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EDITOR'S NOTE

Introduction traduite du français par Michael Hinchliffe

- 1 The practical aspects of publishing avant-garde poetry came under academic scrutiny in the second half of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st centuries. The development of reception theory has led to more sustained research on the ways whereby poets can communicate the technical, economic, social and political implications of their work and experimentation. Small scale printing houses, in no way to be confused with the vanity presses of bygone days, have positioned themselves in the publishing world as avant-gardist laboratories. Promoting innovative work, they stand side by side with the little magazines and little journals which played such a key role in the passage from the 19th century to the Modernist era. Small presses began to appear in the 1920s, notably with Paris and the Shakespeare & Co. bookshop as nerve center, and gained both greater visibility and a wider public after the Second World War on account of technological changes enabling print runs less confidential in nature, sale in bookshops as opposed to postal subscription and promotion through public readings. Emblematic of this development was the famous public reading in 1956 at the Six Gallery in San Francisco of "Howl" by Allen Ginsberg concomitantly with its publication by the bookshop and publishing house City Lights. The publishing scene was in a state of flux, a state which carried experimental poetry with it right up to the digital revolution which now offers

new possibilities for composing and publishing works. Since they are no longer exclusively textual, these works imply an intermedial dimension and are transformed by new modes of poetic performance.

- 2 This context, in which the entire publishing ecosystem is undergoing deep change, has meant that publishers and poets as key agents have brought into play new strategies for proximity and trust. Following a dynamic similar to that which produced the poet-critic, both theoretician and practitioner of their art, there are today an increasing number of publisher-poets whose practice as publishers is tantamount to a poetic manifesto. Vanessa Place with Les Figues Press is one of the most recent examples of a poet publishing the work of other poets, composing aesthetic and ethic constellations that are operative in the field of contemporary poetics. In what ways do these publishers and the poets placing their work in their hands contribute to the rise of original poetry in a publishing context often characterized by the retreat in commercial terms of both books and poetry itself? To what extent are small presses agents of transmission for aesthetic initiatives that, without them, would encounter no readers? The flexibility that independent publishers have gained in terms of both the quantity of print runs and the frequency of publication has indeed meant that poets have been accepted for publication with collections or individual texts whose special requirements for type-setting, involving visual experimentation or the imbrication of image and text, presuppose a common desire for aesthetic communication and a similar commitment to the significance of the book-as-object. Artisanal practice, in the fullest sense of the term, and poetic experimentation come together in the making of total works which bring poetry into the realm of the visual arts or even of sound poetry and music. Such works are perforce excluded from conventional circulation because of the standardization implicit in the best-seller economy and industrial modes of fabrication.
- 3 Would it therefore be relevant to speak, as does American poet Barrett Watten, of a “systemic de-totalization” bringing about new configurations of the poetic landscape into networks and archipelagoes? The articles in this issue of *IdeAs*, centering on publishing ventures that are both marginal and fundamental, attempt to provide some answers to the problem of merchandized publishing. They show how certain publishers have used the methods of cultural globalization in the service of poets whose originality is all but hermetic. The subject then becomes the world of publishing itself, its margins and objects, and revolves around poetic texts inspired and informed by close contact with recent innovations in sociology, philosophy, linguistic and cultural studies, the overall aim being a transnational evaluation of the status and circulation of avant-garde poetry.
- 4 In an unprecedented manner, the texts presented here are seeking an overview of the entire American continent (from the US to Tierra del Fuego), and deal with the practice of late 20th-century poetic avant-gardes, how they were published and distributed. They bring to light how the use of fairly similar tactics leads to the conclusion that “biblio-diversity” is in all likelihood a kind of shared resistance against hegemonic, consensual or “disengaged” (Jean-Luc Nancy’s [“désœuvré”]) thinking. “Biblio-diversity” is proof both of the resilience of publishing houses considered too small or too ephemeral to hold their own in an ecosystem more usually based on the single consideration of profitability, and of the energy deployed by avant-garde poets, their determination, and their desire to encounter their readers even if their reputation is yet to be established. And when they have gained recognition, they nevertheless remain faithful to these small publishing houses and persevere in maintaining and developing their links with alternative modes of

publishing. In “Une révolution conservatrice dans l’édition”, (Bourdieu P., 1999: 14) Pierre Bourdieu provides a precise formulation of the conditions of this publishers’ rebellion which, in the Americas, represents as much a poetic counter-discourse as an ideological alternative:

The small recent companies are in the initial phase of accumulation and have almost no capital of any kind, even if they gain a certain amount of symbolic capital from the way they are seen as “discoverers” by avant-garde critics and writers, enlightened booksellers and informed readers.¹

- 5 It is easy to understand how these publishers accumulate a symbolic capital through the building of their specific catalogue of publications, which then attracts new poets with publication prospects including e-books, and multi-media works involving visual and spatial dimensions, audio-visual material or unusual size formats.
- 6 At the forefront of this tendency are to be found what, in Latin America and elsewhere, are known as “creative publishers”. Over and above the structure *per se* of the publishing house, these publishers approach the question of building up a catalogue in terms, for example, of the balance between book publishing and book over-production, the coherence between new titles and existing collections, questions of book distribution and links with the audience via readings, debates and other performances. To be noted is the fact that the capacity to put into practice an ethics based on the respect for the various skills that constitute the chain of book production locally or internationally amounts to a form of activism common to many of the publishers and poets appearing in the following pages.
- 7 Further along the line, the need for distribution and the desire to gain readers have an influence on the nature of poetic writing and incite poets to seek new textual forms able to circulate through channels other than conventional book stores or libraries with their rows of neatly classified books containing cleanly printed pages. Certain texts exist exclusively as recorded readings and must be listened to; one text proposes image and audio CD only (Vanessa Place, *Last Words*, Dis Voir, 2015); another challenges the audience into reading the internet in paper version by means of an installation comprising over ten tons of unbound sheets on which the texts of the web are “published” (Kenneth Goldsmith, *Printing Out the Internet*, Labor Art Gallery, Mexico, July 2013). This latter exhibition by a poet from the United States in Mexico City stresses the convergences, the networks of influence and dialogue linking north and south over the American continent. As it happens, one of the main objectives of the present collection on publishing and avant-garde poetry is precisely to demonstrate convergence by placing side by side publishing experiences that have not been looked at, until now, as an integrating factor for a polyglot, cosmopolitan American poetry, concerned with making a plurality of voices audible.
- 8 The opening article of this collection is a reflexive, polemical and poetic text by Jacques Darras asking both himself and the reader about the status of poetry today. Darras is concerned by the devalorization of poetic texts in the current context of the merchandization of culture and by the commercial criteria being adopted by publishers generally. He is also preoccupied by the increasing isolation of an elitist poetry characterized by hermeticism and confidentiality. He invites his readers to turn to a European tradition that ascribes very different missions to poetry, Rilke being a prime example. Poetry should be steeped in its time, in its political and economic environment, it should fight on the same ground as all the other arts to address a public other than the

restricted circle of specialists. When the poet invents new forms such as *slam*, in tune with the world of today, poetry may once again flow through its widest spreading channels, making the poet an opener of fresh ground, and a discoverer of new orders.

- 9 A case in point lies with Manuel Gleizer, publisher of historic avant-garde writers in Argentina, also known as “the writers without books”. Gleizer’s publishing house was in a state of almost complete abandon in the fifties. Yet, after having been publisher, bookseller and discoverer in the 1930s, by publishing the work of Juan Gelman, he became the oldest of publishers to publish the youngest of poets. Gema Areta shows how the relay has been transmitted from one generation to the next, from Raúl González Tuñón to Juan Gelman, from one revolutionary poet to another, with Gleizer palying the role of go-between. The publisher-bookseller functions not merely as the means but as the agent of the poetic revolution.
- 10 The uneasy negotiation between relatively mainstream and alternative publishing is addressed by Clément Oudart. Whereas the chance to have work published by the New York publisher James Laughlin (New Directions) is generally perceived as a consecration amongst experimental poets in the United States, for Californian poet Robert Duncan (1919-1988), small underground publications and alternatives to the institutional publishing circuits exercised a greater seduction. Duncan’s detailed bibliography reveals the radical changes he effected in his policy with regard to publishing. Before he made his appearance in the New Directions list and in between each of the volumes published there, he chose to bring out a number of booklets and shorter works with very limited runs. It was a choice that did not simply reflect his liking for small publishing houses, it evinced a deep-set quest on his part for authorial autonomy over and against the publishing empire.
- 11 In that, Duncan was following a direction bearing the marks of European avant-garde strategies in the first half of the 20th century. In her contribution, Barbara Montefalco points out the relationship existing between the activity of independent publishers and the practice of artistic and literary collaboration. Although the post-World War II artistic and literary context in the United States differs from that of early twentieth-century Europe, there are interesting parallels between the two that have to do with the role of small publishing houses and their encouragement of collaboration between artists and writers at the time. An examination of the work of brave-spirited publishers such as Robert Creeley (*The Black Mountain Review*), Jonathan Williams (Jargon Press), or more recently Steve Clay (Granary Books) reveals how avant-garde poetry in the final decades of the twentieth century was able to circulate and make its voice heard through an association, and more often than not, a collaboration, with the visual arts. This dynamic resulted in a long series of collaborative works in which the physical appearance of the books is part and parcel of the unique character of the texts themselves.
- 12 In her article, Peggy Pacini shows how, as with Gleizer, the bookshop developing into a publishing house occupies a key position. City Lights, a small West Coast publishing house, became both a cultural and publishing landmark for poets and artists and a counter-cultural mouthpiece. From the mid-fifties it was one of the vehicles transmitting a new dissident, experimental poetic and aesthetic vision, most notably when the Pocket Poets series was started. Pacini concentrates mainly on issue number 4 of the series, *Howl and Other Poems* by Allen Ginsberg, the censorship of which amounted to a reshuffle of the cards of contemporary American poetry. Publishers and poets influenced each other reciprocally in the process of constructing the Beat Generation movement.

- 13 In Lily Robert-Foley's article, the 1990s appear as the culmination of a chronological evolution towards the development of alternative modes of both publishing and living. Xerolage is a collection initiated by the publisher Xexoxial which publishes experimental poetry and prints "chapbooks", 25-page-long booklets run off on a photocopier. These "chapbooks" are made within an "intentional community" founded at Lima (Wisconsin, US) in 1991 by mIEKAL aND and Elisabeth Was under the name *Dreamtime Village*, which also practices the alternative agriculture known as "permaculture". Robert-Foley raises the question as to the type of link that may arise between experimental writing together with independent publishing on the one hand and, on the other, forms of social organization standing against the dominant paradigm. Publishing outside conventional circuits and extracting the community from the overall economic organization are two facets of the same challenge to the principles of order governing reading and civilization. The challenge is based on the paragrammatical strategies of diversion, bringing about disorder through recycling, collage and the redeployment of lost histories to produce new forms of resistance.
- 14 Around the same time in Brazil, as Suzana Scramin describes, publishing and little magazines merge as was the case with the Brazilian journal *Inimigo rumor* (1996-2008; 20 issues over 10 years of existence) and the prestigious publisher 7Letras which not only publishes different generations of Brazilian poets but also acts as a channel for Argentinian poets in particular, but also French, Portuguese and Peruvian poets. Its publishing founder is a poet in his own right, together with a group of writers all of whom transited through the journal as young poets. The journal thus became a locus for apprenticeship and training, in particular through the practice of translation. Playing as it does a key role in avant-gardist debate, the journal also provides an alternative publishing possibility for poets whose expression is not in book form.
- 15 Such choices made by poets and publishers asserting the political dimension of poetic voice are theorized by Rafael Farías. Taking his inspiration from Jacques Rancière and his "new distribution of the perceptible" (*nouvelle distribution du sensible*), this article recontextualizes the poetic voice and its media in order to bring out the symptomatic nature of social, economic and political situations. In Chile the marginal text moves back to center in crossing the threshold of publishing institutions, thereby transcending the dichotomy between two forms of literary recognition. In the post-dictatorship years and on into the 21st century there has been a return to the book as object and a renewal of questions concerning the individual choices made by poets and the collective practice of publishing.
- 16 The tension between the individual and the community is even more tangible in the piece by Manuel Brito which discusses the international reception of North American Language Poets. Emblematically, most of the publishers were also authors, proof of the fundamental role played by the mode of production and interactivity in the circulation of contemporary poetry. Shared sources of inspiration are to be found in other disciplines such as sociology, philosophy or linguistics, whether the theories originate from this or that side of the Atlantic or from elsewhere. This cosmopolitan approach has brought grist to experimental North American poetry and has remained the source of reciprocal influence and avant-gardist exploration internationally from the end of the 20th to the beginning of the 21st centuries.
- 17 Noura Wedell looks at an instance of Language Poetry work when she examines the links between Barrett Watten's poem *Progress* and its readers together with its economic,

political and socio-economic context. Written in 1982-83, at the end of the recession in the Reagan years, the poem reflects on cultural production in a hostile neoliberal context, in the aftermath of the relative failure of the emancipation movements of the sixties and seventies and from within while the horizon of progress promised by avant-garde aesthetics is crumbling. Watten's text builds a voice whose instability mirrors cultural experience in circumstances where the political role of art has been compromised. With this text, the questions of poetic form and the poem's political dimension fuse with the fact of its publication by the little press Granary Books.

- 18 Correlating avant-garde poetry with its circulation and the rise of small publishing houses provides a means to rethink from the margins the well-known, often described and often stigmatized dynamics of the publishing world in the age of globalization and digitization. The books studied here as objects give new forms to experimental poetic expression; they crystallize creative communities which transcend school-of-thought divisions and revolutionize modes of artistic visibility; they participate in the democratization of poetry by boosting the poetic activity of an often circumscribed locality towards a type of universality, which persists in its random and stochastic nature. Not easily apprehended it will be the focus of further research.
- 19 The editors of this foray into the study of poetic productions and their means of propagation are hopeful that it will provide readers with a more complete view of the situation at a given moment in an ongoing process of transformation, a view less hampered by the idea of national frontiers throughout the continent. The American continent is witnessing a proliferation of projects seeking to dismantle conventional networks and to contest economic hegemonies while giving rise to original poetic works driven by a permanent aspiration for communication with the audience. This dynamic is inspiring, even with its limits and its failures. In a continuous quest for new textual, technological and publishing modes, poets, publishers and publisher-poets seek to weave the webs of this communication.

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NOTES

1. Translator's note. Source: Pierre Bourdieu, "A Conservative Revolution in French Publishing". Translated by Miranda Vlot and Anthony Pym. http://www.academia.edu/23043798/A_conservative_revolution_in_French_publishing

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Hélène Aji est professeur de littérature américaine et directrice de l'UFR des Langues et Cultures Étrangères à l'Université Paris Nanterre. Elle est présidente de la Société d'études modernistes (SEM). Elle est l'auteur de nombreux articles sur la poésie américaine moderniste et contemporaine, ainsi que de trois ouvrages : *Ezra Pound et William Carlos Williams: Pour une poétique américaine* (L'Harmattan, 2001), *William Carlos Williams: Un plan d'action* (Belin, 2004) et *Ford Madox Ford's The Good Soldier* (Armand Colin, 2005). Elle a co-dirigé divers volumes dont *Revue modernistes, revues engagées* (Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011), *Selected Poems: From Modernism to Now* (Cambridge Scholars, 2012), *H.D. and Modernity* (Rue d'Ulm, 2014) et *H.D.'s Trilogy and Beyond* (Presses de Paris Ouest, 2014). À Nanterre, elle a créé, avec Brigitte Félix, le programme de recherches « Conceptualism(e)s » sur la poésie et le roman américains hyper-contemporains et dirige, avec Emily Eells, la collection d'ouvrages « Intercalaires ».

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