

Robert Chrysler

“My work is firmly rooted in the world of dreams, non-linear spontaneity, the surreal.”

Robert Chrysler discusses the motivations behind his book, **Every Exit Impossible to Imagine With Wings** (Trainwreck Press, 2008) with Kane X. Faucher.



Robert Chrysler is an inspired subway-ranter from Toronto, Canada. He enjoys challenging capitalist property relations, trying to figure out what the post-structuralists are going on about, and dreams of someday living in a tree.



Kane X. Faucher currently lives and works in London, Ontario. His activities span academic and creative enterprises, most notably in writing, continental theory, visual art, and music. He currently holds two degrees in philosophy and is working toward his doctorate in Theory and Criticism at the University of Western Ontario.

Kane X. Faucher is an FIMS/MIT Instructor; a freelance writer for *Scene Magazine*; co-editor of *The Raging Face*; co-editor of *The Drill Press*; and serves on the Editorial Board of *Mad Hatter's Review*.

He is the author of *Urdoxa* (2004) *Codex Obscura* (2005) *Fort & Da* (2006), *Calqueform*, *Astrozoica*, *De Incunabliad* (2007) and *Jonkil Dies*, *The Vicious Circulation of Dr Catastrophe* (2008).

Kane X. Faucher: There's been a lot of talk beneath the waves about this notion of borpism and post-borpism. All the signs seem to point to you. What is (post-) borpism, and does it have any appreciable affect on your poetic practice?

Robert Chrysler: Post-borpism?

Oh, THAT!

Well, that's mostly a joke.

Mostly...

John Moore Williams and I were chatting online a while back when he mentioned that he had detected a somewhat similar approach or aesthetic shared by a small group of writers and visual artists who had gravitated toward each other in the blogosphere. That group included us, of course, as well as Matina Sta-

matakis and some other people who were contributors to a group blog called Discharge...Jaie Miller...Aaron Held...Jaan Patterson...Theoni Tambaki...Lee Kwo... (<http://fishyarts2.blogspot.com>)

But he couldn't quite articulate it very clearly. So he asked me if I could identify some common elements we might all have in common. We were beginning to wrestle with the question of whether or not we may actually be some sort of nascent literary/artistic school or movement. We talked about things like surrealist non-linearity and leaps of logic, William S. Burroughs, industrial noise music, dada and punk nihilism; the influence of genre fictions, sci-fi, erotica, pornography; hip-hop sampledelica, textual communism and Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizomia...

We thought we may be onto something, although we weren't quite sure of exactly what yet. We ran the idea of constituting ourselves as a formal group in

need of an official name by Matina. Even though she herself had toyed with the idea of creating her own movement prior to all of this (anyone remember the now-legendary porn-po manifesto?), she told us that, as much as she loved what we were about, she didn't really feel the need to be a part of any official aesthetic school that was likely to eventually become a set of creative shackles anyway.

We considered ourselves told and pretty much dropped the idea.

Pretty much...

A couple of weeks ago I decided to take matters into my own hands. I wrote a humorous blogpost, giving a rundown on some of the key players in this exciting new movement called post-borpism. (Whether they wanted to be included or not is something I failed to take into consideration and must apologize for.) But it was all just a joke. At best, an excuse to give some cyber-shout-outs to a bunch of creative folk whose work I admired and wished to give some wider exposure online.

The word "borp" is my own silly nomenclature used to designate something cool or exciting. I tacked the "post" on there to irritate John.

So, it's all just a meaningless joke that doesn't really affect my poetic practice at all...depending on who you talk to.

KXF: It seems to signal a kind of competing urge to found a school in the wake of so many "poetic schools" gone belly up, and a marked resistance against the "ism" label-making machine that academics can be so fond of doing for reasons of canonical and pedagogical shorthand. I find that conflict rather intriguing, the sort that wants to unite efforts synergistically, yet not under the hierarchy and fixity of a rubric. On one hand there is the nostalgia of "togetherness", and on the other a rejection of what the "schoolmen" have made of these adventitious networks. However, it seems that you have brooked with the third option; namely, to make a jape and satire of that very institution of forming a "school". This segues, albeit laterally, into my next question given your appetite for candour and satire.

Your work seems to avoid the self-indulgent maundering obsession of "being a poet" whilst also por-

traying a kind of semi-jaded hope and optimism. There's a palpable "workmanlike" aspect to your poetry that evades the usual trappings of blue-collar romanticism. It's like you are a kind of Bukowski when he was more honest, yet unabashed by appealing to a stream of consciousness style. Perhaps you are Hilda Doolittle with a job, or Virginia Woolf with a mullet. Would you say that your work operates on a balance beam between dream and the grit reality of the concrete?

I should also ask another followup. Given your occasionally feverish collaborations and connections with international poets, do you think that the very idea of CanLit as a means of trying to establish a "national literature" repugnant? Or do you feel that we should make national distinctions and "shore up" a nationalist reserve when it comes to poetry? If not, then do you believe that poetry is an international affair, beyond all borders, and of universal value for the benefit of cross-border pollination?

RC: Oh geez, you're absolutely right. I don't see myself as a poet or even a writer, really. What I mean by that is related to Barthe's (or Foucault's) notion regarding the death of the author figure, the revered, officially-sanctioned producer of meaning. I'm just someone who writes, a guy who has literally slept on the streets. So I'm not the least bit revered or respected (smiles). On the contrary, I'm sure there are people out there, who, seeing me wake up on the corner of Yonge and Dundas, reeking of alcohol and crack, would regard me with revulsion (laffs). But this internet thing has enabled me to crash the party and challenge the monopoly on meaning to a degree.

I guess that may be the source of the optimism you mention above. I've been published a bit offline, but I'm primarily someone who writes on the internet. And there's no doubt that the voluntaristic, fairly open and free nature of many things happening online in the cultural sphere allows for the creation of organizational forms that subvert established social relations.

It's exciting, and I'm happy to participate.

But I'm someone who also feels that it isn't enough to merely subvert those relations online, that it's necessary to begin the work of transcending or abolishing them entirely, wherever they may exist. I'm not just a cyber-socialist. I see the internet as a utopian space,

but one which doesn't REALLY exist (a heterotopia?). I'm more interested in seeing all the intense collaborative energies and new modes of organization you see taking shape in cyberia become manifest in the everyday world offline.

My work is firmly rooted in the world of dreams, non-linear spontaneity, the surreal. I'd like my writing to be an act of insurrection, but I just don't know if writing is capable of that. I'm a blue-collared romantic in that "I remain faithful to a world that is otherwise." I just don't kid myself or others that we will write it into reality. That will take something more than scribbling in my notebook and typing what emerges onto the internet. That's fun. And the revolution SHOULD be fun, but sorry folks, it won't be taking place online. That's all just a possible harbinger of better things to come, now let's get busy, people! (laffs)

That's the only thing that is rooted in the grit of reality about my work. I don't overestimate the importance of what I am doing. My head is in the interzone, but my feet are firmly planted on terra firma.

Nationalism?

Look, I'll admit, when I was seventeen I thought Hugh Garner and Margaret Laurence were...words fail. And it imbued me with a certain sense of pride to know that there were writers from my neck of the woods who were actually WORTH READING. Wow!

I have to also say that it's a beautiful thing, knowing that writers like Thamyris Jones and Anthony Brenton exist relatively close to me in terms of geographical space. There ARE positive things about nationalism, particularly in how it speaks to our desire for community, camaraderie, belonging, what have you...

But nationalism (like capitalism) is a tired old joke. Don't even get me started. (smiles) I mean, Matina Stamatakis is even closer to me than Thamyris or Anthony, geographically speaking. And she's a bloody Yankee! (laffs) Seriously though, the two people I most want to collaborate with are from Greece (Theoni Tambaki) and England (Jaie Miller). So, I'm all about the internationalism, border-smashing (<http://www.noborder.org/>) and cross-pollination.

KXF: There is no doubt that you have raised literary gatecrashing to the apogee of its art form, and it may

now be safe to write and delve into substance abuse without it being a cliché anymore, O ho ho. But let us shelve that fey and faded notion of "nationalism" once and for all, for good or ill – neither of us need that jangled noise. Your self-deprecation of the authorial role, en vogue via our favourite Frenchies, seems rather sincere. I've jabbered it up with others who take the same position, but who take it on as a mask upon overweening conceit. You certainly indicate some of the inherent limitations of the online forum for the organization and dissemination of literary enterprise, and I wonder if it has to do with a more concrete understanding of activism (I can assume, in your view, that political activism is synonymous with the literary variety, that both are part of a continuum). Given your past "agitations" on behalf of the have-nots, how do you gain credibility (if that is important) among the contingent of high-tone silverbacks if you preclude your own position as a spokesperson for the voiceless? Or is it that you consider yourself, in the humble shuffle of the definite to the indefinite article, "a" rather than "the" voice of a group? The fun revolution will be offline, indeed.

This idea of writing as insurrectional instead of instructional is vitally interesting. But when you speak of that domain of dreams and surreality, do you find yourself occasionally coming up against the wall of surrealism's limitations? While I still have you here, between swings of the hammer, could you say what else you have in the offing, any other bizarro-Bretonian projects that you may have coming down the pike?

RC: I'm actually not so sure that literature and activism are so indelibly linked. They CAN be, of course. But for me personally, they're quite separate spheres of activity.

And once again, it all comes down to what I perceive as being effective forms of opposition. I just don't think that because I'm opposed to, let's say, the occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan that writing even the most affecting or incendiary piece is going to accomplish much in terms of making my dissent felt where it counts (in the pocketbooks of elite interests). The whole problem with literature (surrealism included) is that, whatever insurrectionary or revolutionary desires are expressed by it, they remain confined to the arena of the symbolic or merely rhetorical.

ditch,

At this stage of the game, that isn't enough. Anarchist direct action is where it's at for me. But even though I'm someone who many people familiar with me would associate with ultra-left communist or anarchist politics, not much of that vibe makes it into my work. Writing and literature is a lovely, deeply meaningful, deeply fulfilling...hobby.

However, when I really want to fight the power or try (however vainly) to challenge capitalist social and property relations, I go out and squat a building with The Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (<http://www.ocap.ca>). Or I go party in the streets and block automobile traffic (<http://www.reclaimthestreets.net>). I mean, you can be a writer AND start a community-based, cooperative agricultural project. Revolutionary poetics are fine and dandy, but moving food production closer to urban centers is probably way more important.

Perspective is important...

The immediate future for yours truly?

Well, on the literary front...

It looks like my tenure as editor at The StarFish Journal is over, sadly enough. The vastly unheralded and under-appreciated Dmitri Diakopoulos, the guy who actually does all the technical work that makes the site go, is far too busy with relocation, work and school to work his magic over there for the immediate future.

I'm thinking of taking some of the invaluable, much-needed experience I gained at The StarFish and starting up another surrealist hub. But I'd like to organize things in such a way that editorial control was more decentralized, so that I could devote more time to writing.

We'll see...

As far as submitting material around for possible publication goes, I'm horrible in that regard. I'm fortunate to have received a fair amount of validation, both online and offline, during the past few years. But I've got to start sending more stuff around. I'm hoping to submit some material to Juliet Cook's officially incredible Blood Pudding Press later this month. I'm really excited at the possibility of appearing there.

I'd love to edit Jaie Miller's voluminous output into a chapbook or three...

I'd love to devote more time to my second novel (blogger.com ate my first)...

I'd love to collaborate with Theoni Tambaki on a larger project...

But the harsh reality of my situation is that I spend the overwhelming majority of my time wearing a hard-hat and safety vest, brandishing a shovel and tossing concrete and dry-wall around. I currently live at The Salvation Army shelter in downtown London, Ontario. Which is a huge improvement over last year, when I was sleeping literally on the streets in Toronto, in minus-14 degree weather, and just drunk or high enough to somehow survive it all.

All of which is my way of saying that I don't really have any definitive projects in the works. But I have big shoulders, a wide-open head and heart, and I'm game.

So the possibilities are infinitely sexy!