

INTRODUCTION

In the last half of the 20th century American small presses and little magazines focused on innovation followed a “systemic de-totalization” in Barrett Watten’s terms, and sources for inspiration were found through other disciplines such as social theory, philosophy, linguistics, and art, mainly generated at both sides on the Atlantic ocean, and beyond. All them provided a flowing networking and access for formal innovations and new conceptual approaches in various continents. Particularly, they were within the great aquarium of language, and linked to the diagram of social consciousness and poetic activity. An approach to the role of these publications should focus on some considerations like their aesthetic groundwork, the examination of multiple intellectual bases, or drawing dissenting energies to reinforce innovative navigation, and reinforcing the sense of renewal and exploration. In this context, this special issue of the *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* will serve to highlight the influential presence of these publications of experimental poetry.

It is obvious that traditional literary modes were being challenged, especially those related to New Criticism or writing centered on the self. They tried to enlarge the design of the avant-garde literary line initially proposed by American and English Modernists. As I said earlier, many of these poets/editors coincided with many other voices in developing a new sensibility all over the world. However, the literary proposals crystallized in many presses and magazines left behind a socio-cultural presence that has been profusely discussed in the intellectual world, not only in America and the United Kingdom but also in other countries. The presence of this poetry can be seen in Italian, Russian, French, Chinese, Spanish, or New Zealand poetic environments through the publication of magazines following a similar line: *Nuova Corrente*, *Soviet Life*, *Parataxis*, *Change*, *Gendishi Techo*, *Nerter*, or *Tyuonyi*. Most of these new writers became important in wider spheres. They were accepted by their academic peers and recognized as a definitive influence on the American and English poetry scenes, publishing in university presses like Chicago, California, Southern Illinois or Harvard. What I am suggesting is that to publish innovative small presses and little magazines began as the romantic initiative of a few people. However, experimental writing went further, and was certainly conceived of as ideology or social criticism. Firstly, because of political and cultural dissidence against conventional paradigms, and secondly, to leave self-reflection open to approach any text and to avoid any narcissistic urge, which may lead to the post-lyrical subjectivism legitimated by the death of the author enunciated by Barthes.¹

¹ Michel Deville mentions specific language poetry texts like Steve Benson’s *Blue Book*, Michael Palmer’s *Sun*, Alan Davies’s *Signage*, Steve McCaffery’s *Panopticon* and Ron Silliman’s *Tjanting*, as a sign of these poets’ moving from a strict attention to linguistic assumptions to a writing self-enjoying the strategies used in the self-verbalization of its composition. Michel Deville, *The American Prose Poem: Poetic Form and the Boundaries of Genre* (Gainsville: UP of Florida, 1998) 237.



According to Len Fulton's *Directory of Small Press & Magazine Editors & Publishers*, there were over 5,000 small press publishers and editors in the United States by the early 1990s. This issue of *RCEI* analyzes how this significant circulation of innovative American literature appealed to the pattern of bringing inequalities to light through the publication of small presses in the late 20th century. Some contributors study how the editors of these small presses overcame diverse factors related to their own marginality and material poverty. Others focus on excluded literary voices involved in cultural deprivation and their involvement in the publishing of small presses: Chicanos, African Americans writers or Ian Hamilton Finlay in Scotland. Suggested thoughts derived from for this whole issue, but not limited to, would lead to reflect upon 1) what role/s small publications played in changing literature and social perspectives in the late 20th century? 2) How academy subsumed innovations and creative research published in little magazines and small presses? 3) Market vs. individual position in the publishing industry. 4) What are the benefits of these publications considered as 'high' culture? Were they useful? Or 5) how technological production affected potential readers of this kind of publications? Similarly, there is an overall discussion about the practical attributes in any small press that Loss Pequeño Glazier mentions: 1) not "corporate", 2) locally based, 3) small scale administration, 4) integrity of the publication rather than conceived as a commodity, and 5) well-defined, limited readership. All these conditions usually associated with small presses do not impede that their authors have become successful in the market, as can be seen through their continual presence in bookstores, awards lists, and regularly accepted submissions in major trade publications.

David A. Hollinger has argued that non-essentialist versions of identity propitiated the proliferation of transdisciplinary forums designed to facilitate a discourse across the lines separating the social sciences and the humanities:

Foucault, feminism, antiracism, and Kuhn thus together fostered the exploration of identity that "problematized" (as it was often put, to the horror of those valuing "good English") a number of ideas that the previous generation rarely felt obliged to defend. The ensuing debates drew heavily on the energies of historians, anthropologists, and sociologists, among others, but this collection is about the particular history of four other disciplines: economics, English, philosophy, and political science. (345)²

The editors of small presses and little magazines published material usually ignored by official literature or Academia and the corporate market. Being amply

² For Hollinger the publication of transdisciplinary journals was a focal point to present the distinctive impulses and innumerable forces affecting American culture in the 1970s and 1980s. Academic and not-quite-professional magazines such as *Public Culture*, *Diaspora*, *October*, *Representations* or *Social Text* reached out "to the most humanistic elements within political science, anthropology, sociology, history and geography" (334). David A. Hollinger, "The Disciplines and the Identity Debates, 1970-1995," *Daedalus* 126.1 (Winter 1997): 333-351.

and internationally distributed, and addressed to common readers, teaching profession, students, or diverse communities of poets, the edition of these publications was a cultural, political, and economic gesture. The editors intended to introduce a new sequence of intellectual ideas into encapsulated and over-stated rules of Academia and the publishing industry. An analysis on the role of these publications will allow for a more fine-grained analysis of the contemporary self and its social articulation in this kind of poetry. The academic positions got by many of these innovative poets in important American and British universities reclassify these oppositional practices from poetry for minorities into the category of voices really concerned with a new society in which experimental artistic forms really matter.

This *RCEI* special issue shows the talent and achievement of many editors definitely moving in a cosmopolitan direction, influencing foreign approaches, and transnationalizing similar poetic avant-garde explorations in the last decades of the 20th century. Most American innovative poets published single-author poetry collections and magazines. In this context, many American and British independent literary presses—like Tuumba, This, Gaz, The Figures, Hard Press, Sun & Moon, O Books, Potes & Poets, Roof Books, Chax, Granary Books, or *POTH* to name a few—were felt ascendant in the emergent set of new cultural conditions in the form of new small presses reaching England, France, Italy, Spain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. This is clearly visible in their correspondence with other small presses—like ECW Coach House, The Gig, Hole, Talonbooks in Canada; Akros, Cape Golliard Fulcrum, Prest Roots Press, Reality Studios, and Shearsman in England; Salt, and Post Neo Publications in Australia; Black Light Press, Jack Books, and Van Guard Xpress in New Zealand; Atelier le Feiugraie, Le Seuil and Spectres Familieres in France; *Oferta Speciale* in Italy; and Zasterle in Spain.

By working out and showing up conventions of intelligibility at a wider cultural frame, the editors of these small presses became concerned with the “politics of the referent” in the various relations between language and ideology. The eruption of this kind of writing and publishing also helped to increase reader’s awareness that “poiesis” was put back into poetry. Indeed, the American editors of these diverse small presses and little magazines (Lloyd Addison, Claude MacKay, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Clarence Major and diverse Chicano editors among others) became cultural guides in investigating the political implications in literature, through which they extended their comprehension to specific philosophical schools and literary theoreticians, ranging from Russian Futurism to Marxism. Their success was to synchronize the poetry avant-garde with the sparking debate and catching imaginations of many other poets in the world interrogating and intervening in the discursive construction of social reality through poetry.

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M.B.

