

[Dear Fred]

derek beaulieu

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Dear Fred;

i find myself writing about the writing. but then, of course, the reader *is* constantly reading about the reading.

— bpNichol

Fred, you were — are — a constant thorn in the side of the Calgary writing community. Or at least it seemed that way to me when i was an editor at *filling Station* & *dANdelion* magazines, during my own efforts at housepress (publishing, at one point, your *All Americans*) and as one of your students. But you are a thorn that a writer would never want out of his or her side (& besides it will probably hurt more coming out than it did going in).

During a round-table discussion about the origins of *TISH* magazine & Warren Tallman's influence on the *TISH* writers, you recollected that:

One of the major things that I learned in my experience with *TISH* was through this technique that Warren had in the classroom, and outside the classroom, called resistance. Warren would always throw up these baffles, Even when he was teaching, he would throw up incredible interpretations of poems, so you'd have to fight back.

The same is certainly true of your role here in Calgary for a large number of students, many Calgary writers, small-pressers, critics & poets. Fred, i don't know if you consciously model your teaching style on Tallman's example, but there's no question in my mind that the words "resistance" & "baffling" are more than appropriate to your work both in the classroom and outside of it. Your pedagogy is not limited to the classroom, it extends out into the community to

readings, magazines, lectures, books. That — in my opinion — is where your pedagogy really comes through: though the integration of poetry into life. i have not been enrolled in your classes often (and only in a single creative writing course), but i always remember when i was in your senior level “Disjunctive Poetry” course back in '94. I was unready for the authors 'on the syllabus — Hejninian, McCaffery, Nichol, Stein — at that time and the expectation were high. Sink or swim. i sank, completely baffled. Yet, a couple years later I found myself swimming in those authors' work as their work began to filter into my poetry and my thinking. *Baffles*. You were — are — constantly putting up baffles for your students. You often meet students' work in your creative writing classes with a skeptical glare & a tersely spoken “So what? Why should I bother to read this?”

“So what?” What did he mean by that? How was a person really supposed to answer a question like “So what?”?

The question — i'd like to think — was more rhetorical, presented to force the student to confront the motivation behind the piece in question, to challenge the assumptions made *behind* the writing. & to gauge, of course, whether or not the student really wanted to write, really wanted to engage with language in a way that made the reader work. Once the student had dealt with the stupefying blow of “So what?” there swiftly came another: “How is *this* going to change the world?” The poems & the poetics might not change the world, but as Charles Bernstein wrote

in "Optimism and Critical Excess", poetics "are not directed to the unspecified world at large but rather intervene in specific contexts and are addressed to specific audiences or communities of readers". The poems may not change the world as a whole, but they aren't really intended to. What they change — or have the potential to change — is the *perception* & the *definition* of the world; "Poetics makes explicit what is otherwise unexplicit and, perhaps more important, makes unexplicit what is otherwise explicit". The world is formed in small spaces: audiences & communities, lovers & friends, stove & table, home & away, ink & text. Poetics reflect and respond to those relationships.

Outside of the classroom you don't strike me as someone for idle chatter, for shootin'-the-shit. Instead you ask about me about a couple things: what my three-year-old daughter is up to & where i am in my writing. You want to know *What are you doing? How are you contributing?* Both questions seem incredibly appropriate considering your own writing: continuously engaging family, place & the poet's role within that place. Bernstein proposes poetics as

an invasion of the poetic into other realms: overflowing the bounds of genres, spilling into talk, essays, politics, philosophy ... Poetics as a sort of *applied poetic*, in the sense that engineering is a form of applied mathematics.

With your writing that is certainly the case; poetry & poetics overflow boundaries enabling talk & enabling communication. You dedicate Faking It to Pauline with the lines "on the road and at the table / love the talk that books enable". Your on-going interest in the poetic diary *utanikki* to an extent manifests your desire to self-reflexively know *What are you doing? How are you*

contributing? as, it seems to me, there is no line between what you write & how you live. As Nicole Brossard said: "writing is energy taking shape in language". Poetry & poetics spill into talk, a talk that inhabits the spaces of living both "on the road and at the table." There is little space between the act & the writing, for "[t]he wish / from what is inside / for what is out".

One of your metaphors of poetics is that of the *poet's toolbox* & while the "toolbox lies dispersed in a scatter and a frenzy of needs" it contains both your idea of a "Trans=geo=ethno=poetics" and also the contents of the poet's refrigerator & kitchen cabinets — the home, the place. E.F. Dyck said that "Place is a nest of words [...] When a poet builds his nest he creates place, he does not define it". The smells & sounds of home, that "nest of words" are so often defined by the kitchen — as you know from the cafe, eh? My cupboards & fridge are filled with condiments, lentils, veggies & rice for me, vine tomatoes, apple juice & hotdogs for Maddie but also shelves full of ink, paint, film, paper, glue & other non-edible media. So i'm thinking about what's in the pots on the stove, where the heat comes from & how the meal gets shared. i'm trying to "[f]orget grammar and think about potatoes", trying to "[t]hink about words as a kind of Derridean dietary supplement". There's more to cooking than the recipe, there's the *krino* of the market, the sweat of a salted eggplant, the warm tang of fresh cilantro.

"So What?"

So — come for dinner Fred, bring Pauline too.

allbest,

derek

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