

Bruce Andrews:

a collage of notes for the final presentation on the final panel of
'Rethinking Poetics: the Columbia-Penn Poetics Initiative' — June 13, 2010.

READER REPO

Let me ventriloquize — with a bad accent.

What do you want?

Or, as in the title of my new book of poetry, *You Can't Have Everything... Where Would You Put It!*

If Poetics is the art & science of making poetry, making a new object, who is doing the making? The framing, the selecting, the choosing?

Is the Reader simply being presupposed in our avant-garde, experimental poetics?

And if we presuppose the Reader, we're missing out — on resources we need for differentiating, for evaluating, or for editing texts.

Which creates anxiety — about what is necessary to be done at a particular time.

How do we decide that?

Do we decide on the basis of neo-liberalism's investments in 'what's new' in poetry?

How to differentiate 'us' from the Workshop poets?

Is it on the basis of what is innovative, what is drastic?

And if it's not innovation, but transformation — then transformation of *what?*

Or *who?*

Maybe the anxiety many have expressed over the weekend hints at this — not getting a significant sized audience, do we compensate by clinging to claims about the texts' autonomous agency, or for the (courageous) position of the innovative writer?

Or to replace the position & experience of a Reader with a big rush toward the canon, the classroom, the validation by institutions (now, including the art world).

(Perhaps like Concrete Poetry's 'poetry for export,' ready for a bigger screen, because not only does it require no translation, it may not require readers at all.)

When we think the question is *Writing's* agency, not the Reader's, we ask: 'what do I want to complain about'? — what we can write, what we can do, responding to disasters.

What we speak, what we are; displaying a certain sensibility... that's getting intimate with the mic.

Engaging in 'verbing' with quite delightful proliferation; changing language & the conditions of representation; using convention against itself; or repossessing materials & temporalities from other places; bringing in data streams to trouble the rhapsodic & activate inventories...

How does a poetic economy of negativity or constructivist form or the logic of productivity of a genre get to operate by itself?

Are we 'enacting' discrepancy or spotlighting what's wrong?

But for *who*, if not for *what*?

Or, are we merely having a conversation with ourselves? Building systems & singing to myself while I do it?

Be careful what you say.

Is 'echolocation', as a biological model or trope for poetry — the ability of animals to locate themselves in the dark — simply where Writing is bouncing off of Language, without a Reader?

Instead, what if we centered our avant-garde Poetics on the Reader? — from Reader outwards.

Thinking about what we produce in relation to the social dominance of Consumption.

If the text is reinvented with each Reader, ask:

what kind of poetry do you like to read?

So, repossessing spaces & relations & articulation, taking back what's been taken away — is for the Reader.

Or, in a different version of 'Ontological Pluralism': *many worlds, per person*.

With the 'know-how' of Language *for* spectator & performer, often confusing the two, hopefully. Or as 'poetry animals' eating our nervous systems.

Where Language use isn't standing outside; it is also standing within me — a familial connection, not an opportunity for abstract othering.

Putting the potential for concretion on the Reader's side.

Along with the processual, intransitive, open-ended quality of Knowing.

Not 'who speaks' but: Listening is Speaking & torquing a subject.

Who knows? — given our methods of disorientation, of releasing 'mad affects' with the smashed-up playfulness of 'I' as part of a 'patareading'.

We are your choice.

And it's incompletely intimate.

You don't get it.

'My' meanings are not as author, but as a result of editing in order to share 'sparks'.

Even taking a future anterior focus, in a pedagogical trope about scenes of instruction & extension; but as an informal pedagogy, like a relatively wide-open individualized tutorial.

Not just letting Reading become 'reception' & collapsing into institutional critique, classroom, careerism, canon battles, etc.

What if we asked, about so many of the comments: what if we recast the 'making' verbs of Poetics & gave them all to the Reader, to a 'Reader-centered Poetics'?

In English, to create that bastardization of Language which it promises itself to be.

If Languages are like eco systems, if the Text is a vast eco system, it continuously positions both Writer & Reader. Who is going to be the bottom feeder? Who is going to be the predator?

If social antagonisms 'out there' typically recur in the antagonisms of poetic practice, how does a Reader *register* them, or *co-sign* them?

Or create 'Value': based on affect/identification/pleasure, or on instruction/alienation & saying No to certain forms of pleasure.

If 'estrangement' is still at the core of what we all do; if estrangement always seems like a good thing: why?

Estrangement isn't static; it has to be done again & again. Nor is it automatic.
Do your verbs! Or rework your diction, rhetoric, strategy, voice.

To make forms that impede business as usual. And open the possibility of
instability, or 'midrashic antinomianism':

by who? for who?

If we do think we have to discriminate; if some directions seem more fruitful than
others: why not think of 'the between' more? — sharing connective tissue with
another category.

What is your principle of exclusion? Or, what's so great about the call to
defamiliarize, detourn, irritate, etc. — or placing disturbing language in bodies, in
embodied performance or 'enactments of reciprocal alterity' or the 'phatic' slipping
into noise.

Maybe the procedures need to be site-specific — but in relation to a Reader.

As, for instance, the agent of going back to fix something that was broken; of
Memory — as a restored building that inherits the ruins of its predecessor.

With performance *soliciting* rather than 'enacting' a viable 'shifarama' of social
meaning.

Are we *registering* disjunctive or micro-temporalities — or are we soliciting Readers'
(complicit or critical) engagement with those temporalities?

If *echolocation* is coming into contact with an unknown environment, as a 'textual
sonar' it is bouncing signals off Readers, as Reading & Writing keep adjusting their
positions.

And where readerly *affect* is what activates the political stakes for poetry, its so-
called 'activism of the soul'; its 'interrogation' of markers of nation-state, class,
ethnicity, gender; its foregrounding or privileging or deployment of 'radical
particularity'; its claims to be fashioning a new public or counter-public sphere.

If neo-liberalism involves capital's continuing accumulation by dispossession, I don't
think we want to be stuck with a parallel dispossession of the Reader by Autonomous
Text or Eccentric Author.

What happens when the Reader becomes the beholder of Beauty in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, the contained & yet limitedly capacitated Reader — as if in a reservation, a controlled space.

Can we help a Reader produce experimental knowledge & not just reproduce clichés?
Can we create a disruption in the transmission that would make us wonder about its conditions of production? [I really can't explain it... that's what disjunction is about.]

So if the Poetics of the Reader is a *making*— e.g., producing a *relation to affect* — it's a bigger *capacitation*.

Or self-management.

And 'phatic' [or 'scat'-ic] management of keeping channels open.

And keeping the future open.

With dopamine-sprayed attention, with the Search Function as a way of Reading — since even single words are in a state of wild fluctuation.

Or with a *reframing* — maybe related to Kant's Judgment of the Sublime: with the Sublime as the *system* of Language — or of Discourse, Gesture, etc. — that isn't totalizable.

With a process of reflection getting triggered, & not just with 'data management'.
'Look to the mountain'; take a broader view.

I do like field trips.

Or Frame Shifts.

Or being reminded that it all could be *otherwise*.

And that relations & channels which are usually invisible can be made visible, or bruised & multiplied.

Where antagonisms become occasions for self-reflexivity; for the undoing of the contained Reader, as a micro instance of detotalization.

But — it should be obvious — 'the Reader', even if she or he is the focus, needs to be contextualized.

This would parallel the shift from Language to Rhetoric.

Since the individual only exists within a social context.

Readers' affects make up a social structure.

To be not super interested in phenomenology — since it's too universalizing.

Don't assume this Language you care so much about is universal.

And ditto with the Reader.

What *us* are *wé*? most likely an 'elective community' (or the potential for it)
as a new social formation.

Bring it on.