

# Preface

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We compiled this book in order to offer some insight into the experience of editing little magazines during the most radical paradigm shift since the invention of movable type. This undertaking draws its inspiration in large part from two influential texts of the last century. The first of these, *The Little Magazine in America: A Modern Documentary History* (published fall 1978 as an issue of *TriQuarterly*, and again in 1980 by the Pushcart Press), was a sprawling, 750-page compendium of essays and interviews detailing the state of little magazine publishing in the United States from roughly the end of the Second World War through the 1970s. The editors, Elliott Anderson and Mary Kinzie, were partly inspired in this project by an earlier book, *The Little Magazine: A History and Bibliography*, edited by Fredrick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn Ulrich. The study was published by Princeton University Press in 1946 and surveyed magazines from the dawn of modernism and the founding of *Poetry* in 1911. These two books, which have established a cult following, feature the stories of editors with outsized personalities whose iconoclastic impulses have inspired many of today's best editors.

The moment seems right for another broad view. Not only has the advent of online platforms disrupted the prevailing order in every aspect of publishing, but the thirty-five-year interval since the publication of the Anderson/Kinzie anthology has the feel of a coherent epoch. New Criticism has been supplanted by theories of reading that are more attentive to gender, race, and issues of globalization. Enrollment in creative writing programs has risen exponentially across the country; even so, funding for many little magazines has been cut or omitted altogether from university budgets, while many other independent magazines struggle to survive. It has become increasingly apparent that the period between 1980 and 2015 will be seen as the end of the ascendancy of print periodicals.

With this new paradigm in mind, we began reaching out to editors of the leading little magazines of the past thirty years, asking them to contribute original essays on a topic of their choosing. The imposition

of these requests became apparent to us as soon as we began sending out solicitations. Any little magazine editor has thousands, sometimes tens of thousands, of manuscripts pass before his or her eyes every year, along with review copies of hundreds of new books, e-mails from authors, and requests from subscribers. The advent of the Internet has added exponentially to the demands upon the editor's attention. In addition to time spent blogging, tweeting, editing Tumblr feeds, and posting on Facebook, editors now have access to an inexhaustible supply of information pertaining to the field, including other magazines, the works of authors whom the editor may wish to publish, and endless links leading to matters current in the field, both high and low. Add to this unceasing textual blur the fact that many little magazine editors are college instructors or are supporting themselves with better-paying editorial work, and most are writers themselves, facing deadlines for articles, while the cursors on their home computers blink on page 307 of a five-hundred-page novel in progress.

We were therefore gratified that most of the editors we approached were enthusiastic about the project and eager to contribute. Some of them cited a desire to continue the discussion begun by Hoffman, Allen, and Ulrich; and Anderson and Kinzie. Others were motivated by the state of the debate over the effects of online publishing on print magazines. The prevailing sentiment, however, was that a revisiting of the subject was overdue.

Much to our delight, each submission we received provided fresh insight into the state of little magazines today. For months we had worked in solitude, outlining the structure for this book and, in doing so, developing a sense of the history of publishing over the past thirty years. Now, all at once, a dialogue was forming. From the first we could see why the individual stories of magazine editors dominated not only the first-person recollections in Anderson and Kinzie, but also the ostensibly scholarly Hoffman et al. Above all, little magazine editors value the ways in which literary conversations evolve in their pages and on their websites. It is this conversation that inspires, challenges, and sustains them, regardless of changes in technology, medium, or financial constraint.

There are many compelling creation myths in this volume, as editors tell of the experience of waiting for the shipment of the first issue to arrive, all of them anxious, all of them, it would turn out, with good reason. Lee Gutkind wakes in the middle of the night and rechecks the first issue of *Creative Nonfiction* to find a large chunk of the first essay missing. Keith Gessen recounts nearly losing his rent-controlled sublet when the first shipment of  $n+1$  arrived early. Greg Johnson describes the moment that Joyce Carol Oates and Ray Smith opened a box containing the first issues of the *Ontario Review* only to find many of them smeared with blood.

A few of the editors we invited were unable to contribute. One or two others initially committed but had to drop out owing to time constraints. Because this anthology begins with the 1980s, we wrote to Gordon Lish—to many the father of 1980s minimalist fiction—to contribute a piece on his *Quarterly* (1987–1995). What we received in return was a blank postcard, with the handwritten message:

Sorry, the thing  
was the thing it was, and now  
it's not. Nothing  
to add, save  
Kind regards,  
Gordon Lish<sup>1</sup>

We felt this was an elegant articulation of how little magazines burn brightly for a time and then extinguish themselves. As Jeffrey Lependorf observes in this volume, literary magazines are usually quite short-lived: “I regularly describe starting a literary magazine as akin to starting a restaurant: some open and close, some have a few good years, and a few seem to be around as long as anyone can remember.”<sup>2</sup> In fact, many scholars of the little magazine would argue that such impermanence actually defines the format. T. S. Eliot believed that a magazine should have “a single editor, a small circulation, and a short life span, rarely exceeding that of the founding editorship.”<sup>3</sup> In the second and third decades of the twentieth century many magazines appeared spontaneously in support of a flurry of new movements, including Futurism, Surrealism, and Vorticism. Their editors would turn out a few numbers at odd intervals and then move on to new projects or movements. However, as the century progressed, editors sought and perfected more sustainable approaches to publishing. Longevity was in. Indeed, *Poetry*, one of the first modernist magazines, thrives to this day (after nine or so decades of hand-to-mouth existence). In our book, current *Poetry* editor Don Share offers a vision at the end of the next century of the magazine’s operations.

Once we recognize that the general profile of the little magazine editor allows for an intrinsic idiosyncrasy, the history of little magazines (for all their characteristic eclecticism) aligns along a relatively narrow range of tendencies. Editors characteristically establish new magazines in reaction to—and usually out of dissatisfaction with—the literary status quo or their respective eras. For example, Harriet Monroe founded *Poetry* to pro-

1. Personal correspondence with Ian Morris, October 30, 2010.

2. “Introduction: A Decade or So of Little Magazines; One Reader’s Perspective,” 5.

3. T. S. Eliot, quoted in *The Little Magazine in America: A Modern Documentary History*, ed. Elliott Anderson and Mary Kinzie (Yonkers, NY: Pushcart Press, 1978), 217.

mote a prosody stripped of “eloquence, grandiloquence, poetic diction—all the frills and furbelows, which had overdressed, over-ornamented its beauty.”<sup>4</sup> In this volume, Charles Henry Rowell, founding editor of *Callaloo*, describes the urgent need that he saw in the 1970s for a magazine devoted to Black writers of the South. In his essay on *Exquisite Corpse*, Andrei Codrescu lambastes the conservatism of little magazines, and the culture as a whole, in the 1980s, and notes how the *Corpse* served as antidote to that tendency. Bruce Andrews, founding coeditor of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, describes the theoretical and cultural interventions that that magazine made for just a few short years in the 1980s.

In keeping with the approach of our predecessors, we maintain the descriptor “little” rather than “literary.” While many, perhaps most, of the little magazines of the past century featured poetry and fiction, many did not. We have chosen “little” to allow for nonliterary content.<sup>5</sup> The earliest modernist magazines, such as the *Little Review* (1914–22) and the *Seven Arts* (1916–17), were preoccupied with the full scope of the arts, as were the post-WWII magazines *Kulchur* (1960–66) and *Yugen* (1958–62), and some in this volume, including *BOMB*, *n+1*, and *Bitch*, which was born out of the zine scene, and *Women’s Review of Books*.

Penury is integral to the definition of the little magazine. Hoffman characterized the little magazine as a vehicle for “artistic work which for reasons of commercial expediency is not acceptable to the money-minded periodicals or presses.”<sup>6</sup> Three decades later, Anderson and Kinzie agreed with this characterization: “Little magazines generally put experiment before ease, and art before comment. They can afford to do so because they can barely afford to do anything; as a rule they do not, and cannot, expect to make money.”<sup>7</sup> While several of the magazines featured in this book—including *McSweeney’s*, *Bitch*, *BOMB*, and *Poetry*—have thrived, at least in terms of circulation and longevity, these characterizations remain true for the majority of magazines. And the editors of these magazines would all agree that making money has never been a primary goal.

The ingenuity with which editors have responded to financial con-

4. *Poetry* 33 (October 1928), 34.

5. Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman acknowledge the difficulty of assigning small magazines to one category or another in their book *Modernism in the Magazines: An Introduction* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); and George Plimpton bristles at the diminutive connotations of the phrase “little magazine” in his essay “Enterprise in the Service of Art,” in *The Little Magazine in America: A Modern Documentary History*. Even so, many editors use the phrase “little magazine” with no difficulty.

6. Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn F. Ulrich, eds., *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947), 2.

7. “Prefatory Note,” *The Little Magazine in America: A Modern Documentary History*, 3.

straints has been a significant part of the legends of the magazines themselves. In the early twentieth century, members of the American literary avant-garde traveled to Europe in search of a more stimulating intellectual and cultural discourse and, coincidentally, favorable exchange rates. A celebrated example of this last phenomenon was *Broom* (1921–24), a magazine that began its brief but eventful run as a full-color affair, published in a Roman palace and ended in New York, “greatly reduced in size” and done in by censorship and a lack of financing.<sup>8</sup> Daisy Aldan, editor of the New York School magazine *Folder* (1953–56), describes how she put together the first issue, along with Grace Hartigan, Frank O’Hara, and John Ashbery: “They all came to this little studio and we all walked around a table putting the pages together like a smorgasbord.” Later in the same interview she said, “Certainly being poor never deterred a truly gifted person from creating art,” which might serve as a motto for the little magazine.<sup>9</sup>

Editors have traditionally found ways of getting by, including in many cases editors paying considerable amounts of money out of pocket. And in this book, Rebecca Wolff, founding editor of *Fence*, vividly captures the demands and pressures a self-financed magazine places upon its editor. In general, little magazines are founded and run with a highly specialized readership in mind. The idea of altering their content to attract more subscribers would strike most little magazine editors as precisely beside the point. What these editors seek is influence within the larger community of the arts. Major figures such as James Joyce, e. e. cummings, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, H. D., Amiri Baraka, and others have had their most celebrated and widely read works published in little magazines. For example, T. S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” “The Waste Land,” and “Tradition and the Individual Talent” were all first published in magazines with subscriptions under a thousand. These days, printing costs have made the independent print magazine almost a thing of the past. And the editors of university magazines, who once could boast of the prominent writers they published between their subsidized covers as rationale for their existence, now attend panels and workshops at academic conferences on how to increase subscriptions. In his essay on the *Alaska Quarterly Review*, Ronald Spatz acknowledges that it is no longer sufficient for well-established magazines to tout their list of accomplished authors. Instead, editors must find new ways to create literary communities, whether it be online or in person via reading series and other public forums.

In the 1960s and 1970s, as magazine editors were confronted with sharp

8. Hoffman, Allen, and Ulrich, *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography*, 101–7.

9. *The Little Magazine in America: A Modern Documentary History*, ed. Anderson and Kinzie, 274, 278.

increases in offset printing costs, many of them relied on the mimeograph machine as a less expensive method of publication. While the technology seems almost ostentatiously obsolete today, mimeo machines were commonplace as recently as two decades ago. Cranked by hand and later electrically, they were unwieldy and unforgiving in their design and operation. A generation of American writers, editors, and artists mastered this means of production. From Berkeley to Greenwich Village, editors of American avant-garde magazines were able to produce and distribute magazines and handmade anthologies at extremely low cost. Perhaps the prototypical example of the intersection between this technology and the little magazine scene was the story of *Blue Suede Shoes*, which was born when editor Keith Abbott pilfered a box of mimeograph paper at Washington State University, where he was a graduate student. He went on to borrow his friend's A. B. Dick mimeograph machine to publish four issues of *Blue Suede Shoes* and four books of poetry in his first year as editor.<sup>10</sup>

Though Beats and Black Mountain poets generally kept each other at arm's length, both favored an asceticism that was well suited to the do-it-yourself aesthetic of the materials at hand. The appearance of magazines like the *Black Mountain Review* (1954–57) and the *Neon* (1956–60) coincided with the rise of the counterculture movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The handmade, low-budget look of these magazines suggested an outlaw aesthetic that was also reflected in the magazines' contents. Ed Sanders's *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts* (1962–65) provides an example of this aesthetic.

Mimeographed and creatively bound with staples, *Fuck You* (1962–65) was the manifestation of Sanders's "message of Gandhian pacifism, great sharing, social change, the expansion of personal freedom (including the legalization of marijuana, and the then-stirring messages of sexual liberation)."<sup>11</sup> Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips remember the mimeo revolution with some nostalgia: "Looking back at them now, the books and magazines of the mimeo revolution appear imbued with a vivid purity of intention that seems impossible in today's publications."<sup>12</sup> The mimeograph was a tool for creating an oppositional aesthetic among a whole generation of influential iconoclastic editors. It was not merely a means of communication; it transformed that communication as well.

The mimeo revolution has captured the imagination of young scholars and aficionados in the digital era. Decades after the Xerox machine

10. "Blue Suede Shoes, Issue 379 (The Babe Ruth Essay)," in *The Little Magazine in America: A Modern Documentary History*, 474.

11. Steve Clay and Rodney Phillips, *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960–1980* (New York: Granary Books, 1998), 167.

12. *Ibid.*, 15.

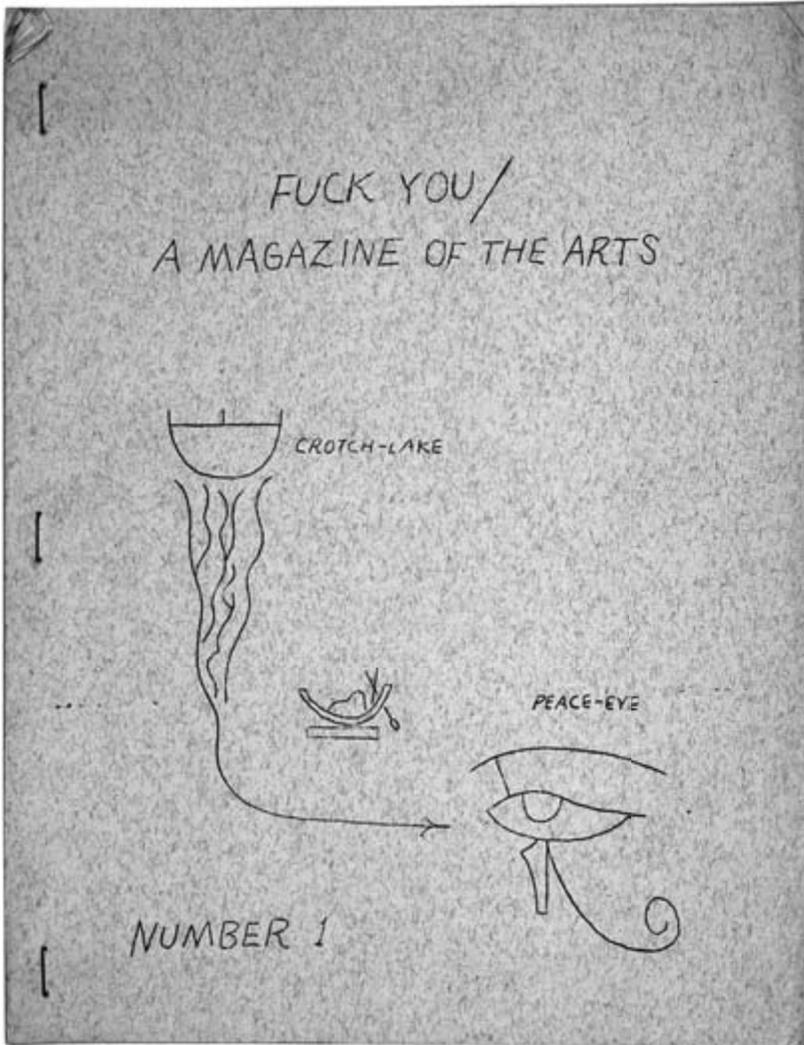


FIGURE 1. Front cover of *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts*, no. 1 (1962). Source: Edward Sanders.

drove the mimeograph into obsolescence, Facebook pages, blogs, and websites exist to archive high-resolution photos of old mimeo magazines.<sup>13</sup> Once the mimeo machine fell by the wayside, zine editors of the 1980s and 1990s took advantage of the technology of the photocopier to mass pro-

13. For an excellent example, see the Mimeo Mimeo website: <http://mimeomimeo.blogspot.com>.

duce printed material. Not only was the technology superior to that of the mimeograph, but one no longer needed to own the machine or have access through school, just a Kinko's card. In their interview for this volume, Andi Zeisler and Lisa Jarvis, founding editors of *Bitch* magazine, recollect their early experiences with such machines before their magazine developed into the popular four-color magazine that it is today.

The most significant development in little magazines in the second half of the twentieth century was that journals and magazines produced in universities, with institutional support, began to challenge the independent, movement-driven magazines of the prewar era. Certainly, there were some editors—and readers—who preferred the intellectual cache that came with university-sponsored magazines; in his essay “Academia and the Little Magazine,” Charles Robinson privileges the high-quality production of university magazines over the DIY aesthetic of the mimeo revolution: “The psychological value of a tidy periodical of ninety-six or more pages, replete with drawings, engravings—often vari-colored printing—is devastating. The majority of independent magazines are handset or mimeographed (often from incomplete or mixed fonts) and shoddy by comparison.”<sup>14</sup> The university has been integral to the evolution of the modern little magazine, from *Hound and Horn* (1927–34) at Harvard to *The Kenyon Review* at Kenyon College (1939–present). The GI bill and a rapid expansion of the state universities turned out a generation of graduate students who were contemporary and cosmopolitan in their interests. The tradition of the university professors of the time was to exclude work from the canon that had not had a century or more to establish its position in the canon. The reading of contemporary fiction and poetry, or worse, the writing of it, was best left to leisure hours. Suddenly, iconoclastic work from the States or abroad became an obsession with young women and men of letters. Certainly, the relationship between universities and their magazines can be fraught. As Carolyn Kuebler observes in her essay for this volume, universities hold the purse strings of these literary enterprises, and they can ultimately determine the fate of a little magazine in tough financial times. Still, the relationship between universities and the little magazines can also be a mutually beneficial one: it is an inexpensive investment that yields cultural capital in the form of Pushcart Prizes, *Best American* selections, and other accolades.

A primary contention of this book is that the role of the little magazine is to promote the avant-garde—that is, little magazines function as a “front

14. “Academia and the Little Magazine,” in *The Little Magazine in America: A Modern Documentary History*, 28.

guard” that anticipates the newest movements in literature, politics, and art.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Hoffman contends that this notion is so integral to the mission of the little magazine that they should be called “advance-guard” magazines, and we tend to agree.<sup>16</sup> Robie Macauley, editor of the *Kenyon Review* from 1959 to 1977, said “that a good literary magazine ought to be ten years ahead of general acceptance. . . . This is what avant-garde really means, although the term is often confused, in the minds of editors, with pure experiment for experiment’s sake.”<sup>17</sup> Above all, it was Ezra Pound who most thoroughly grasped the values of the little magazine as a vehicle for the avant-garde:

Work is acceptable to the public when its underlying ideas have been accepted. The heavier the “overhead” in a publishing business the less that business can afford to deal in experiment. This purely sordid and eminently practical consideration will obviously affect all magazines save those that are either subsidized (as chemical research is subsidized) or very cheaply produced (as the penniless inventor produces in his barn or his attic).<sup>18</sup>

We also believe that in considering a magazine to be avant-garde one must also consider the means by which the magazine is produced—as was demonstrated by the influence of the mimeo machine. An innovative, problem-solving approach to producing and distributing a magazine on a very limited budget has been the mother of ingenuity since Harriet Monroe first began soliciting financing in 1911. Since then, whether featuring ads from the Topeka and Santa Fe Railway System or pioneering the use of blog technology to initiate and sustain literary conversations, little magazine editors have been by necessity innovators, operating outside of the prevailing modes of commercial publishing. In this volume, we provide examples of how online technology has become the latest means of low-budget production and how innovative editors have exploited this reality to make it about more than inexpensive server hosting. Rebecca Morgan Frank, founding editor of *Memorious*, describes her early desire for a simple aesthetic that would be accessible to the largest number of online readers. Jonathan Farmer, founding editor of *At Length*, considers how his online platform has allowed his magazine to thrive in ways that it wouldn’t have as a printed magazine. Ander Monson, founding editor of *DIAGRAM*, remembers how the aesthetic for his online magazine was born out of his

15. For more on the broader cultural and literary significance of avant-garde literature, see Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

16. Hoffman et al., *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography*, 3.

17. Anderson and Kinzie, *The Little Magazine in America: A Modern Documentary History*, 74.

18. “Small Magazines,” *English Journal* 19, no. 9 (November 1930): 702.

fascination with old dictionaries and how-to manuals, thus hearkening back to the heyday of printed materials.

While the notion that a politically themed literature, specifically writing in which the content of a story or a poem progresses toward a political message, could be deemed good literature is not widely held today, political—generally leftist—magazines were important contributors to the role of little magazines in advancing the literary and cultural arguments before the Second World War. What kept these magazines relevant to the general literary and artist discussion was the tendency in the best of the magazine to favor quality of writing over purity of Marxist ideal. In our section “Politics, Culture, and the Little Magazine,” our contributors trace the evolution of political discourse and its current influence over the past thirty years. For example, Lawrence-Minh Bui Davis and Gerald Maa, founding editors of the *Asian American Literary Review*, provide historical context for understanding the political and aesthetic necessity of their new magazine.

The ultimate and most pressing charge of this book is to ask how the publication of little magazines changed over the past thirty years and what insight we can offer to those readers, writers, and editors who would enter into such an endeavor in a new era of little magazine publishing. Our book is divided into five thematic sections: “The Editor as Visionary”; “Politics, Culture, and the Little Magazine”; “Innovation and Experimentation: The Literary Avant-Garde”; “The University Magazine”; and “Today’s Magazines and the Future.” As we organized each of these sections, we paid careful attention to how each magazine both complies with and resists the modernist tendencies of magazines through much of the twentieth century. We observed that while defined movements or systems of theory are alive and well in literary and art criticism, editors no longer seem interested in aligning themselves with defined aesthetic movements.

Little magazine editors are always aware of the current state of little magazine publishing but are also deeply committed to adopting and exploiting new platforms for showcasing the best writing in America. Jane Friedman and Don Share, who represent two of the most venerable—and until the last decade—old-fashioned magazines, *Virginia Quarterly Review* and *Poetry*, are two of the most recognizable advocates for modernization.

A post on *Poetry*’s widely read Harriet Blog simultaneously suggests the direction that little magazines may be headed in and why anticipating future trends will become increasingly difficult. Craig Santos Perez begins his essay, “I’ve seen the best minds of my generation destroyed

by Facebook," by recollecting that "once, blogging was king."<sup>19</sup> Perez describes his evolution from a blogger who scorned Facebook to a devotee of the social media site. The author is announcing that he is abandoning his blog, a medium unknown to the first online magazine editors, and recording this act on the blog of the website of the very little magazine recognized as the first of the modernist era. Online magazines that may have once seen themselves as serving the same function as a print magazine only in a different medium have added blogs, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, and myriad other online tools, not only to draw attention to their content but also to create and maintain a dialogue within the literary community at large.

And yet, even as the little magazine adapts to the digital age, the passion and commitment of editors and writers refuse to wane. Certainly, some magazines will become online-only projects, but others will remain faithful to the power of the literary object. Each print issue of *McSweeney's* is still a collector's item, distinct from what precedes or follows it both in content and format. Other magazines will lift away from the page, and from written language, altogether. *The Drum*, a new online fiction magazine, provides free podcasts that feature the writer reading his or her work. *Tin House's* online feature "Tin House Reels" is dedicated to short films that foreground the relationship between word and image. In this way, readers can also become viewers of video content that stimulates and inspires, thus continuing the conversation that the magazine initiates. As Cara Blue Adams notes in her essay on *The Southern Review* for this volume, it is this conversation, regardless of medium, that is what's most thrilling about little magazines. Thanks to globalization, smartphones, and wireless technology, the actual location of a magazine and its editors is becoming increasingly irrelevant, and this might actually be a strength of the magazine in the twenty-first century. In their commitment to avant-garde aesthetics, their global engagement, and their eagerness to influence poets, critics, and scholars who might then influence a wider readership, these new little magazines are surprisingly similar to their modernist antecedents from the 1920s. One can imagine that thirty years from now, when little magazine editors come together to discuss the state of their various projects, they too will signal their debt to Harriet Monroe, Margaret Anderson, Eugene Jolas, and Gorham Munson.

19. "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by Facebook," Harriet Blog: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2012/04/i-saw-the-best-minds-of-my-generation-destroyed-by-facebook/>, accessed April 30, 2012.

