

rou/e, a footpress I use to place poetry on trails, is formally a way of placing poems in the way of people. But not necessarily masses of people. And not necessarily — and no way to really find out — people who necessarily read poetry. Just people. People on ATV's, people on snowmobiles, people on skis, people in running shoes, hikers, rubber boots, snowshoes and on bike. The poems are also in the way of the various entities that are with us on trails, such as insects, birds, coyotes, foxes, bears, amphibians, plants (in no particular order). The poems are planted in places that they can be encountered — alongside marshlands, edging bridges, bordering “junk” people have dumped, alongside trees in groves — but not obviously. You could consider them another form of a ‘nature note’ — as if about to identify something local, naturalized, introduced, historical, absented, or, even, a perspective from a vantage point. Insects, birds, coyotes, foxes, bears, and plants move around, on, mark, and incorporate them into their travels as an ordinary thing, indistinct from anything else. People use the trails mostly for recreational activities and yet, most of the time, I don't encounter anyone else — just tracks: tires, footprints, skis, snowshoes, dog, racoon, snowshoe rabbit, squirrel, mouse, bear, fox, bird, deer.

Today's rou/e emerged out of a print version that I started in the mid to late 1990's; it initially focused on writers local to Vancouver. The first issue was in wide broadside format, with red ink. I'd been lucky to have a cohort of friends/fellow writers who were also doing small press activities, or who had been involved in them, so I knew the basic process¹; I was helpfully mentored by Gene Bridwell in an unassuming way (Special Collections at SFU) during some of my undergrad years, and when I was travelling, was introduced to a variety of different/additional forms by Gael Turnbull (no relation), with whom I'd been corresponding off and on. There were six editions of rou/e — of sporadic timing and disparate runs. I think the last one was a run of seventeen, tucked into art magazines and distributed by mail. What I had hoped was that contributors would pass it along to others, or to add to it (e.g. the art magazine) and pass it along. There is a tendency to gather chapbooks and hold on to them — archive them; I would have liked rou/e to keep moving. In general, rou/e came out of a collision of interests: design and writing; I wanted to juxtapose interesting writing using different design formats and materials. I eventually moved to a format that incorporated re-used materials (art magazines), and then took a break from rou/e.

rou/e started up again in 2010 as an idea — I was thinking about readerships, the writing community, and who, among the folks I know, actually read poetry (outside of the writing community). Poetry isn't a blatant tradition where I live. Well, maybe short pithy poems, poems of sarcasm and limerick poems. You know the ones — and they can be very amusing, depending on their subject and where they're 'found'. Roasting homages. Or poems of a nature that we learned in secondary school; the ponderous poems (they have a place), as I always thought. The poems that might turn you off poems or make you really want to bend one. This doesn't mean

¹ Reg Johansen, Ryan Knighton, Karina Vernon, Wayde Compton, Jason Le Heup, Jamie Reid, George Bowering, George Stanley, Roger Farr, Aaron Vidaver, Steven Ward

that there aren't artistic ventures — there are loads of visual artists and musicians, woodcarvers and weavers. There are avid readers, bookstores, and print shops. There are a few really good poets, too. I started thinking about poems I give away — chapbooks of other writers, books, pieces of errata (and the erratic). I decided to move away from pamphlet/broadside/chapbook form to something less time consuming than the production of those, and also something that might evoke an inner response not requiring a claim or a statement or expertise from the reader. Something a person might just come upon — encounter — both in place and out of place. Something, also, of a different physicality than the printed form folded, stapled, bound.

I think best when I am moving — out for walk, hike, or cycle — and I enjoy spending time outdoors. In some of the places where I have done long distance walking, leaving things on trails — as markers/crossings/communicators — have been common. Walking in Wales, I have come upon communication stones. Walking in Scotland or Northern England, trail narratives came out over beers in small towns or passing by others on the trail. Walking in Ontario, markers, boxes for notes, bunches of lilac bushes are all reminders of passings and passages. There are many artists who use the outdoors in which to leave an artistic imprint — although I wasn't as aware of them initially, as I am, now. *rout/e* isn't particularly unique, I don't think, but what planting the poems and finding the poems does do, perhaps, is highlight how much space there is and how much distance of trail there is, vast uninhabited spaces. It highlights the possibility of someone encountering a poem, and perhaps never reading it again; finding a poem in a space where poems aren't typically discovered, in an environment that does not normally host poems in a written form, enables engagement outside of the spaces where poems are usually normalized. There is no test — a person can read the poems nor not; a person can look at the poems as a type of landscape or as an object that contains multiple meanings. It might be something like finding a unique plant on a trail and deciding to look it up after getting home. Who knows? These trails are mostly unpopulated by people except for at certain times of the year. Depending on the mode of transport, too, it would be very easy to ride by them on an ATV or snowmobile. The entities that encounter the poems the most are those who use the immediate environment routinely. The poems, also, are subject to any form of destruction or slow, unalterable, changes — as we all are. The poems are unprotected; they are unshelved; they are not pristine.

In late 2010 or early 2011, I asked various poets to contribute one page of their writing to *rout/e*, and explained that the poem would be placed along a trail (unspecified) and that I'd send a pic when it was planted. I used plywood, plexiglass, screws, and 1x2 or 2x2 stakes, as well as marine seal for materials. A retired friend with a workshop helped me with cutting and fielded some basic design questions. Contributors were asked to send me a bio as a link. I imagined the minimum time a person might spend on the poem to be about the same time that one might spend looking at a moth on a plant, or trying to locate a bird. I was not sure, really, how *rout/e* would pan out.

The folks I've asked to contribute have all been fantastic, and patient. Between 2011 and now (2015) I planted a stylistically diverse bunch of poems by a number of Canadian poets (they're listed [here](#)). The poems have been planted in a variety of habitats, along very different trails. The

poems have undergone some transformations ranging from erasure (rob mclennan's poem has a sun spot whereby the sun has burned a hole in the paper underneath the plexiglass, obscuring some of the words of the poem); to caretaking exercises (Amanda Earl's poem stands at the edge of a beaver pond. Someone carefully mows the grass around the poem each year, and wild strawberries flower, fruit, and are eaten; arawlings' poem, "The Great Canadian", initially planted in snow, was moved by someone else to edge a collection of garbage that had been placed within a window frame; my son and his friend, discovering the poem on a hike — and un-alerted by me — broke into song, delighted with the acoustic repetition of the poem); to tooth marked (Jamie Reid's poem became a brief game of chase-me when I took a Labrador Retriever with me to plant the poem. She stole it and teased me from a within the flooded section of trail); to stolen (Steven Ward, Monty Reid, Jamie Reid and George Bowering's poems have been transported (taken) — although as of last week, it seems as though Bowering's poem has re-appeared). These incidents intrigue me. derek beaulieu's visual pieces have intrinsic elements that are quite captivating in outdoor spaces. The first poem he contributed was placed between two wetlands. While out on a hike with friends, over a year later, I discovered that it had been shot with paintballs. The poem (on paper) was intact, caught in some cattails. The plywood and plexiglass were separated; the plexiglass shattered. I video-taped the poem floating on one of the wetlands. arawlings' poem has lasted the longest. The spring before last (2013), I found it during the spring melt, floating in a deep ATV-created large puddle — still intact, the plexiglass muddied, the paper beneath, undamaged. I replaced it. This occurred again this last spring, but I wasn't able to replace it where it had been, the trail was too slippery. This winter (2014) it was standing again, replaced (by someone) in its metal frame, fronting the collection of garbage where it had been found before.

The poems change over time — the materials become weathered, mud may splatter the plexiglass and obscure words, foliage may surround the poem at some times and at others, not. Poems may fall into spring rain if planted in the winter. The poems aren't always visually obvious — it depends on the time of year and what might be occupying the trail or whether the poem is even there anymore. Things move around the poem, with the poem, or move the poem. Perhaps people stop and read the poem.

rout/e has taken some other paths, in design. Between fall and late spring 2013-2014, I planted poems in an abandoned black walnut grove near to where I live. There are three rows of trees, each tree — or where a tree was — has a small, empty, metal placard that at one time, perhaps, held tree descriptor notes. Each placard has been filled with 8x5 laminated cards — one poet's work per row. The laminate cards make it easier for someone to take the poems. They also make it easier for someone to walk by them — though they are printed on white paper and stand out quite well in all seasons. Monty Reid, Sandra Ridley, and derek beaulieu participated in this version of rout/e. A video I took of derek's poem is posted here. In March 2014, rout/e moved to the Glynmill Pond component of the Cornerbrook Stream Trail network in Cornerbrook, Newfoundland via a workshop at a conference on Digital Publishing. Shosh Ganz solicited poems from local writers; her literature class constructed the installations in class and, with conference participants and some of the local writers, planted them, with spontaneous readings.

It was an enjoyable collaboration. In early fall, 2014, Friends of Petrie Island and volunteer Katherine Forster and I collaborated to place poems at Petrie Island in boxes usually used for ecological information. The boxes were made by volunteers at Petrie; participating poets and friends planted and read them. Petrie Island is designated as a Class 1 wetland, which is the highest rating in the Ontario system. It is also a regionally significant area of natural and scientific interest (ANSI, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources). Also in early fall, 2014, I installed another piece by derek beaulieu at a local conservation area. His poem, “Translating Translating Apollinaire” was placed alongside a solar panel array — beside an empty space where one of the panels had been stolen. The poem was affixed to a cedar-framed plexiglass panel and matched the dimensions of a panel in the solar array. The piece was mounted to a support made of grey birch. It flew off in a windstorm in early winter and will be re-designed and re-installed in early 2015. The installation included a q-code of a song by local band Fiddlehead Soup. It is likely that future rout/e poems will have an acoustic element attached via q-code. It may be that the q-code is not always available for download, depending on the location of the trail.

Checking on the poems in rout/e is as sporadic as the print run used to be. The poems are placed on a variety of different trails, of different distances apart. Between 2011 and 2013, I did not get to arawlings’ poem. I haven’t checked on George Bowering’s poem since 2012 — I planted it, checked it a few months later, and it was gone. Now it’s back, apparently. Jamie Reid’s poem was present until last summer. There was no evidence that it had been destroyed. I have made more of an effort to track the grove poems because they are considerably closer, and I wanted to see what would happen to the laminate during seasonal changes. The burn in rob mcLennan’s poem could only occur during a particular time of year and at a particular angle — because the sunspot on his poem is fairly exact, and his poem is partially obscured by foliage part of the year. Amanda Earl’s poem has rippled from the infiltration of water through the marine seal. The time between planting and checking on the poems was about a year, in both cases. The poems at Glynmill, except one, are all gone — these were checked on by Shosh Ganz in late summer 2014, following the winter planting. The Petrie Island poems have been unchecked (by me) since they were planted. Others, apparently, have gone back to take a look again.

In my garage, I have eight 2x2 posts and a bunch of plywood rectangles roughly 8x10. I have some places picked out to plant them...and have a solicited a few poems. Spring. 2015. Between the snow, the melt, and its evaporation.

Chris Turnbull lives near Ottawa, Ontario. She is published in *o w n* (CUE Books 2014), alongside work by arawlings and Heather Hermant. Her visual and multi-voice book *continua* will be published by Chaudiere Books in 2015. Thuja Press published her chapbook *Shingles* in 2001; above/ground press published a selection of *continua* in 2010. Her work can be found online in (*parenthetical*), *ottawa poetry newsletter*, *Spiral Orb*, *ditch*, *The Volta*, *Dusie 10*, and *ottawater*, among others. She has a chapbook, *Candid*, forthcoming through *Dusie Kollektiv 8*, and additional work through *Stroboscope*, *Nerve Lantern*, and *Touch the Donkey*.