Lower Standards

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On March 18, 2000 I began writing a poem a day. Today is June 19, 2001, and I have 428 poems written—I skip a day or two every month. What is it like to do this? How much does William Stafford's advice to "lower standards" help? How does one revise in this regimen? What techniques can one use to gather material to "write about"? What does it cost to work this way? What can you gain once you've made the work less precious or special? Is any of it publishable? Quality "versus" quantity? This little class will start with some observations I've made and continue with a discussion. Resistances will surely come up. And fear.

History

When I entered Warren Wilson, I had written about 40 poems up to that point not counting about 20 juvenilia (followed by 25 years of nothing). When I graduated, I had written about another 40 or 50 more, including the parts of a long poem. Therefore, the 47 poems in my final manuscript represent quite a large proportion of my total output, and just about all the poems I did at WW.

My method of working was to write in the morning and struggle to get a first draft over the length of a morning—about 3 hours. I would succeed at this about once a week when things were going well. And then I would revise like crazy. My goal was to turn every possible poem into the best thing I could. I did this with every poem and with the help of the workshops and advisors. At my graduation reading I was tempted to introduce these advisors as co-authors, but was steered away from that by Pete Turchi.

After I graduated, I went into a slump!

Over the next 6 months I wrote 8 poems, and then for the next 20 months, it got even worse: Nothing. I tried just writing lines, but nothing happened. I couldn't revise, either.

Then a former friend threatened my life, and 5 days later I started writing a poem a day.

In the Fall of the previous year, I had read "Morning Poems," by Robert Bly—under the advice of a Wally friend, John Gribble. So I had been looking into the question of marathon writing. Fifty days into my daily regimen I wrote a review of "The Daily Mirror," by David Lehman for **Crania** (which folded immediately after receiving my review). I can't recall when I read the Lehman book, but it might have been before I started in my own poem-a-day regimen.

Now it's about 15 months later and I'm still at it. I'm up to number 434, and if anything I am more regular in the last 6 months than I was in the first 12.

Why This Might be Important

I am not a typical poet in a particular sense: I desired to write early in my life and was not bad at it, but due to circumstances I became a fairly hardcore (computer) scientist, was heavily trained in

mathematics, and in short, had developed my so-called "left brain" to an extreme. Being a bit observant as part of my training and acquired habits, I noticed things about how I wrote before and after the decision to write a poem a day. There are physical, emotional, mental, cognitive, and results-based differences between the two modes.

With enough personal accounts like this one, perhaps we can start to understand something about the poetic process that is more than anecdote and uncontrasted observations.

Origins

History is one thing, but origins are another. I'm not sure what triggered the writing spurt, but the threat was an immediate cause. For a while I sent my daily poems to a female confidant, and maybe this is part of it. Though when I stopped sending them, my regularity increased and the quality of poems did, too.

Though I don't totally buy into the popular left-brain/right-brain mythologies, it seems that my mode of writing changed somehow. Not only did the external mode of my working style change, but the physical and mental sensations while writing changed as well, as if the center of writing switched from my left brain to my right brain. First, let's look at the physical mode changes.

The first 100 poems I wrote (the so-called "before" poems) were written like this:

- The first draft was written in the morning, usually between 9am and noon, taking usually a minimum of a full hour for 20 lines. Typically a full first draft would take a minimum of 3 hours, even for half-page poems. The first draft *felt* very hard to write—each word, phrase, and line would take many, many minutes (sometimes more than 30 minutes for a word or phrase) to get out. It also felt as if the pathway was convoluted somehow, that a conscious effort based on looking at and thinking about the words on the page would turn into a "search" somewhere (memory, images?) which would be shipped back and turned into words that were evaluated in the context of the existing text. The writing not only was very stop-and-go feeling, but along the way there were a lot of revisions and corrections on a line-by-line basis. Sometimes I would capture a particular draft path into a separate file for later consideration. This methodology, in retrospect, was similar to how computer programs play games and reason—by trying out different approaches and then evaluating them, throwing away the "bad" ones and keeping the good ones, and working on them.

- I would be able to write the first drafts only in the mornings and sitting at my computer, alone in the house with music playing—there was a definite routine I would have to follow to get work done. I found that the images that the music brought forward were central to my working habits.

- Furthermore, if I read anything before doing a poem, I would be unable to write a draft. Many times I would read the newspaper as soon as I got up, and on those days I almost never was able to get anything written.

- For many months one year, I would sit down 4 mornings a week trying to come up with new work, and that year I wrote 20 poems.

- The drafts were substantially revised, typically over the course of a dozen or two revisions, frequently in conjunction with a mentor or a workshop. Revision felt very easy to do. Making things

more clear, eliminating not so useful parts—these were easy to do. I had worked out by the end of my WW program a way of looking at poems that made finding weak places in the work easy.

- I would be able to revise any time and anywhere. Even if I had a spare moment waiting in line, I would be able to pull out a draft and work on it.

At first when I was doing the poem a day, the routine felt quite a bit like this older one, though I switched to working last thing at night, on the "advice" of David Lehman who talked about trying to gather images of the day to try to make his poems-a-day somewhat like a journal or diary.

I found that I was able to write every day this way, but a draft would take about an hour to do, with some variation—meaning it would take at least 30 minutes and up to 2 hours.

I found at first that the only real differences between the way I wrote before and the early poem-a-day way were that I could actually write a poem each day, and that I would often start with either an image that I saw during the day (e.g. **Vinyl Polychrome**) or else an image or memory that had come to my imagination during that day (e.g. **Where She Danced**). To succeed at writing the poem, I would sometimes have to think fairly explicitly about Stafford's reported advice to lower my standards—I felt I had permission, if needed, to write prose in lines if I had to in order to get the thing out that night.

These two changes, though, perhaps had large effects later on. I found that the permission to resort to prose meant that I felt freer to try odd experiments in grammar (e.g. **the first step in your quest to become linguistically obscure**) or even to take pieces as "found poems" (e.g. **whoever copies this sacred text without permission will be damned**). I also found that the need to find a trigger (like Richard Hugo's *triggering towns*) meant that I was able to use the literature as jumping off points, which soon vastly increased my palette of subjects and approaches.

I noticed some differences as time went on:

- The most dramatic difference was that I became able—after 6 months or so—to write very quickly and anywhere. In some cases I was able to get a decent first draft done in as little as 5 minutes. This, though, is rare. Today my average amount of time is about 20 minutes for a 20-line poem. Moreover, I am able to write these poems anywhere—even standing in line or in between the segments of a slow conversation or e-mail exchange with someone or in a crowded room. While before, distractions would break the sort of spell I needed to be in, after, the "spell"—if that's what it is—doesn't break very easily, and even when it seems to have been broken, it is easily re-established.

- Mostly I can do a first draft any time of day, but if I had to pick a time of day when I am least effective, I would say the mornings are worst. The reason seems to be that I've grown to rely on the experiences of the day and the feeling of summing up to trigger me into a poetry-writing mode.

- I find that having interesting and varied experiences, including reading experiences, helps that night's poem. I've found also that I can be interrupted while writing a poem, have that interruption require reading and writing something else—usually something left-brainish—and upon returning to the poem, I can resume writing with little or no drop-off on *perceived* effectiveness.

- Revision has not been tested as thoroughly. The revisions I've done have been relatively minor. I've always assumed that since revision could be done relatively easily before, it would be similarly easy after. However, it could be that the transformation in process has been so thorough and symmetric that revision is now the bottleneck. On the other hand, some of the work has been accepted for publication with little or no revision beyond what I had done, which was invariably light. (Note, there will be lots more on revision later.)

- Nevertheless, my current process is to always revise the previous day's poem, and whenever I send a poem to an editor, I revise it as thoroughly as seems right for the poem—but this amount has always seemed light.

The most major differences seem to come from how the process feels while I'm writing. Before, it felt as if there were a long conduit or perhaps a process with many steps between where the poetic vision—if you don't mind this phrase—originates and where the mechanism that puts words on the page operates. The process felt very fragile and this was borne out by how frequently it broke down. After, it felt as if the process were rather direct with very few interconnected parts. It felt as if the impetus for the writing came from the origin of the poetic vision as a push, rather than from the writing mechanism as a pull.

These feelings are physical feelings. In some cases the feeling of writing before was one of pain or strain, like trying to ride too fast up a steep hill or do more bench presses than have ever been done before. After, the feeling was a difficult one, but it seemed more like exertion than over-exertion.

Another major difference is that after, the origin of the poetic vision seems to be someplace I can feel, while before that origin was only inferred—that is, it must have been coming from somewhere, but the experience was of the writing (putting the words on the page) and of the heavy, dangling conduit that disappeared somewhere.

Sometimes when I am in a poetry-writing mode and need to switch to another writing task, there would be a lingering or momentum to the poetic mode of writing, and what I would write would seem to its readers out of character for me or more heightened or fantastic. Before getting accustomed to a poem-a-day, this would sometimes happen, but not quite as consistently.

The theory I'm not sure I want to buy into is that the source of poetic vision—again, let's use this phrase with caution—is in the right brain while the work of getting the words onto the page normally takes place in the left brain. The old process had me engaging the left-brain writing process, which would try to communicate with the right brain and sometimes succeed, more often not. The new process seems to be that the right brain is getting the words down (somehow) while the left brain is checking for left-brain things like clarity, grammar, etc, or assisting the word-writing process.

I find that I am sometimes or even often surprised each day by what comes out, and those times there is that (too) familiar click of closure, the understanding behind it usually comes from the place where the poetry comes from and not from a rational reckoning of the factors and aspects of the poem, and the closure is a surprise. It's that feeling you've heard about where someone writes in order to find out what they think.

How Do I Start?

Stephen Dobyns once accused me of planning my poems—thinking of the message I wanted to send and plotting out all the craft elements I would use. He gave me too much credit, but my work must have seemed like that to him. I don't think I plotted things out very much, but I do admit to thinking, on occasion, abstractly about the poem before writing it and during. I think I don't do anything like that now.

Here are the ways I approach the work now:

- Usually I start with an image that pops into my mind, typically something I've seen during the day or something I've thought of during the day. Sometimes when an image like that pops in early in the day, I'll write it down and work from that (e.g. **Bag Thoughts**)

- Another common thing is to sit in front of the computer, put myself in poetry-writing mode, and write down the first of the phrases or lines that comes rapidly to mind *that seems strange enough*. I use this as a trigger and go from there. A lot of times that phrase or the first stanza will not make it—I think of this as pulling away the scaffolding once the poem can stand on its own. (E.g. **TransWork**)

- I find I am now willing—which I wasn't before—to respond to an existing poem. I'll sometimes respond outright (e.g. **Our Numb Circle**, which is made from the images from Rilke's **The Panther** in backwards order and making a different point than Rilke). This seems to work better the less I understand the poem and its images.

- Quite a few of the poems have been constructed by taking 2 or 3 haiku and creating an arc between their images. I call this form a *multi-ku*. (E.g. **Multi-Ku (1)**, **Multi-Ku (2)**, and **Multi-Ku (3)** as well as many others.) In most cases I need to add some element—a narrative or some overarching images—to have this make sense.

- Sometimes I'll invent a form, like taking a song lyric and making those the first words in each line (e.g. **Gee Whiz**), or like every word starts with the same letter (e.g. **T Party** and **Pastische**). Other times I'll set some constraint on the titles, like the series of 19 I wrote whose titles began with "In…" (e.g. **Inutile Reflection**).

- Sometimes I will write the same poem over again from different viewpoints or with different images or stances or re-envisionings. (E.g., the series of goodbye poems to a fictitious lover, including **End of the Road, Baby, in a Georgia Roadtown**, or the series on panties.)

- Sometimes I try to simply not make any sense at all in the classical surrealism mode (e.g. **Hung on Skeletons of Detail**).

- Occasionally I'll do a found poem or use found text as the trigger (e.g. **Unnormalized Models**).

- I'll lift images from other disciplines (e.g. **Dandy Candy**)

- Sometimes I write while reading technical or scientific books (e.g. **Ars Poeticrap**)

- I'll grab images from the surroundings and trying to put a spline between them (e.g. **Panties at the End of the Mind**)

Lower Standards

I found Stafford's advice useful: In order to get something out every day, I needed sometimes to really do whatever it took to get it done. I never failed to write a poem once I sat down to try—all the days I didn't write a poem were days when there wasn't time or any opportunity at all, or when I was simply too beat or sick.

What I found just as useful was the idea that what I was doing was practice—like music or like the pottery thing from **Art & Fear**.

Practice is how you get good at the guitar for example. You build muscle memory which enables you to play what you hear fast, but it also helps train you to hear things in your head that you can then play. If you are practicing in a improvisational way, then there are likely lots of great licks or chord changes you come up with—if only you were recording it. I found that I was very willing to try out lots of new things, take risks, be willing to fall down, to do something that perhaps would never be read except by me. This is what the "lower standards" mantra did, the idea of practicing.

In the book **Art & Fear**, they tell a story—which may be true, maybe not—of a university pottery class broken into two halves. One half was told their grades depended on the quality of the one pot they each handed in, and other was told their grades depended on the total weight of all their semester's pieces. That is, each person in the first group would work however they wanted, but that person's grade was determined by the quality of a single piece; each person in the second group would work all semester, and at the end each person would put all their pieces on a gigantic scale: 50 lbs and up was an A, 40–50 lbs was a B, etc. The best pieces of course all came from the group going for weight. The reasons are probably that the second group had no reason to fear the artistic process while they were learning craft techniques, and that they were practicing and experimenting through repetition.

But I think one of the most important reasons for their having the best work was that they could select the best piece rather than shepherd it along. You see, the first group could have worked this way too, but they all decided to just focus on making one perfect pot. Which is what we do as poets often.

Selection Versus Perfection

This raises an interesting question for us. Think about this:

What if what once was scarce is now abundant?

What changes if we are in a position to select the best poem rather than craft it? One immediate consequence is that when we sit down to write *knowing that we will judge the poem later* as part of a deliberate second step, then we might be able to work with a deeper unself-consciousness. Perhaps by working this way we can build a direct path to the place of poetic vision.

From my experience, this place of poetic vision is a place where there is an ability to observe the world differently—with less explicit consciousness, with less logic, with less mechanics or machine-like determinism.

Another way to think about this is that when we believe that the poem we are drafting right now must take on some special place in the world, we will be more cautious or safe with it, while when we think the poem will be tossed into a pile we will select from, then it frees us and maybe something magical will happen that we will see later.

Randomness

My journey into thinking about poems and randomness began in February, 2001, when two editors I knew asked me to send them 4 or 5 poems to look at. They both knew I was doing a poem a day, and I think they wanted to see them and maybe take a couple. I was happy for a few minutes until I realized that at that time I had over 300 to pick from. I never before was in a position where I couldn't name the next 6 poems I wanted to publish.

I started reading through them and picked 40 which seemed pretty good to me that didn't need a lot more revision. One night I separated the 40 into two piles with the 10 "best" in one and the rest in the other. The next morning, my SO got up and noticed that I had left papers untidily on the kitchen table and shuffled them together. No problem, I had marked the good ones on a printout of the table of contents. But darn the bad luck, I lost that sheet. Well, no problem, I'll just do it again. When I finished, my SO handed me my marked table of contents which she found in the living room.

Happily, I checked—and discovered that none of the original 10 "best" made it into my new 10 "best". I picked 6 and sent them to the first editor.

I wasn't going to get mixed up again, so I took the remaining 34 poems and wrote numeric ratings on each one—of how good/finished they were. I picked the top 6 and sent them to the second editor.

The first editor selected two poems—but they didn't strike me as the best, and one I had thrown off with some found elements in it.

The second editor selected 3—the 3 with the lowest ratings of the 6. I later showed him some poems from the discard pile, and he replaced one of the three he took with one from the discards. What is going on here? Is my judgment that bad?

I realized a couple of things. First was that there must be something different about how I read my own work than how others do. But it doesn't necessarily come from my taste being whacko. For example, most of the time the poems in a collection I like are the ones others like. What's different is that sometimes the words on the page have a special meaning to me, or I can recall the images vividly that made me write the words I did, and I am judging those things as well as the words on the page and the images that they excite. Therefore, I am reading in a privileged way, sort of, which prejudices me. There are poems of mine that I can't help liking better, because what I like about the poem *is not in the poem* but in my head.

Second, people do have different tastes, or they are looking for something, or the images conjured up in their heads are especially enjoyable (or whatever) to them.

This story led me to the realization that although generating a lot of work and selecting the best might be a good way to work, human nature makes it hard to truly select the best work.

I couldn't help but consider this as a computer science problem: How can you select the work you will send out and be successful at it when your own evaluation function can be badly broken? The answer in CS is simple: Use a randomized algorithm, one where random choices play an important role.

You might think this idea is strange, but there is a whole subfield of CS called "Randomized Algorithms." They work really well in cases such as searching for something where there may not be an a priori structure to the data and when the sole correct answer is not required. So if you're looking for the highest score in a huge set of test results, sometimes just picking a random bunch of them and them picking the highest of them will give you an pretty good idea of the highest score, and it can be done faster than searching systematically.

We seem to learn to work under the belief that poetry is special and therefore rare, that each poetic act seems to deserve or even require perfecting it. This causes fear and intimidation, where perhaps we are even intimidated by that part of ourselves that produces poetry. What if what once was rare is now abundant?

I recall giving a talk on Mob Software—my research area at Sun—at IBM in March. For some reason while fiddling with my laptop during the early part of my talk, I felt myself go into the poetry place—call it my right brain, if you wish. Imagine trying to give a serious talk in front of 100 scientists, and you're not even entirely sure you're speaking in complete sentences. Or that you aren't simply free associating. That day I discovered that the poetry place wasn't a special place, just a different place and as identifiably me as the parts I use for rational interaction, only stranger. Just as when I gig in my band, I am simply doing something different from what I normally do during the day to earn money. Neither is more special.

But if we do take this poetic vision place as special—just as the sole offspring is to a primate—then it makes sense to want to make what's produced—the poem—as good as it can be. And like the primate with one offspring, there is a lot of anxiety taking care of the poem, moving it along and repairing it as it seems to need, since it may be all we have to give the world.

And because we perfect most poetic acts, we can't imagine easily the idea of practicing—by just writing, writing, writing—and we miss a surprising benefit of lots of material: Treating it statistically.

The key to understanding the ideas I'm about to present is that for many physical phenomena, there is a distribution of values. Consider height: The average man is about 5'9". But not all men are exactly this height. A lot are up to 4" shorter or taller; fewer are 4"–8" shorter or taller. Very few are under 5' tall or over 7' tall. If we look at the graph of the number of people on the vertical axis and their heights on the horizontal axis, we'll see that it is a bell-shaped curve—the so-called ***normal distribution*** ($y = a \cdot e^{-mx^2}$). A measure of dispersion is called the **standard deviation**. It would make sense, then, to say that a man 7' tall is *2 or 3 standard deviations out* (from the average).

What difference can this make? Consider backgammon, a game that combines skill and luck, since you throw dice to move. Someone during their whole life might have average luck with the dice. That is, if we look back at all the dice throws that person had during a game of backgammon, we would be able to assign a number which is how lucky that person was during his whole life. Like most things, there will be a distribution of luck if we look at all backgammon players—ignoring their skill. Most

people will be average and their results at backgammon will depend a lot on their skill. But, there will be some people who are 2 or 10 or 20 standard deviations out on the lucky side. That is, they will appear to usually have luck on their side. Whether there is something special about them that causes this doesn't matter. It's simply statistics.

Here is a practical application of this idea. Consider building a CPU chip. There is a measurement called the *clock rate* which tells how many instructions the CPU executes per second. Recently we have heard about clock rates in excess of 1 gigahertz, which can be thought of as close to a billion instructions per second (assuming lots of things). When a company like Intel produces a range of clock rates for a given CPU chip, it does it not by manufacturing them any differently, but by selecting the ones that run correctly at the various speeds. So, if Intel designs a chip to go 1 ghz, there will be some that can go 1.5 ghz. And if there are enough that do, then Intel will sell them at that speed, but for more money because they need to find the ones that happen to run at that speed.

This also explains why classical music is generally well liked: Over the years, the pieces that people don't like have fallen by the wayside and are not performed much any more—the good ones have been selected (or let's be accurate: The generally well-liked ones have been selected).

Here's how random selection can work for poetry. First, if you're writing poetry pretty seriously, it's a good bet you can identify and eliminate the truly bad poems. This is going to skew your distribution to the better

Then, let's say that some editor would like a couple of poems in my pile, but I don't know what he or she likes or is looking for. My pile can be partitioned into sets that are written in a certain style or on certain topics or generally would aggregate according to some commonality to the editor. The ones the editor would like are in a couple of these sets. If I choose deliberately which ones to send, I am likely to prefer sets that have a special meaning to me. They are therefore likely to be narrowly focussed, and chances are I will miss the sets the editor prefers (unless I have enough experiences with the editor to know what to send). If I choose randomly, there is a better chance that I will select a poem in a set that the editor favors, because my bias will have been removed. Perhaps that one will be acceptable to the editor, or the editor will ask for some other poems like that one to be sent instead.

Moreover, with the random selection, I can usually be sure that its range will be wide enough that there will be one poem the editor will like more than some other. The fact I've given the editor something to not like will perhaps boost his or her estimation of the one he or she liked better, and the fact that there will be a variety will likely sit well with the editor anyhow, and maybe I'll be invited to send some other things. (Note: This happened with both the 2 editors.)

When the batch sent has no real variety, no real distinctions, it's easy to simply reject them all.

Doing this can be scary, I can tell you.

Revision

Given this, what of revision? I've learned a couple of things. One is that revising ought to be done separately from the drafting. And I think it's important to respect the strangeness that comes out of

you. You may think it's pure irrationality, but it is part of the stuff of poetry, I think—a hard lesson for people in our rationalist world.

Another has to do with statistics again. Suppose you are generally writing poetry better than average, and you are favorably skewing your distribution by pruning bad work. Then, you may not need to revise as heavily as you think. Suppose you randomly pick 6 poems, lightly revise them, and send them out. The editor will still like them or not as he or she pleases. The ones not liked will not have been revised a lot, so not much wasted work there. The ones liked will have been polished a bit, and if they were good enough anyhow—several standard deviations out—they didn't need much anyway.

This leads to another approach to revising. Select randomly the poems to be sent to a colleague or a workshop. See which ones are generally liked, and revise only them. Perhaps if you are a weenie, you can then add positive weights to the selected ones and negative weights to the rejected ones so that your later random selections are biased toward the well-liked. But once you've selected what to revise, revise as you normally would, but perhaps with a bias toward light editing.

Heavy editing probably seems vital to the poet who is trying to salvage every poem—thus it is a sort of habit—but the early drafts of essentially good poems don't seem to need it. Both editors commented about the lightly revised poems they selected, that they seemed "done."

The 6 poems I sent to the workshop here were randomly selected by a computer program I wrote, as were the poems I read last night.

Conclusion

Generating a lot of work changes the landscape of how you can work. I find it tough to go with the purely random approach, but am trying to stick by its spirit to see what happens. I perhaps will experiment with a system that "learns" a bias during random selection. I find that reading randomly selected poems from my pile seems to generate better judgments about them than reading them in the order written, which is the natural way.

None of these technical approaches makes a hill of beans of difference unless you are producing work that is generally good. By generating a lot, you can experiment with genres and approaches, take a lot of stupid risks, try different ways of writing, and just plain get a lot of practice going to the poetry hole in your head. No single poem is so important that you can't stand the risk. If the risk doesn't pay off, just delete it, or put it in the lines junkyard for later mining.

If I were doing nothing but writing poetry, I could easily generate 2, 3, or 4 poems a day in draft form. About once a month I do more than one a day as it is. Let's say you could generate 1000 drafts a year where the distribution is well-skewed—that is, there are a decent number of poems with good potential—say 10% were pretty good, or 20%. How would you work then? Think of how much practice you'd be doing. How would you deal with the volume?

If you work by generating a lot, it's best if you generate variety. If you use randomized methods to select work, perhaps as part of how you decide what to revise, then the variety will enable your good work to be discovered more efficiently. And we only live so long, no?

Judging by the subjective impressions of my poem-a-day writing habits, it might be that successfully writing poems requires creating a wide variety of work with as little *conscious* control as possible. Revising, among other things, then means repairing the places where the poem signifies something special to you because you can recall its origins. Selecting the best and lightly revising will keep you sane while giving you a good chance at good poems, assuming you're in the ballpark to start with. Randomly selecting what to send out or workshop and then revising removes another place where the conscious, rational mind can screw up the strangeness and music in your work.

The experiment of writing a poem-a-day has had its downsides, too. For instance, the poem-a-day regimen produces mostly short work. I haven't figured out how to take what I've learned this last 15 months and turn it into a way to do longer poems except by aggregation, which is congruent with some of the techniques I use to work. Well, maybe that's future work to report on some day.

Observing people's reactions to my more recent work, I have to say the work appears to be better. If nothing else, there seems to be plenty of benefits to being able to treat any given piece of work as not special—loss of fear, better access to where real work happens in your head, and access to a whole host of weird revision and publication strategies.