

Sunday, 30 January 2022

To write, I first must world

Over the decades I’ve been on the internet, I’ve admired bloggers.

It’s beautiful to write on one’s own platform about anything that interests you. Especially when that writing wouldn’t easily be accepted on a platform that already exists.

But I’ve often felt like an outsider. That is, I never felt like a blogger myself. Why? Maybe because, despite admiring bloggers, I never felt like I would write about any of the same things they did, or in the same way. I also never felt “literary” in that certain way people who were good at “language arts” class in high school were. In school, I remember never getting the intended meaning from books and poems we were assigned.

Somehow though, despite everything, I started blogging.

Over the past few years, I created a few different blogs. But I call them notebooks.

While perhaps easily overlooked, this naming them “notebooks” is important. Traditionally a “notebook” is something you have multiple of ... in the paper world, you often have different notebooks for different purposes. Whereas a “blog” feels like you have only one and it’s this monolithic thing. So inherently notebooks are less precious and more context-specific than blogs.

Going the notebook route is a clue to how I was able to convince myself that blogging / writing, despite feeling like an alien, was okay and fun. In other words, I first created the world (the environment ... feeling, constraints, audience, etc.), and only then I could easily write.

These are some of my notebooks:

Ellipsis

This is a notebook I only write to when I’m in motion.

<https://notebooks.laurel.world/ellipsis>

It originally started as an experiment on the p2p web (specifically: “Beaker Browser”) because the technology enabled me saving offline and then it syncing whenever I was online. I’ve kept it up for ~3 years now, posting intermittently ... whenever I’m on a train, plane, boat, or even walking. I gave a talk about this notebook once, and I keep references surrounding it, too.

Pomera

With this notebook, I create all my entries first on the Pomera DM30, an e-ink typewriter.

<https://notebooks.laurel.world/pomera>

I started this notebook when I was traveling in Japan and Korea, summer 2019, pre-pandemic. I had been curious about “distraction free” writing devices for a while. So when I landed in Japan, one of my first stops was to buy a Pomera DM30, a simple e-ink typewriter that saves .txt files to an SD card. All the entries on Pomera are written with it and then translated into HTML. Sometimes I would add photos. I don’t update this anymore — it’s more a time capsule of that special summer.

Reflections

This notebook is my 2020 email newsletter sent to friends.

<https://notebooks.laurel.world/reflections>

I had a regular email newsletter during 2020 I sent to friends called “Reflections.” This is that newsletter as a website. This newsletter had a more thematic constraint. I remember typing, “I want to write in a way... in which I don’t know exactly what I’ll write before I write.” I used various constraints in the actual writing ... sometimes I used the Pomera, other times I wrote in motion, and other times I just did it somehow. Looking back, one of the main constraints of this newsletter was

the email format and audience. I would regularly receive replies, and most of the people signed up I knew personally.

While I said I felt like an outsider in the blogging world, it might be more true to say that I’ve felt like an outsider almost **everywhere** — not just blogging. This is likely why special friendships and work situations in which I’m appreciated for what I’m truly good at are so vital to me. I’ve also enjoyed using the internet to connect with others who feel different, to realize we’re not as alone as we may first believe.

This circles back to a larger idea I’ve been thinking about ... world-building as self-care. For those of us who feel different, who don’t easily fit into structures of this society or this world, we have to make our own structures, definitions, and taxonomies to feel at home — that is, to build our own world. And while others might be confused why we spend so much energy inventing new names and containers seemingly constantly, it’s important to remember doing this helps us simply exist ... so that we can connect in this one world we share.

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