internet is a Borgesian library of perversions and pornography whose only redeemable feature is the card catalogue itself.

11 – Do you take submissions? If so, what *aren't* you looking for?

I rarely take submissions—in fact I probably don't take them at all. Now if something come up through conversation, sure – but direct unsolicited submissions? No. I'm not looking for poetry that looks and acts like "poetry," work that doesn't challenge or surprise me, plot-driven fiction, the unconsidered lyric, and—keeping Cobbing's quotation in mind—anything that adds to the quantity without adding to the quality. I would much rather read and publish the conceptual, the feminist, the constraint-driven, the concrete and visual; abstract comics, essays on poetics; the collaged, the oulipan and the weird. Please, no more poetry.

We expect plumbers, electricians, engineers and doctors to both have a specific and specialized vocabulary & be on the forefront of new advancements in their field, but scorn poets who do the same. Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal. The worst thing about poetry is poetry. The true artist is known by the use he makes of what he annexes.

12 – Tell me about some of your most recent titles, and why they're special.

Early 2011 brings *Echo* by Vanessa Place (a theoretical essay exploring the role of voice and gender in conceptual poetry, accompanied by a CD reading of the essay by the author), *Lucid Clusters* by Claude Gauvreau (a selection of Gauvreau's statements on poetics, and the Automatiste's first publication west of Toronto), *The fun-house mirror stage* by Jake Kennedy (a fictional biography of Madeline Gins, written with her permission), *Copys* by Craig Dworkin (a re-issue of his rarely seen phrase-based shuffle text) and more ... In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice. But, in practice, there is. Rules are guidelines for stupid people. In poetry we applaud mediocrity and ignore radicality. Poets should not be told to write what they know. They don't know anything, that's why they are poets.

4 poems by derek beaulieu

That's not writing

"That's not writing, that's typewriting."

Truman Capote on Jack Kerouac

"That's not writing, that's plumbing."

Samuel Beckett on William S. Burroughs

That's not writing, that's typing.

That's not writing, that's someone else typing.

That's not writing, that's googling.

That's not writing, that's pasting.

That's not writing, that's blogging.

That's not writing, that's wasted, unproductive, tweaking time.

That's not writing, that's stupid.

That's not writing, that's a coloring book.

That's not writing, that's coming up with ideas.

That's not writing, that's waiting.

That's not writing, that's a mad scribble.

That's not writing, that's printing and lettering.

That's not writing, that's tape-recording

That's not writing, that's word-processing.
That's not writing, that's following the herd.
That's not writing, that's copying and pasting.
That's not writing, that's directing.
That's not writing, that's using high-"polluting" words to confuse readers.
That's not writing, that's aggregating, and there are already plenty of aggregators out there.
That's not writing, that's printing.
That's not writing, that's art.
That's not writing, that's Tourettes.
That's not writing, that's posing.
That's not writing, that's button-mashing, and anyone can do that.
That's not writing, that's vandalism.
That's not writing, that's acting.
That's not writing, that's blabbing.
That's not writing, that's hiking.
That's not writing, that's just a knife he's using to eat pie with.
That's not writing, that's bullying.
That's not writing, that's dentistry.
That's not writing, that's just endless blathering.
That's not writing, that's yelling.
That's not writing, that's butchery!
That's not writing, that's a fortune cookie!
That's not writing, that's emoting.
That's not writing, that's just dressing it up after.
That's not writing, that's just playing around.
That's not writing, that's daydreaming.
That's not writing, that's showing off.
That's not writing, that's keyboarding.
That's not writing, that's calligraphy.
That's not writing, that's mindless pasting.
That's not writing, that's an action flick.
That's not writing, that's a puddle.
That's not writing, that's a tragedy.
That's not writing, that's assembly line mass production.
That's not writing, that's transcribing.
That's not writing, that's computer-generated text.
That's not typing, that's data entry.

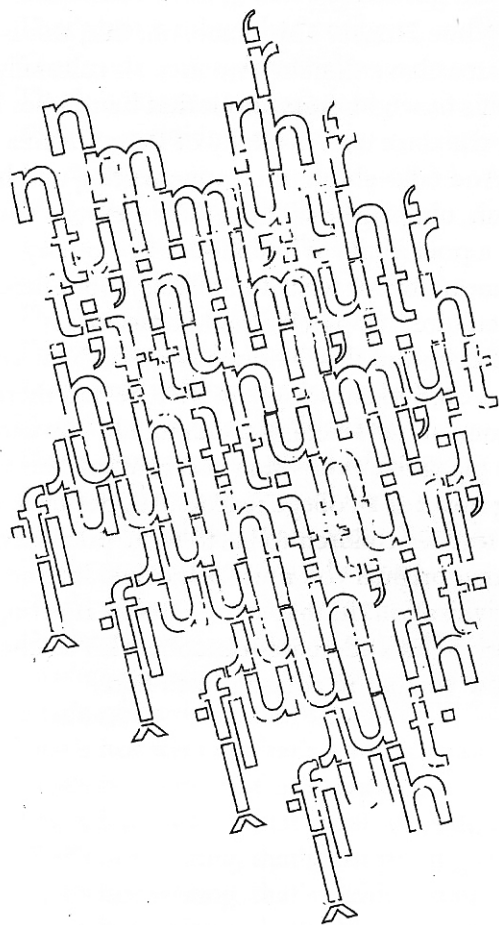
Untitled.

OK, turn the clown off. This is who was in the White House. This is the, uh, this, this is what I'm giving you an example of what the Obamas have done to America ah culturally and socially. They bring a tenth-rate clown like this in who boasts about that he teaches his children how to, uh, his students, so to speak, at the once ex University of Pennsylvania. It's become a cesspool, uh, what's happened there. And talks about uncreative writing and how to plagiarise, you hear? Now, when you have a, uh, uh, plagiarist in the White House you would think having a plagiarist pretending to be a poet in the White House in a poetry event ... what is this, like, Abbie Hoffman 2? I mean, this is what I'm talking about here, this is not poetry; this is the debasement of our culture. It's part of the Marxist class warfare. This is what he does and this is what he does and this is how he does it. You say "what are you going on about?" All right, bring it on, I'm showing you who he had there. It wasn't just the rapper, he has this putz there talking about teaching children, uh, you can't write anything creative and original, you have to plagiarize everything you turn in. This is a teacher in a college. This is what's going passing now for a college teacher. It goes back to Obama inviting a so-called college teacher who teaches children to te- to write uncreative writing, where you're not allowed to write anything original you must plagiarize. It's the same mentality. It's the destruction of western civilization. In that sense Obama is acting in a rather s- schizophrenic manner to have a poetry event and invite someone who teaches children that that they must plagiarize. You follow where I'm coming from here?

Right. Yeah.

Alright, it's a little too esoteric, I get it.

Jan 30



Jan 30 3

Future Bakery: Interim Report

1.

Tumble awake, this morning. Start from fragments. A gauntlet. Urge others, speak slowly, more. Unity precedes. A cranial. Decline to leave names.

2.

Regular harbour, weave. Brunswick House, girlfriend. Ease down like an astronaut. What brief integrity, dialed. Composure governs. I pull my soldiered hands, small fortunes.

3.

Children, the frame. Agency of water, fresh and unremarkable, rare. Brace, with low chairs. The sun strikes everything, rattling plastic clouds. Who is this, really? Table this, divide.

4.

Windspeck, taste of rain. Illusions in this distance, blue. Compulsive fingernails. Battered, cleared and crawled. Hotel concordance, congress. In passing, spark tongues. Suppress. These rooms are legion.

5.

Mechanical lineage. By the way, no longer. Sorry flightless birds. Submit is not the word. The right lane ends. All these coloured pencils. A shelf-life. Blueprint grit. She worries: where we cease to be.

6.

A corkscrew, distance. Impatient, leaf. Sweet fragrance. Hotel, sustains. Time changes colour. Coffee cools, and something moves. Synopses: boundaries. Hips and dashed integrity. Relieved, we plummet.

A manifesto on the poetics of Asphodel Twp.
for Michael & Suzanne Wilcox,

I have forgot
and yet I see clearly enough
something
central to the sky
which ranges round it.

William Carlos Williams, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower"

1.

If Heaven, river. What greeny something. Shine, Kawartha Highlands. Lake, and early hum. Once, in the shadows. Glowing outwards, temperate. Ontario syntax. Reassuring this, and self. A revelation, you. I see the world. Claw, in architecture. Bipolar lift, a tongue. A peace the mind can breathe. Although the dark remains, small lights in favour. Celebration, soar.

2.

The mouth, at Cameron's Point. An acid-free layer. Craft: a promise, fold. Is this all nothing? Repair, a situation. Sorrow, and a cock-eyed grin. In this room, this other room. A complicated, binding. This morning, Highway 7. Double-binding, surface of a still. Lovesick Lake, meeting hip to shape to shore to night. A glacier, made. Such frozen light.

3.

Asphodel, greeny flower. Surveyed in 1820, Richard Birdsal. To warm up, bottles under covers. All the uphill way. If it is, repeated. Notes, and highway. Hummingbird feeders, to keep from ants, from black bears. An empty bench, among. Back and forth, snow-scribbling. Some other star. The metaphor: cast iron, photo-legal. Walking. John Becket and his wife, five children.

4.

You left your mark. Combination of industry. Vaguely seen, but can't cross. Waterskin. Go, central-eastern. The shores of Rice Lake, frequent. Burned away. Big Cedar, smoke. Yours, truly. Tell, no other story. Picked up, by useless clouds. Such well-bred manner, brush. Such lovely liquid. A leather casing, isolation. Those that have the will.

Love letter

welcome to the weather here, it's snowing—
Patte McCarthy, L & O

No one forgets, the traces of pageantry. Squirrels on the window sill. Speechlessness folds, deepest blue. If you were to ask. These interlocked fingers. The trees for the forest. The great shadow of language, between sitter and subject, assimilating a sense. I am attracted to linens. Love, phrased perspective. Stained mobillites, vanish. Dread the upcoming dive. Talked a bottle of red wine. A second. Sound cut from another. Sequins, an alternate word. Clouds asleep in the yard. Daytime cable, Bridezilla. Once a neighbour in costume. Microscopic pearls. So little else is recorded. As happy as moonbeams. A kitten dubbed 'Lemonade.' Obviously, a boy. Your initials in tracery, silks. Dialogue, disguised as a monologue. I await the grey page. Sketch out the stretch of a syllable.

4 poems by rob mcLennan

Territory is not Map—

that is, for me, a marvellousness—the great paradigms of our meanings
 shift—“God, self, history, and Book,” to use Mark C. Taylor’s arrangement of
 them, shift—that is to say, in the Anglo-Saxon meaning of the word *shift*, **divide**
and separate—and thus, because they are never still, they meander, like persons
 who have come upon a territory—“Map is not territory,” in a phrase that delighted
 Jack Spicer and me, when we found it something like 45 years ago in Alfred
 Korzybski—and equally, territory is not Map—
 Robin Blaser, “Hello,” *The Recovery of the Public World*

In terms of agency, capability; ice pellets form a naked stretch
 of frozen purpose. Does not fall harmless, house-organ bled,
 the myriad agencies of winter. “Write what
 you know” evolved into “Write
 what you don’t know, otherwise you’ll never learn.” Appeals
 are flecked, inelegant, locked; a single role, played
 instrument. I must see where the fragment licked, combustible.
 The only instance gives me credit. As if by chance,
 by which the short lines of our meaning textured, breath-took,
 blended or combined. Attention spans economy. Majesty, the nature
 could not last. Articulate the sparrows, seasoned geese, the traffic-calming
 speed bumps. A station at the banks, we were not progress. Flame,
 a barking gemstone, dangerous or bled. Infatuated. Worst,
 in his opinion. London fog, a hearty snowfall, paws
 a land of magic, Styrofoam, the snow-plows jostle car alarms,
 present unstable, scratch. Artless,
 fallen, shade to blissful grey they were before
 included, function-blessed. We cross the street,
 we look at something, something else, engage
 with shaded rocks, unfold. Black and polish, tarnish sight.

throughout the 1990s that have evolved into larger works of longer attention. I don't know if I might have gone in the same direction had I not been a small publisher.

10 - As I've mentioned in your interview with me, Bob Cobbing stated "The world has quite enough poetry already. Probably too much. Far too much. The only excuse for being a poet today is to add to the quality of poetry, to add a quality which was not there before"—how would you respond to that? What is the role of the publisher in a culture of plentitude (especially in terms of the internet's proliferation)?

mm: The role of the publisher, in many ways, is one of filter. If you understand my interest, my aesthetic, and trust my judgement, then you know what you're in for. I've long admired Ottawa writer John Metcalf's editorial position, first at The Porcupine's Quill, Inc., and more recently at Biblioasis, and have known for a long time to trust it. Certainly, you're getting a particular kind of writing, but damn, its going to be worth reading, if that type of writing is your thing. There aren't that many editors in literary publishing I'd trust as much. Karl Siegler at Talonbooks, certainly. Michael Holmes at ECW Press is up there, those years of Bev Daurio at The Mercury Press, Melanie Little (formerly Freehand Books, now senior fiction editor at Anansi) as well. There are probably others I can't think of, right now.

Proliferation simply means one has to learn to differentiate the good and the bad, like any system. What happened when literature exploded because of the Gesteiner? Photocopiers? The internet? Many more are doing it, certainly, but that doesn't necessarily mean many more are doing it better. The hard part, and often the most entertaining, is in digging deep into the piles, and seeing just what out there is really exciting, is really worth the trouble.

one circle, but not necessarily another, including my own, so hopefully some readers might be introduced to an author that intrigues them, and they might look over to the rest of what that author has already done. My publications don't exist in opposition to trade publishing, but beside and between.

8 – Who is reading above/ground? Why do they do so?

mm: There's so much going on that readers require a series of filters. It's why Ron Silliman gets so many daily hits on his blog, the sheer amount of people who realize the quality of his recommendations. One reads *The Capilano Review*, say, for one kind of work, and *The Malabar Review* for another. I would imagine that readers of above/ground (I require a print run of 100 just for subscribers and immediate trades) engage for the sake of its range, not just of writing style and geographic communities, but a first or second chapbook by a newer author (Cameron Anstee, Chris Turnbull, Marilyn Irwin) alongside another by a more established author actively publishing (George Bowering, Monty Reid, Phil Hall) beside that rare chapbook by a writer we don't hear from nearly often enough (D.G. Jones, Nelson Ball, John Newlove). Thanks to jwcurry, I was even able to produce the first proper (posthumous, obviously) issue of a particular bpNichol chapbook (as well as a little broadsheet at the same time), *KON 66 & 67*, one he originally produced very poorly through Ganгла. The news, as I said, that wants to stay news. I've been very deliberate at trying to produce first chapbooks by new authors to help give that initial push that might keep them writing, keep them in the game.

On the other hand, I think my engagement with the broader literary community offers readers small items that otherwise might not have seen the world, and possibly, above/ground can provide homes to certain more experimental works by writers who don't often stray into that kind of territory. Until her third trade poetry collection, *Pavilion* (2002) appeared, my favourite of Stephanie Bolsters' works was still the chapbook I produced, her *Three Bloody Words* (1996). And despite whatever else she achieves, I'm finding my favourite of Jeanette Lynes' works is still her above/ground press chapbook, *english prof with her head in a blender. turned on. High.* (2001). There seems an experimentation in some of the poems in that chapbook that the rest of her poetry collections don't seem to have, and I'm not entirely sure why.

9 – How has publishing above/ground affected your own poetic?

mm: I would think that my years of above/ground have altered my attentions for longer projects, as opposed to individual pieces. I spent years writing chapbook-length projects

Response Unit, Cameron Anstee's Apt. 9 Press, Nicole Markotic's Winkler Press (to name but a few) and smaller, more occasional publications by Ryan Fitzpatrick, Kevin McPherson and Natalie Simpson. There used to be a lot more Canadian small/micropress activity, and I'm not entirely sure why certain energies have diminished. There are plenty of non-Canadian touchstones I've been slowly working to engage over the past few years as well.

6 – What is your editorial policy; how do you see what you accept for publication shaping both the press and a larger reading “public”?

mm: My editorial policy is predominantly marked by what I'd like to see more of, and almost everything I produce now is solicited. I regularly send out emails suggesting to various individuals that “isn't it about time we think about a chapbook?” Still, I have to be wowed.

If I'm spending my time, effort and money on these small items, they have to be amazing, and I have to be able to distribute each one with pride. If I think that reading more pieces by Natalie Simpson or Rob Budd, say, will invigorate a number of writers around me, its somehow easier to simply ask either of them for a submission and start distributing the work locally than, say, trying to figure out how to find the money to purchase a bunch of copies of their already-produced works for give-away. I know Warren Tallman did such at Simon Fraser, something I admire greatly, and was even able to get a copy of bpNichol's *GIFTS: The Martyrology Book(s)* 72 (1990) with a “Simon Fraser University Library, This Book is a Gift from Warren Tallman 1921–1994” insert, but those who can and are *willing*

to do such are extremely rare.

As my work with *side/lines: a new canadian poetics* (2002), or even the monthly reading series I ran during my 2007–8 writer-in-residence year at the University of Alberta reminded people, part of what I've always taken as my editorial mandate has been in introducing writers from different communities to each other. So much more can get accomplished if we are just more aware of each other, in our individual pockets of physical and/or intellectual space, sharing and producing work.

7 – What is the interaction between smallpress publishers like above/ground and NO PRESS and larger publishing venues (the publishers of national distributed perfect bound books)?

mm: I'm not entirely sure, to be honest. We're all doing different publishing with different goals, despite whatever possible overlap. I'm very aware of my publications opening or extending particular conversations. Maybe some authors I'm publishing are well known in

mm: Originally, thanks to the University of Ottawa library shelves, I was aware of such publications of bpNichol's *chapelbook Beach Head*, aware of *blewointment* and *Open Letter*. I was fascinated by the ease at which these publications could exist, and wondered why there weren't stacks of writers around me in Ottawa doing the same. Mags & Fags on Elgin Street has always had the best literary magazine section in the city, so I pretty quickly found small, odd publications such as *Bywords* and Rob Manery and Louis Cabris' *hole* magazine, later discovering Maggie Helwig's Lowlife Publishing, Joe Blades' *New Muse of Contempt* and various other then-recent or still-contemporaries. It felt like a wonderful goal, to be part of such publishing, whether as author or publisher or both.

STANZAS was a direct response to George Bowering's long poem magazine *Imago* (1964-1974), and I managed some forty-six or forty-seven issues before the whole thing fell apart, distributing hundreds of copies of each issue gratis. When I started, I was very interested in the idea of the long poem, and trying to figure out what that meant. I didn't see that many opportunities for literary journals for such, still favouring the mass of single-page lyrics. I wanted to provide a space, not just for the poem to exist in print, in pre-trade collections, but to exist for me as a reader and writer. I wanted to know what was out there I was missing.

I recall early on enjoying the idea of *TISH* as a newsletter, "the news that must stay news," and bpNichol's "gift economy" of *grOnk* and *Ganglia*. Finance shouldn't be a barrier, and distribution needed to remain fluid. Handouts allowed more opportunities than attempting to sell in stores that didn't want, and would return six months later, damaged.

Besides, a free journal helped advertise the chapbooks I attempted to sell. I didn't want to be producing items that only filled boxes in my apartment. Gary Geddes informed me that the earliest incarnation of Cormorant Books, his Quadrant Editions, kept afloat through subscription, and thought that the best of ideas, and I've been offering annual subscriptions since. This was probably in 1993 or 4, as we drank from bottles of Sleeman's in the treehouse in what is now their former front yard in Dunvegan, Ontario, bare miles away from my parent's house.

Originally my response was quite direct, responding to a perceived lack of Ottawa small publishing, but I've since broadened my scope considerably. Over the past decade or so, my community of Canadian publishers have included your own housepress/NO Press activity, jwcurry's extensive range of publications, Jason Dewinetz' Greenboatathouse, Rob Budd's wink books, Jay Millar's BookThug, Jon Paul Fiorentino's Snare Books, kememy babineau's LaurelReedBooks, Amanda Earl's AngelHousePress, Faulker and Nash's The Emergency

readers. There has to be a middle ground. Have you seen what Maggie Helwig was producing in the late 1980s and into the 90s through her Lowlife? I love the rough edges of her productions, chapbooks by herself, Michael Dennis and Lynn Crosbie. I far prefer rough work to preciousness.

I try to keep the design as simple as possible. Certainly, there's room for improvement, but I enjoy the simple grace of an uncut cover, straight image and playing with the (frustratingly) limited colour options that Ottawa copyshops provide. I prefer uncomplicated, and usually produce runs of 200-300 copies, deliberately leaning on the side of distribution over over-production.

4 - What do you believe above/ground does that other presses do not? In other words: what is the niche for above/ground?

mm: My tastes are pretty broad, so I attempt to engage with different communities over a wide range. There was something particularly entertaining to me a few years ago when I produced a broadsheet of a visual poem by you at the same time as I produced a more formally-constructed poem by Montreal poet Carmine Starino. I knew full well that there would be various readers out there receiving their usual above/ground press subscription envelope who would enjoy the work in one and be angry or confused by the other, but what really appealed were those who might enjoy both, perhaps engaging with one for the very first time. For the longest time I was very aware of producing more formally-adventurous work in the pages of *STANZAS* than in the regular chapbook series, and a number of authors that might have had regular above/ground press chapbooks had no chance to get into the journal, but I've since folded the mandate of *STANZAS* more into the press as a whole. I keep hoping I can find a press, perhaps, to let me edit an anthology as a last-hurrah for the journal, much the way Talonbooks produced *Imago 20* in 1974, but I haven't yet had time to pitch anyone properly on the idea.

But still. I'd say a certain part of my niche is producing works closer to the aesthetic of *filling Station*, BookThug, NO Press, *The Capilano Review* and CUE Books, without ignoring more formally-conservative lyric modes. My niche is to bridge the gap between the extremes, in form and geography. Basically, I publish what I like, and I like an awful lot.

5 - Is above/ground in conversation with a particular community (either aesthetic or geographic)? Do you see it responding to particular presses, venues or spaces?

others I've been trying to get another or first chapbook out of for some time, predominantly women writers, who I find notoriously difficult to get work out of (although it's almost always far more polished than writing by their male equivalents when I finally do).

2 – What do you consider the role and responsibilities, if any, of small publishing in general and of above/ground in specific?

rm: I consider my roles as editor/publisher to critically encourage and actively engage with the writers and writing that surround me, not necessarily exclusively tied to geographic concerns. I consider one of my roles that of cheerleader/coach, and regularly push various poets to submit when I think they're ready for a chapbook, whether a first overall, or simply first through the press, which much of time reaches a far wider audience than many of their small self-published beginnings. It's been fun the past few years to push at Pearl Pirie, Roland Prevost, Marcus McCann, Nicholas Lea, Amanda Earl and Marilyn Irwin, for example, simply to see where they might end up. There's lots of talent in this town, and sometimes the best thing you can do for someone is encourage. Hell, I think anyone interested in writing should experiment with their own small publishing. It can often encourage a clarity about writing and the process generally that might not otherwise come.

Another part of what I enjoy is the "gift economy," and for years, I've been handing envelopes of recent above/ground publications to visiting authors, or poets in other cities I might be visiting. When I first read in Buffalo, I made a point of putting together a packet of various publications for Steve McCaffery that I thought might appeal, including what I'd produced by bpNichol, Donato Mancini, Chris Turnbull and Max Middle. When I heard that Vehicule Press was producing a selected poems by D.G. Jones in 2002, I made a point of sending off the little chapbook of his I'd just produced to Signal Editions editor Carmine Starnino. It's a way to get the work out in a more direct, more personal way, and I would think that the publications might be viewed with more meaning, perhaps.

3 – What is your design aesthetic? How does that aesthetic compliment or respond to the work that you publish? Why have you chosen the format you have?

rm: Originally I was trying to keep production values simple and inexpensive for the sake of highlighting distribution. I loved what presses such as High Ground Press and mothertongue were producing, but had a problem with chapbooks produced in exclusive runs that sold for nearly \$100 each. I found that such preciousness became self-defeating when producing a literary work that should have, first and foremost, been available to

keep costs low and copies abundant, partly due to my own financial constraints; keeping chapbooks cheap enough to give away, as opposed to hoarde. Why bother making books, otherwise? Part of this was to promote contemporary writing generally, and my own writing specifically. Also, there was nothing more frustrating than hearing someone say they hated poetry, only to discover they hadn't actually read any. How can anyone speak with such authority and no knowledge? So I would give them a poem handout or a chapbook, depending. Over the years, you'd be surprised at the number of people who have responded positively, even if only as purchasing a further book, or handing over a compliment, tinged with shock. When a dry-waller who doesn't have a book to his name tells you, a week later, that he liked your poem, it carries an awful lot of weight. I've never been the kind of writer interested in altering the work for the sake of accessibility, focusing more on altering publishing, bringing it directly out into the world. Why should art be dumbbed-down for the sake of furthering audience? It's an insult to both art and audience.

Originally above/ground came out of an awareness that small publishing existed in other places, other times, but there didn't seem to be anything going on at all in the city. The days of Oroboros and *Antibos magazine*/Anthos Books were long behind, and publications such as the Friday Circle Chapbooks and hole books hadn't yet begun. I was only peripherally aware of *hole*, and had no clue about their Transparency Machine readings at Gallery 101. Despite my interest in what was happening, I was still a new co-parent home with our toddler Kate, and starting the daycare out of our tiny apartment. I had started participating in the TREE Reading Series, with regulars, I later realized, who were seemingly only aware of themselves. Writing and publishing and simply *existing* in the world is supposed to be a conversation, and I didn't notice too many of them actually listening, which I found baffling. Alternately, to be great, you have to have, among other qualities, a wider scope than everyone else around you. What I was aware of was a number of writers who could have benefited from a small chapbook publisher, but weren't necessarily interested in doing the work themselves. For some reason, I took this on.

My mandate has evolved, especially when you consider its been nearly two decades since I began, but I think the core interests are still the same, working to fill the spaces that other publishing doesn't, and to provide connections between readers, writers and even communities. My interests have matured, and I'm far more critical of the work that passes across my desk. I'm interested in poetry that has difficulty appearing in other venues, interested in seeing more by particular authors I might catch a single poem by in an issue of *filling Station* or *Bywords* or *The Capilano Review* or the like. These days, my excitement hinges on new and forthcoming titles by Monty Reid, Paige Ackerson-Kieley, Ken Norris, Ross Brighton, Robert Kroetsch, Dennis Cooley and Larry Bremner. There are still plenty of

The author of more than twenty trade books of poetry, fiction and non-fiction in a number of countries, rob mcLennan has published work in over two hundred trade journals in fourteen countries and three languages, and performed in Ireland, England, Wales, the United States and across Canada. His most recent titles are the poetry collections *Songs for little sleep*, (Vancouver: Obvious Epiphanies, 2012), *grief notes*: (Buffalo: BlazeVOX, 2012), *Glengarry* (Vancouver: Talon, 2011) and *kate street* (Chicago: Moita, 2011), and a second novel, *missing persons* (Toronto: The Mercury Press, 2009). In 1999, he won the CAA/Air Canada Prize for most promising writer (in any genre) in Canada under the age of thirty, and recently won the 2011 John Newlove Award through Ottawa's *Bywords.ca*, judged by poet and performer a rawlings. He spent the 2007–8 academic year in Edmonton as writer-in-residence at the University of Alberta, and regularly posts reviews, essays, interviews and other notices at robmcLennan.blogspot.com. In 2008, ECW Press released a collection of his literary essays, *Subverting the lyric: essays*, the same year Arsenal Pulp Press produced his expansive tourist guide, *Ottawa: The Unknown City*.

After nearly eight months of producing chapbooks under various press names, above/ground press officially started with its first two publications in August 1993, and has published over six hundred publications since, including chapbooks, broadsides and nearly fifty issues of the long poem magazine *STANZAS*, half a dozen issues each of *Missing Jacket* and *drop*, and many of the sixteen issues of the writers group occasional, *The Peter F. Yacht Club*. Since above/ground press began, he co-edited two years of Carleton University's *The Carleton Arts Review* (1993–1995), and founded a number of projects as extensions of the press, including the semi-annual ottawa small press book fair in 1994, the Ottawa poetry pdf annual *ottawater* in 2005 (for the sake of Ottawa's 150th anniversary), the online poetics journal *Poetics.ca* (with Stephen Brockwell), the trade publishing house Chaudere Books (with Jennifer Mulligan) in 2006, *The Carneau Review* (2008), and the *Poetics.ca* sequel, *seventeen seconds: a journal of poetry and poetics*, as well as numerous books, journals and anthologies edited for Insomniac Press, Black Moss Press, Broken Jaw Press, Vehicule, *unarmed journal*, *Jacket magazine*, *Dustie*, *New American Writing* and Guernica Editions. He has also organized a few hundred literary readings in Ottawa, Edmonton and Toronto, including co-ordinating Ottawa's TRHE Reading Series from June 1994 to January 1999. January 2011 marks nineteen years of events organizing in the city.

1 – Why did you begin above/ground? What was the impetus for its creation—and do you think your publishing mandate has evolved since its inception? If so, how?

rob mcLennan: It's been fun to make and distribute books. How could anyone not want to? Sending out books and receiving others in return. Very early on, I deliberately wanted to

derek beaulieu interviews rob mcclennan on above/ground
press

**ECONOMIES OF SCALE: rob mcLennan interviews derek beaulieu on NO PRESS
/ derek beaulieu interviews rob mcLennan on above/ground press
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isbn 1-897224-63-X

13 digits: 978-1-897224-63-2

published in Ottawa by above/ground press, February 2012
a/g subscribers receive a complimentary copy

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cover image, derek beaulieu interviews rob mcLennan: "dream poem for dieter roth 1," by
derek beaulieu

An earlier version of the interview with rob mcLennan originally appeared on derek
beaulieu's blog (derekbeaulieu.wordpress.com) on March 16, 2011.

rob mcclennan interviews derek beaulieu

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