

## FOR BILL:

### ISN'T IT WONDERFUL?

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William E. Doll Jr., Bill Doll, is a person to whom I owe a great deal, someone I miss deeply, and, paradoxically, someone I still talk to. I mean, I know Bill died nearly two years ago, but his voice, his ideas, his incisive, genteel wit, still resonate in and through me. Not just in a passive, I remember the kinds of things Bill said kind of way, but actively; I continue to think with him and, as I do, learn from him as I always have. It's bittersweet though, especially when the conversations come to a close.

Admitting such things aloud, the courage to be vulnerable when one is supposed to stand in the ever-glowing expertise of the academy, is but one of the many lessons I learned from Bill Doll. Unlike so many who knew and loved Dr. Doll, I was never formally his student, nor a student at Louisiana State where he taught so many. My relationship with Bill was that of friend and colleague. I studied with Bill in the sense of being and thinking with him and reading much of his work. Yet another kindness and thoughtfully intentional aspect of curriculum studies that marks our field as distinct from so many other educational fields: senior scholars are available and open to graduate students. For that is how I first met Bill Doll, at a conference. Yet, if my hunch is correct, I am indebted to Donna Trueit for Bill's interest in me and my work, as it was Donna's dissertation that bumped into my scholarship on questions of play and improvisation.

Contributors to Molly Quinn's edited collection about William Elder Doll (2019) reflect the depth and breadth of a scholar who lived life like a synoptic text, both in terms of its relational eclecticism and its roots in the Christian Gospels. Bill's work, perhaps not surprisingly given my predilections and biases, always reminded me of a particular kind of hard bop cat. A person whose deep listening practices (Oliveros, 2005) are steeped in theories and the trajectories they engender, yet uses those understandings beyond their intended or acceptable use, playing outside the boundaries traced with a wink and a twinkle in his eye. I'm a most modern postmodern scholar, I heard him joke on more than one occasion, a Duchamp-level turn of phrase, all the more playful for its veracity.

As contributions to *Complexifying Curriculum Studies: Reflections on the Generative and Generous Gifts of William E. Doll Jr* (Quinn, 2019) also document, Bill Doll was a scholar for whom playful improvisation was a tool for analysis, wonder, critique, and inquiry. This, however, should not somehow be mistaken for a lack of gravity, mistaking a tendency towards joy about the everyday for a lack of theoretical complexity, literal or metaphorical. A person who preferred Dada to binaries, though binaries, too, weren't to be thrown out with this historical modernist bathwater for they can serve as heuristics as well as a node in a complex system.

Here was a man who, in my experience, listened as much as he talked, and took others' ideas seriously. I should know. No matter what I shared with Bill, he took my ideas, feelings, processes, seriously. No talk of those possibilities being too far removed from any sense of what "we" do. Instead, a sense as though those ideas were, of course, to be considered, that they were somehow "normal" or at least defensible or sensible, a gift for any of us who live a good portion of our lives absorbed in thought and study.

My relationship with Bill is perhaps best summed up in a couple of stories, kinds of bookends in our time together. As an almost graduated Ph.D. candidate, I came to Louisiana and spent a couple days at Bill's house. Over dinner—preceded by Bill saying in his inimitable way, it's 5PM, I think it's probably time for a cocktail, don't you, at which point we had a single, delicious drink—I raised a critique and limitation of Gregory Bateson's notion of framing: namely that Bateson's use of frames and framing provided kinds of false limitations and parameters that, in many ways, both limits potential uses of Bateson's arguments and also serves to negate some of those arguments at the same time.

I had, however, forgotten in my exuberance that I was saying this to Bill Doll, the person whose interest in complexity theories and Bateson was the reason I had turned to Bateson in the first place, having not attended to him as I might've in my scholarly life as a social scientist. The next morning, Bill and I were headed in to LSU from his house in New Orleans, about an hour and a half drive. After saying some rather complimentary things about his thoughts of my work and current trajectories, another example of his thoughtful generosity, he then said: so, I was thinking about Bateson and your point, so I reread it before going to sleep last night and thought it might be nice to think about these things together as we drive. I know my next look to him was not nearly as cool as I'd hoped because it was met with a bout of his absolutely wonderful, uproarious laughter.

The conversation was one between colleagues, each of us arguing our respective positions. Bill's central points, if I remember enough to do them justice, were that I'd taken Bateson too literally on one hand, and that his talk was more anachronous than I'd allowed on the other—Bateson might have used different language and metaphors had he been around for the next turns. I disagreed, saying that Bateson's position about framing play—a) Bateson's construction of play as "this is play" and other things outside of that frame are not play and

b) the universality with which Bateson claimed such frames are recognized and agreed upon—were problematic in conceptualization and questions of justice. Bill's response documents another essential aspect of his approach to knowledge and study, he agreed that this was indeed a possible interpretation and suggested again that, though that was the case in our contemporary context, it neither diminished his understanding of the book or interrupted Bateson's arguments.

To get a sense of how pivotal this conversation has been in my career, it is this conversation that further spurred my thinking about frames and framing around Judith Butler's (2009) *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* that resulted in a paper and chapter titled, Sound Curriculum: Recognizing the Field. Without Bill Doll's generosity and respect that combined to take my ideas seriously and argue against them as if they were significant, I'm not sure how ready I would have been to as clearly enunciate this intuition I had about the intersections of curriculum and sound studies.

As significantly, Bill's response also taught me something important, a lesson that was perhaps unintended. This was not so much a lesson about how one disregarding an entire work for disagreement about one of its central points, something that still happens with far too great a frequency in a seemingly never-ending push to publish in ever-greater numbers. Instead, that one's ability to note the deep shortcomings of an argument might not either stop one's admiration for that scholarship or in its ongoing use to support one's own positions. A reminder about what it means to be a scholar and the significance of a particular path of study.

The last time Bill and I spent time together was at his hotel in Ottawa during CSSE 2015. Breakfast with Bill and Donna, something so very worth a morning timeslot for this often late night person. Although it was their most available time, both Donna and Bill lovingly teased me about the hour and if I made it to the hotel okay; it was under a mile walk from my hotel. I just remember laughing and laughing. Catching up on our lives, hearing about family and friends, talking all kinds of shit though Bill, who really wasn't a fan of the swearing, would have preferred I'd frame our teasing another way. At one point, Bill, whose vision was fairly limited at that point, asked me to read a headline aloud. The article in question had a not-atypically cheeky Canadian headline about the recent abolition of extra taxation on feminine hygiene products. Bill leaned his head back and laughed for a good while then said, Isn't it wonderful?

There are so many stories I could share about William E. Doll Jr. The time he told me in quiet solidarity, "that person has always been this way;" or when Bill shared how much he loved my scholarship; or when he pulled me aside at his fully packed 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party in New Orleans to share how thrilled he was to see me there; or the time Bill insisted that two slightly nervous doctoral students whom I'd mentioned were coming to a party in the flat where he was staying during a conference in Vancouver, sit with him and share what they were working on

moments after they walked in the door; or any of the countless things Bill said or did that I learned of later through others, as was the case with this conversation with doctoral students.

And the work. A lifetime of work, of feeling and thinking, of care, of service to communities and people. Rolling recursions of riffing resonances, performatively perforating preestablished protocols. You know I like alliteration, once said the man said who gave us Richness, Recursion, Relations, and Rigor as a means around Tyler's ends-means, linear sequential formal curricular theorizing, giggling.

These understandings are not hyperbolic but are instead reflections of our relationalities, as friends and colleagues, certainly senpai to kohai as anyone would immediately recognize, but that way nonetheless. This particular positionality for each of us created a context in which there was no cause for the kinds of inevitable frustrations of working closely with others over time or professional disagreements about programs or the little things one does that can frustrate when in constant contact. A poetics of relation (Glissant, 1997).

Dapper, dignified, dialogic, divergent, dear

Entangled, emergent, eclectic, effervescent

William Elder Doll Junior. This is for you Bill, a person without whom I could not be the scholar I am today. When I ask students to hold notions of wonder and productive doubt in reflexive tensions and possibilities, it's your voice I hear. Isn't it wonderful?

## References

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