

Teaching the  
Little Magazine

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Leong

**AMONG THE NEIGHBORS 10**

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**AMONG THE NEIGHBORS**

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I thought I knew a thing or two about modern and contemporary American poetry. Then I taught an undergraduate class

on the little magazine. At the time, I was teaching in the English Department at the University at Albany, SUNY, where I worked from 2015 to 2019. Accustomed to teaching creative writing workshops, various poetry surveys, and research paper seminars, I had found that tackling the little magazine as an explicit object of study radically defamiliarized my central assumptions of what it means to teach literature and literary history. More than once during the Spring 2018 semester, in the vertiginous midst of course prep, I found myself regretting having volunteered to teach such a time-consuming class for the first time. Nevertheless, the process was a rewarding experience that shook—in surprising and salutary ways—what I thought was a stable grounding in the field. This essay is a self-debriefing of what I did, what I learned, and what I might have done differently in hopes that it can be of use to others.

In Fall 2016, at the request of my former department's Director of Undergraduate Studies, I joined my colleague Eric Keenaghan to form an ad hoc committee whose task was to develop a new class on literary publication. It was only my second year on the job and I was still learning how to incorporate labor-intensive service—being on a search committee, for example—into the larger picture of an assistant professor's various responsibilities. This is to say Eric—thankfully—ran point on the project and did the lion's share of the work in developing the syllabus and drafting the course description, which we completed by January 2017. I learned a lot following Eric's lead while I pitched in by creating some sample assignments and activities and suggesting a few inclusions to the reading list. What facilitated the entire process was the fact that we shared many overlapping interests such as periodical culture, modernism, and the New American Poetry: our sample 300-level course, titled "Literary Publication: History and Practice," emerged as an introduction to the

modern and contemporary literary magazine. In May 2017, the university approved the course, and I agreed to run its inaugural section the following spring.

I inevitably pursued my own interests when building the assigned reading list, but I generally followed the basic structure and concept of the sample syllabus that Eric and I had submitted. After studying key moments in the history of the little magazine, from modernism to the so-called mimeo revolution to the digital turn, students would spend the last three weeks conceiving, editing, designing, and producing their own zines in small groups. As an elective in the department's recently established creative writing minor, the course was supposed to draw students interested in literary study as well as creative writing. Twenty-four students signed up.

Most of the class members were English majors (or intended majors) with non-majors coming from areas such as Communication, Journalism, and Political Science. While recommended for juniors and seniors, this class wound up attracting four sophomores, which also contributed to the broad mix of backgrounds and experience levels within the classroom, a perennial pedagogical concern when teaching at UAlbany (and, I imagine, at many other institutions as well). But perhaps the greatest challenge that I faced was linked to three overlapping circumstances pertaining to literary-cultural literacy. The first was the sheer and obvious fact that every fresh batch of undergraduate students would be necessarily at a greater generational remove from what the discipline considers core material. The second was that this course had no prerequisites for enrollment. All of this was compounded by the third factor: for better or worse, the department's curriculum was not structured around historical coverage. Rather, required classes for the English BA focused on—to quote the department's

course catalog— “strategies of writing and close reading” and “the various methods through which literature has typically been read and understood.” English majors, then, might be more familiar with terms such as “Marxism,” “deconstruction,” or “postcolonialism,” than historicizing descriptors such as “modernist,” “Pre-Raphaelite,” or “neo-classical.” In short, if the subtitle of this course was “History and Practice,” then I should have anticipated that the former was going to be a tough sell.

In January 2018, the twenty-five of us started with the early years of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, reading poems by writers both canonized and forgotten alongside Harriet Monroe’s editorial statements. We noted, for example, how the publication of T. S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”—which famously appears at the end of *Poetry* 6.3 (June 1915)—supports Monroe’s inaugurating claim that *Poetry* can accommodate “poems longer, and of more intimate and serious character, than the popular magazines can afford to use.”<sup>1</sup> We moved to a pair of smartly designed, experimental, and short-lived ventures, Wyndham Lewis’s *Blast* (1914-15) and Wallace Thurman’s *Fire!!: A Quarterly Devoted to the Younger Negro Artists* (1926). These magazines allowed us to examine literature in the context of various social histories (World War I, the Harlem Renaissance, the Suffrage Movement) as well as consider poetry as a neighbor to other arts. Reading Ezra Pound’s verse alongside prose by Rebecca West or a dramatic monologue by Langston Hughes alongside Zora Neale Hurston’s drama and fiction demonstrated how a magazine—the word comes from the Arabic *makẓan*, *makẓin* (storehouse)—can be a heterogeneous storehouse of various artistic genres.

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<sup>1</sup> Harriet Monroe, “The Motive of the Magazine,” *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* 1.1 (October 1912): 28.

The recognition and differentiation of genre seemed an especially important point since undergraduates at UAlbany, even English majors, often blithely referred to any book of literature—even a collection of poetry or essays—as “a novel.”

*Blast* and *Fire!!*, both polemical publications to be sure, seem to pun on the various definitions of “magazine” as they are both “periodical publication[s] containing articles by various writers” and “store[s] or repertoire[s]” of “rhetorical weapons.”<sup>2</sup> If the former sought “to destroy politeness [and] standardization,” the latter aimed to set fire to “wooden opposition with a cackling chuckle of contempt.” In this first unit on modernism, following Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible, we identified two major through-lines for the course, observing how “little magazines tend to share two features: a vexed relationship to a larger, ‘mainstream’ public and an equally vexed relationship to money.”<sup>3</sup> Both features, the class realized, related to tensions between avant-gardism and institutionalization. We contrasted *Fire!!*’s financial struggles—it took years for Thurman to pay back the printer for producing the magazine’s first and only issue—with Monroe’s ability to fundraise “among Chicago’s commercial and cultural elite” to ensure *Poetry*’s future.<sup>4</sup> Looking forward to our study of *Poetry* in the twenty-first century, we considered Ruth Lilly’s \$200 million

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<sup>2</sup> “magazine, n.”. *OED Online*. August 2018. Oxford University Press. <<https://www-oed-com.libproxy.albany.edu/view/Entry/112144?rskey=gz6Mfi&result=1&isAdvanced=false>> (accessed August 24, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible, “Little Magazines and Modernism: An Introduction,” *American Periodicals* 15.1 (2005): 3.

<sup>4</sup> Averill Curdy, “A History of the Magazine,” *Poetry Foundation*, <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/history>> (accessed June 18, 2019). During the 1930s, and the decades that followed, *Poetry*—unsurprisingly—experienced several financial crises, which were eventually allayed by last-minute donations.

donation in 2002, a gift that has contributed to the magazine's contemporary image as "a distant, powerful monolith."<sup>5</sup>

Other nodes of interest coalesced throughout our discussions: sampling excerpts of *Ulysses* in *The Little Review*, edited by Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, and *The Egoist*, edited by Harriet Weaver, made us appreciate the fact that "during the 1910s and 1920s, women writers dominated the possibilities for avant-garde publishing of literature in English as editors of journals."<sup>6</sup> These readings further anchored our exploration of issues surrounding censorship; we previously noted the redaction of Pound's "Fratres Minores" in *Blast* and Thurman's hope for *Fire!!* to be banned in Boston.<sup>7</sup> Discussing the 1921 obscenity trial against Anderson and Heap and, later, Judge John M. Woolsey's 1933 landmark decision that defended *Ulysses* made for an interesting transition to the continuing struggles for free artistic expression in the 1940s and 1950s. We considered John Crowe Ransom's withdrawing his previous acceptance of Robert Duncan's poem "An African Elegy" from *The Kenyon Review* after he read Duncan's 1944 essay "The Homosexual in Society," which he considered "an advertisement or notice of overt homosexuality."<sup>8</sup> We read the Spring 1958 and Autumn

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<sup>5</sup> Christopher Borrelli, "Poetry Magazine Well-Versed in Criticism," *Chicago Tribune*, June 20, 2011, <<https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/ct-xpm-2011-06-20-ct-ent-0621-focus-poetry-foundation-20110620-story.html>> (accessed August 6, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Lynn Keller and Cristanne Miller, "Gender and Avant-Garde Editing: Comparing the 1920s with the 1990s," *How2* 1.2 (1999), <[https://www.asu.edu/pipercenter/how2journal/archive/online\\_archive/v1\\_2\\_1999/current/readings/keller-miller.html](https://www.asu.edu/pipercenter/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v1_2_1999/current/readings/keller-miller.html)> (accessed August 6, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Martha Nadell, "'Devoted to Younger Negro Artists': *Fire!!* (1926) and *Harlem* (1928)," *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, V. II (Oxford University Press, 2012), 810.

<sup>8</sup> Qtd. in Ekbert Faas, *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet as Homosexual in Society* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1983), 153.

1959 issues of the *Chicago Review*, including excerpts from William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, and discussed the University of Chicago's subsequent suppression of the Winter 1959 issue, which resulted in the resignation of much of the editorial staff and the founding of *Big Table*, whose first issue was impounded by the Post Office.

Our study of the mimeo revolution—enriched by Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips's excellent catalogue *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960-1980*—included coverage of LeRoi Jones and Diane di Prima's newsletter *The Floating Bear*, Jones and Hettie Cohen [Jones]'s *Yūgen: A New Consciousness in Arts and Letters*, and Ed Sanders's *Fuck You, A Magazine of the Arts*.

Examining Tom Postell's fascinating poem "Gertrude Stein Rides the Town Down El" (fig. 1) from *Yūgen* 1 (1958) helped us grasp the importance of consulting little magazines as primary sources and how an attention to textual criticism can help readers grasp the subtlety of a poem's meanings. Before we read the first issue of *Yūgen*, I had given the class two versions of the Postell poem, one from Aldon Lynn Nielsen and Lauri Ramey's *Every Goodbye Ain't Gone: An Anthology of Innovative Poetry by African Americans* (2006) (see fig. 2) and one from Franklin Rosemont and Robin D.G. Kelley's *Black, Brown, & Beige: Surrealist Writings from Africa and the Diaspora* (2009) (see fig. 3). The poems from the anthologies differ in important ways. Is the title "Gertrude Stein Rides the Town Down El," as indicated in Nielsen and Ramey, or "Gertrude Stein Rides the Torn Down El to NYC," as indicated in Rosemont and Kelley? Do these differences matter? Does the poem consist of only long lines (that spill over) or a mix of long and short lines? Are the indentations in Nielsen and Ramey intentional? Consulting the poem as it appeared in *Yūgen*, the ostensible source for both

Rosemont and Kelley's and Nielsen and Ramey's anthologies, resolved these questions. After comparing the three versions, we decided that the poem in *Black, Brown, & Beige* was a corrupted transcription. It replaces the title's unusual phrase "Town Down El" with the more pedestrian "Torn Down El"; it abbreviates the dedication ("to NYC" instead of "to New York City") and sutures it into the title; it forgoes the indentation of turnover lines ("surprise," "and rose," "children skate and," and so on); and it includes a hyphen in the last line ("torn-down El") that is not present in the other two versions. We agreed that the most crucial difference was the changing of "Town Down El" to "Torn Down El" since the latter phrase telegraphs the ending and removes what seems to be Postell's deliberate use of anastrophe or syntactical inversion. Some of us argued that the anastrophe of "Town Down"—the scrambling of syntax—parallels Postell's scrambling of time in his anachronistic image of a "long dead" Stein riding the downtown El. This enabled us to reflect on the relationship between the New American Poetry and modernism; after all, *Yūgen* 1 also includes Di Prima's "For Pound, Cocteau, and Picasso." Considering Postell's poem in *Yūgen* also sparked practical discussions about design, typography, and layout in advance of the final zine-making assignment.

Many of my students entered the class already having studied LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, whether having read, for example, his "Dutchman" in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* or "In Memory of Radio" in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*. Our focus on Baraka's robust editorial activities with *Yūgen* and *The Floating Bear* was meant to expand their image of him as more than just an isolated, if celebrated, name in an anthology. His contributions to little magazine culture, as he said in his *Autobiography*, "had plugged [him] into a developing

literary world.”<sup>9</sup> Di Prima’s recollection portrays him as a kind of vortex of cultural energy: “LeRoi could work at an incredible rate. He could read two manuscripts at a time, one with each eye. He would spread things out on the table while he was eating supper, and reject them all—listening to the news and a jazz record he was going to review, all at the same time.”<sup>10</sup> The difference between considering Baraka as one author among many suspended in the amber of an anthology and Baraka as a dynamic actor within mid-century periodical culture is dramatically apparent in the graphs from Emory University’s *Networking the New American Poetry*, a data visualization project that seeks “to test a taxonomy of postwar poetic schools that appeared in Donald Allen’s influential anthology, *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960*.”<sup>11</sup> In one graph (see fig. 4), which visualizes poetic communities through Allen’s famous groupings, Baraka is a small subsidiary node, a satellite of the fifth group, which, as Allen indicates, “includes younger poets” and “has no geographical definition.”<sup>12</sup> Another graph, in contrast, “visualizes connections among editors, authors, and translators of twelve poetry journals of the era” (*Beatitude, The Black Mountain Review, Origin, Measure, The Floating Bear, Intrepid, Yūgen, “C”: A Journal of Poetry, Big Table, Fuck You, A Magazine of the Arts, J: A Magazine of Poetry, and Evergreen Review*).<sup>13</sup> Since, in this second graph (see fig. 5), the “size of the nodes are determined by how

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<sup>9</sup> Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1997), 222.

<sup>10</sup> Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips, *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960-1980* (New York: The New York Public Library and Granary Books, 1998), 75.

<sup>11</sup> “About,” *Networking the New American Poetry*, <<https://danowski.digitalscholarship.emory.edu/nnap/about/>> (accessed August 27, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Donald Allen, “Preface,” *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960* (Berkeley: University of California Press, [1960] 1999), xiii.

<sup>13</sup> “Networks,” *Networking the New American Poetry*, <<https://danowski.digitalscholarship.emory.edu/nnap/network/>> (accessed August 27, 2018).

many connections the node has,” Baraka appears as a prominent, one even might say “planetary,” presence. He was, indeed, “plugged into a developing literary world” that, as Lisa Chinn has suggested, can be credibly described as “the Baraka era.”<sup>14</sup>

The class only partially appreciated that studying little magazines could offer a more detailed and complex, if messier, understanding of literary history in comparison to relying on the received narratives, canons, and traditions that mainstream anthologies tend to promulgate. It seemed clear to us that, for example, anthologies such as *Black, Brown, & Beige* and *Every Goodbye Ain't Gone* rely on publications such as *Yugen* in the first place to highlight those figures who (to quote Rosemont and Kelley) have been “almost entirely ignored by literary historians, critics, and memoirists.” Nevertheless, I should have anticipated the fact that most class members simply didn’t have the reading experience to inform any rudimentary narratives of post-1945 American poetry let alone counter-narratives; most had never heard of the likes of John Ashbery, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, or Denise Levertov. But some of the class began to grasp the relative affordances as well as limitations of studying poetry in literary journals rather than in anthologies and single-author collections, which are, of course, more frequently assigned in English classes. The discursive contexts of the latter two—whether determined by a Foucauldian “author function” or a special topic, such as black surrealism—tend to be more defined in comparison to the heterogeneous and sometimes chaotic storehouses that are literary magazines.

Only two out of my twenty-four students had previously studied a literary magazine; and those two students happened to

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<sup>14</sup> Lisa Chinn, “Digital Danowski: ‘Schooling Donald Allen: Re-Locating Mid-Century Poetry Networks.’”

have been in one of my poetry workshops the year before, in which I required a subscription to *Bone Bouquet*, a journal that “seeks to publish the best new writing by female and non-binary poets, from artists both established and emerging.”<sup>15</sup> This is to say that I could have paid more attention earlier in the semester on why the little magazine—our main object of analysis—is a crucial alternative to its others (namely the anthology and the poetry book).<sup>16</sup> Despite the fact that I had emphasized the Modernist Journals Project’s motto that “modernism began in the magazines,” and that, for example, Eliot’s career began in the magazines, the students didn’t understand or weren’t concerned with modernism or Eliot sufficiently enough to commit to learning why modernist magazines matter as important resources. Likewise, though they acknowledged how the mimeo revolution sparked an alternative “DIY” stance towards cultural production that helped to enable marginalized communities, not knowing anything about the New American poetry made them somewhat apathetic to the fact that the New American poetry also began in the magazines—in such publications as *Origin*, which, according to Alan Golding, “occup[ies] a special, origin-ating place in the overall field of canonizing forces affecting postwar American poetry.”<sup>17</sup> The difference between reading Eliot or Baraka in a little magazine

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<sup>15</sup> “Submission Guidelines,” *Bone Bouquet*, <<http://www.bonebouquet.org/submission-guidelines/>> (accessed June 18, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> According to Gerald Maa, “Like its sibling, the old standard bearing anthology, the journal collects work from various authors. Both are defined as such. The journal, however, aspires to timeliness, whereas the anthology aims for timelessness. In essence the former’s work is ephemeral, the latter immortal. Or so they both would wish.” Gerald Maa and Lawrence-Minh Bui Davis, “The World Doesn’t Stop for Derek Walcott, or: An Exchange between Coeditors,” Ian Morris and Joanne Diaz, *The Little Magazine in Contemporary America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 88.

<sup>17</sup> Alan Golding, *From Outlaw to Classic: Canons in American Poetry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 126.

as opposed to an anthology was negligible to some of the students; I imagine that, to them, it was all just old stuff that they had to read for school. In a student evaluation, someone reported that the class “was more history oriented, so more modern content for more of the class would be better.” It made perfect sense, then, that the only History major in the class, who was acquainted with doing archival research, excelled, more so than most of the English majors, in the first two-thirds of the class.

In retrospect, I could have paid more attention to the fundamental fact that “modern” can mean “current, present” as well as “of, relating to, or designating a current or recent movement or trend in art, architecture, etc., characterized by a departure from or a repudiation of accepted or traditional styles and values” (*OED*). Students are sometimes surprised to learn that cultural tropes that are recognizable to them as “current” well preceded their lifetimes by a long shot. I also could have reinforced the importance of what Eliot famously called “the historical sense.” During the first unit, I invited modernist scholar Rebecca Colesworthy, author of *Returning the Gift: Modernism and the Thought of Exchange*, to visit our class, and she had selected for discussion some choice texts for my students to read in advance, including Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” which was serialized in *The Egoist*. I could have better reiterated throughout the semester Eliot’s crucial point that grasping the presence of the past—such as the apprehension of Stein riding the torn down El undercover—requires “great labour,” exactly the kind of work I was asking my students to perform in the first two-thirds of the class.

As can be expected, our penultimate unit on the contemporary literary magazine sparked greater engagement and enthusiasm. This unit was guided by the Community of Literary Magazines

and Presses' Adopt a Lit Mag Program, which offers students a discounted subscription rate and includes a publisher/editor from the chosen magazine(s) visiting the class virtually or, when possible, in person. We subscribed to a monthly and a biannual: *Poetry* and *Fence*. The former gave the students a sense of how the magazine had evolved since 1912, and they enjoyed having a chance to ask editor Don Share questions via Skype. They also enjoyed receiving multiple issues of *Poetry* throughout the semester. *Fence* was, at the time, conveniently housed at the New York State Writers Institute at UAlbany, and Rebecca Wolff was able to visit us in person to talk about her extensive experience as an editor, designer, fundraiser, and publisher. I had also successfully applied for a mini-grant from UAlbany's Center for Experiential Education so that I could bring in additional guest speakers, including Laurin Jefferson, who was Editor-in-Chief of *Barzak*, a graduate student-run electronic journal affiliated with UAlbany's English Department. Ian Morris and Joanne Diaz's *The Little Magazine in Contemporary America* (2015) provided some sensible scaffolding: reading Share's "Poetry Magazine: On Making It New" and Wolff's "Publishing Is Personal" complemented both the assigned readings and prepared the students for the editors' visits. And reading Ander Monson's "This Being 2015" and Rebecca Morgan Frank's "Summoning the Bard: The Twenty-First-Century Literary Magazine on the Web" alongside issues of *Diagram* and *Memorious* formed the core of a mini-unit on electronic little magazines.

GERTRUDE STEIN RIDES THE TOWN DOWN EL  
- to New York City

Then colors rose through the leaves in light  
surprise.  
The last peacock poised and sighed on the leaves  
and rose.  
Wonderful day careens while blighted riff-raff  
children skate and  
Laughingly dig the hole for the mid-western  
bonfire.  
Wrap honey in velvet air and hide it in October's  
searching breath.  
The bonfire dwindles as the circus leaves and  
the animals roar.  
It's only in the sun that madness splatters into  
joy . . .  
Cover down the moon for the night before you  
lift the skirts of a cloud.  
Love knocks on the inside of my skull and kicks  
in my stomach.  
A doe licks the gum from a tree and runs into  
the woods.  
She lets me govern her gaze when the parade  
blares its colors.  
Gertrude Stein is long dead but under cover rides  
the torn down El.

Figure 1. From *Yugen* 1 (1958).

TOM POSTELL

## Gertrude Stein Rides the Town Down El

to New York City

Then colors rose through the leaves in light  
    surprise.  
The last peacock poised and sighed on the leaves  
    and rose.  
Wonderful day careens while blighted riff-raff  
    children skate and  
Laughingly dig the hole for the mid-western  
    bonfire.  
Wrap honey in velvet air and hide it in October's  
    searching breath.  
The bonfire dwindles as the circus leaves and  
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Love knocks on the inside of my skull and kicks  
    in my stomach.  
A doe licks the gum from a tree and runs into  
    the woods.  
She lets me govern her gaze when the parade  
    blares its colors.  
Gertrude Stein is long dead but under cover rides  
    the torn down El.

**Figure 2.** From *Every Goodbye Ain't Gone* (2006).

## Tom Postell

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In his 1984 autobiography, Amiri Baraka recalls Tom Postell (under the name Tim Poston) as a wild character, a real poet, and, most enticingly, influenced by surrealism. For a time, despite the fact that Postell was also a heavy drinker and, indeed, a bottom-of-the-barrel bohemian, he was one of Baraka's closest friends.

Frequenter of a milieu that included Billie Holiday, Archie Shepp, Jack Kerouac, Diane diPrima, James Baldwin, Jack Micheline, Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Frank O'Hara, Franz Kline, and many other poets, artists, and musicians, Postell seems to have published very little, and has been almost entirely ignored by literary historians, critics, and memoirists.

The two poems reprinted here originally appeared in the little mag *Yugen* (1958).

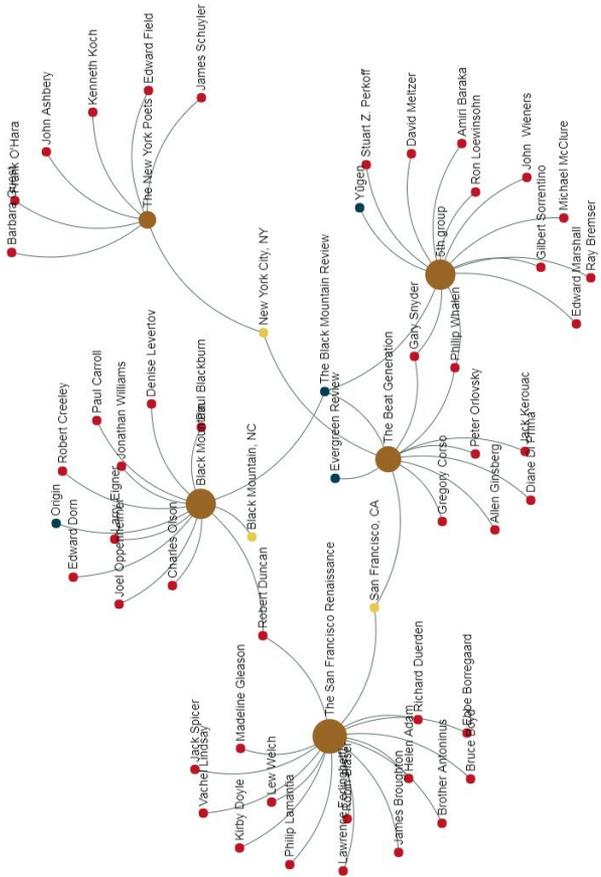
### GERTRUDE STEIN RIDES THE TORN DOWN EL TO NYC

Then colors rose through the leaves in light  
surprise.  
The last peacock poised and sighed on the leaves  
and rose.  
Wonderful day careens while blighted riff-raff  
children skate and  
Laughingly dig the hole for the mid-western  
bonfire.  
Wrap honey in velvet air and hide it in October's  
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The bonfire dwindles as the circus leaves and  
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It's only in the sun that madness splatters into  
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Cover down the moon for the night before you  
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Love knocks on the inside of my skull and kicks  
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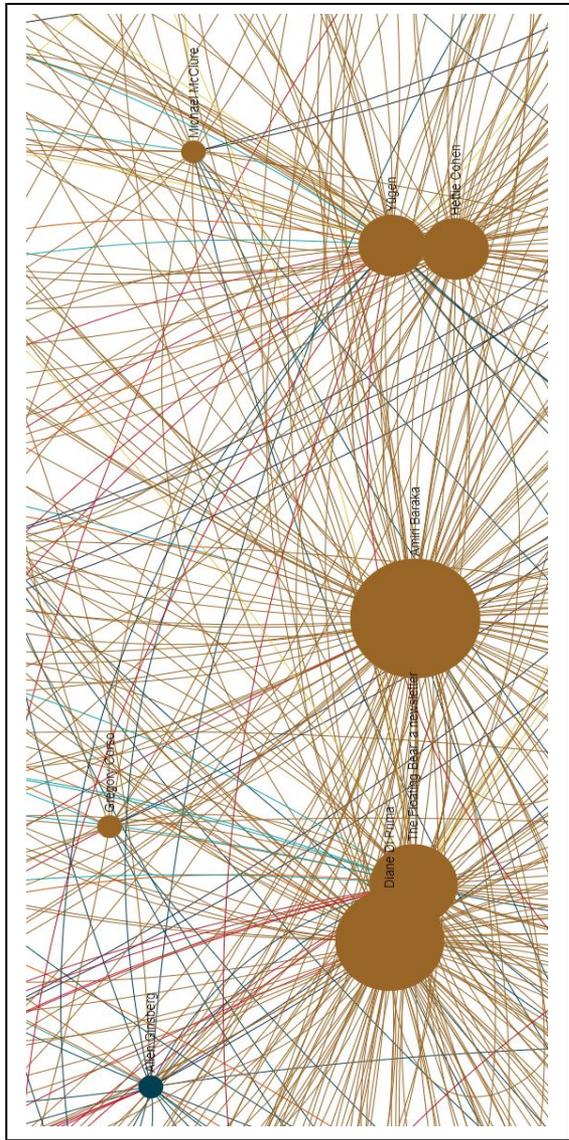
Figure 3. From *Black, Brown, & Beige* (2009).

# SCHOOLS CATEGORIZED BY DONALD ALLEN

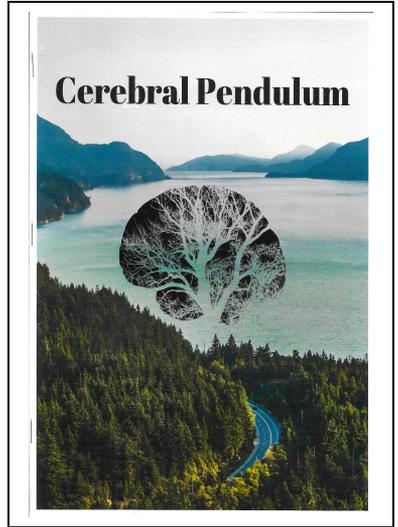
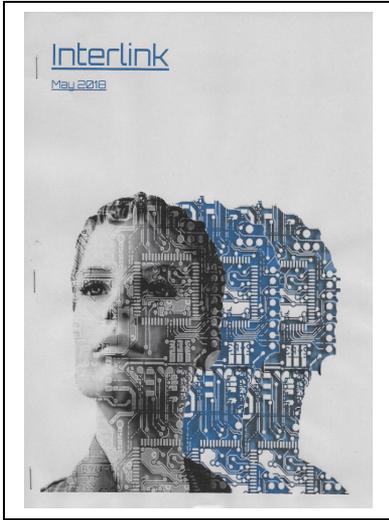
People, journals, and locations associated with schools as categorized by Donald Allen.



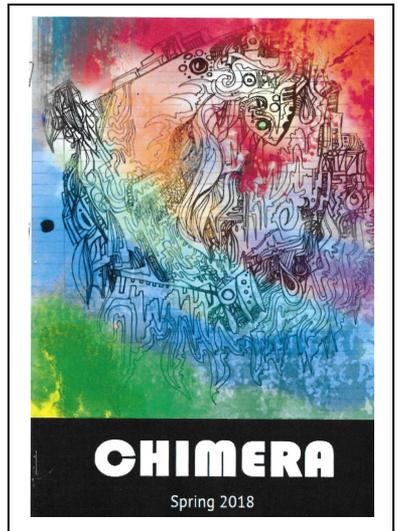
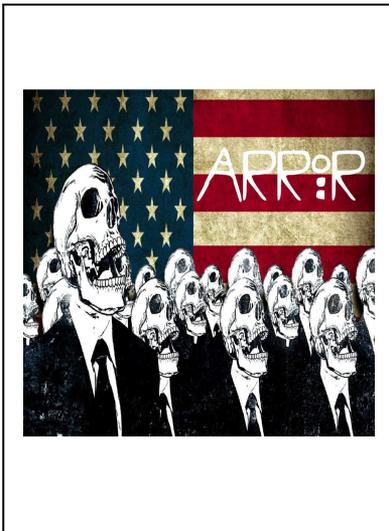
**Figure 4.** From *Networking the New American Poetry*, <<https://danowski.digitalscholarship.emory.edu/nnap/network/>>.



**Figure 5.** From *Networking the New American Poetry*,  
 <<https://danowski.digitalscholarship.emory.edu/mnap/network/>>.



Figures 6, 7, 8, and 9, clockwise from top left.



To set up the final zine making assignment, I had the class read and evaluate the editors' statements from the first issues of *Alcheringa: Ethnopoetics* (1970); *ecopoetics* (2001); and *Calque* (2007). Then, in small groups, they conceived of a title and mission statement for a hypothetical literary magazine. Through a series of editorial meetings, small group workshops, and visits to the university library, they proceeded to create zines that featured original student writing and/or reprints of writing that they admired. On the final day of class, the small groups presented their zines and passed out copies to the other groups. I had never implemented such an assignment before so I had very few expectations. Though the capability of their editorial practices was somewhat mixed, I was impressed with my students' attention to both the design and concept of their zines. Final projects included *Interlink*, a cyberpunk zine (fig. 6); *Cerebral Pendulum*, a zine devoted to Romantic and Neo-Romantic nature poetry (fig. 7); *Chimera*, a feminist and LGBT zine of comparative mythology (fig. 8); and *Error*, a zine in opposition to the "American Horror Show" of contemporary politics (fig. 9).

Overall, the class was, I think, modestly successful. Three short essays—one on a historical magazine, one on a subscribed magazine (either *Poetry* or *Fence*), and one on an electronic literary magazine—spaced throughout the semester allowed me to track the progress of student writing, and I did notice some improvement, particularly with students who had initially struggled. Furthermore, responses to the question "What do you feel you learned from this course?" from end-of-the-semester evaluations showed that students had adequately absorbed some of the major concerns of the class. One wrote of learning about the "history of literary magazines [and] why they fail [and] how to collaborate with a group on a creative project." Another observed, "little magazines are not small in

the sense that they provide cultural impact.” Other students seemed stimulated enough to want to pursue further exploration: “I’ve learned a lot – but mostly I’ve gained an interest in pursuing this field in the future.” Someone else similarly reported, “I learned that I want to have my career revolve around literary publication!” Another student conveyed a practical benefit from the perspective of the creative writer: “I learned a lot about lit magazines and publication that I will apply in my attempts to get published.” Even so, I would do things somewhat differently if I had to teach this course again.

My biggest mistake in planning the syllabus is probably the easiest to correct. I had intended to teach facsimile reprints of *Blast* and *Fire!!*, which are available from Black Sparrow Press and The Fire!! Press respectively, but at the last moment, I had decided to teach digitized versions; the former is included in The Modernist Journals Project and a scan of the latter is available on the platform Issuu courtesy of the POC Zine Project. I had wanted to reduce textbook costs, which is a recurrent concern for students at UAlbany, and I wrongly assumed that students would prefer the convenience of reading on-screen. Discussions of printed artifacts—for example, recent issues of *Poetry* and *Fence*—were much more spirited than ones of digitized PDFs (of, say, issues of *Blast* or *Fuck You, A Magazine of the Arts*). Multiple students reported to me that reading printed codices was a refreshing experience for them since it gave them some respite from being constantly hailed by their electronic devices. I also should have predicted that a classroom full of students with open laptops is a much more challenging environment to manage than one with only hard copies present. If I were to do it over again, I’d require more facsimile reprints in the reading list despite the increasing availability of high-quality scans of important periodicals from sites such as The Blue Mountain Project, the Modernist

Magazines Project, Open Door Archive, Reality Studios, and *Jacket2* Reissues. I'm sure that this simple change will make my students pay better attention; one student's evaluation noted some "concern" about "the disinterest of the class." I'd likely teach, for example, the *Evergreen Review* 1.2 (1957), the special issue on the San Francisco Renaissance, which is available in a faux-aged facsimile edition from OR Books. Listening to *San Francisco Poets*, the "vinyl version" of the 1957 issue from Evergreen Records, could help further illustrate Danny Snelson's point that "the 'little' magazine might best be seen as a medium that resists the standardisation of the 'magazine' generally understood; whether it be in terms of genre, format, content, circulation, or editorial intervention."<sup>18</sup> Having revived in 2017, the *Evergreen Review* is now completely online; examining recent issues, such as Winter 2017, which features born-digital work by Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, then could nicely bridge a unit on mimeos with a unit on electronic journals.

According to the Modernist Journals Project's "How to Read a Magazine"—a text that we discussed at the beginning of the semester—"because magazines are so open, and so various in format, and so disruptive of our conventions for reading more formally closed texts, some advice about reading them is helpful."<sup>19</sup> As much as that is the case, I found that some students were not particularly adept at "reading more formally closed texts" to begin with. (If it were up to me, I would have

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<sup>18</sup> Sophie Seita and Danny Snelson, "Lodging, & Dislodging, the Little Magazine: (A Google Document Conversation in Fifteen Parts)," *Hotel*, April 2017, <<https://partisanhotel.co.uk/Sophie-Seita-Danny-Snelson>> (accessed August 24, 2018).

<sup>19</sup> "How to Read a Magazine," *The Modernist Journals Project*, <[http://modjourn.org/teaching/introduction/intro3\\_howto.html](http://modjourn.org/teaching/introduction/intro3_howto.html)> (accessed August 24, 2018).

made the first of the department's required core courses, which is supposed to focus on close reading, a prerequisite.) Indeed, a student evaluation reported that the "poetry in this class was very hard to understand." In a future iteration of this class, I will likely cut down on some reading in order to start with a crash course on how to read a poem before we even get to how to read a magazine.

Probably the single most helpful suggestion coming from the student evaluations was that the group project "could have been spread out over the semester." I agree: instead of addressing history and then practice—which assumes the latter is best informed by the former—I could have braided together history and practice throughout the semester by introducing more hands-on and collaborative activities in the first unit on modernism. We did more of such things in the final third of the semester as a lead-up to the zine projects.

When we were studying *Fence*, for example, I had asked my students to rank what they thought were the three best pieces from the special "Other Worlds" portfolio on speculative fiction from the Fall/Winter 2016 issue. They formed small groups and, under the pretense that they were a jury that could choose only a single piece for a fictitious award, they debated their selections and then drafted mock prize citations for their ultimate choices. Some students at UAlbany did not always adapt well to the classic English class model that calls for reading in private followed by an in-class discussion of that reading. This particular activity—which more directly invited students to persuade and to be open to persuasion—primed the class for a more detailed conversation about the assigned readings, and I would likely create more assignments in this vein in a future version of this class. Establishing the small groups at the very beginning as opposed to at the end might also be more

conducive to the final project's percolation and development, building the teamwork necessary for any editorial collective to succeed. Perhaps small groups can solicit work and edit writing from members of other groups or include interviews with other editorial teams, creating affiliations that simulate the various networks of the New American Poetry. Perhaps I will have my students read "The Waste Land" from the November 1922 issue of *The Dial* and then ask them to compose, in small groups, polyvocal collage poems; such an approach would likely better enliven material that is nearly a hundred years old. And, in that spirit, a requirement of the zine might be that it contain some collaboratively written poem whether it take the form of shored fragments or an exquisite corpse or a Japanese renga. My pedagogy has always operated on the principle that the best way to appreciate poetry is to write it oneself; perhaps a more consistent attention to practice could have appealed to the student who reported that they "enjoyed [the] visits by editors but [the] rest of [the] class felt more like poetry analysis."

Nevertheless, at the end of the day, my business is the business of poetry analysis. If I had to offer this course at a higher level—as a 400-level special topics class or a 500-level graduate seminar—I would more strongly highlight how the study of little magazines can augment our analytical insights about how individual poems interface with larger literary communities. More advanced versions of this class might explore an under-recognized corpus: poems that explicitly thematize little magazines as objects of concern. I'd teach, for instance, "Letter 5" from Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems*, which famously addresses Vincent Ferrini, editor of the journal *Four Winds*, a venue, in fact, in which previous instalments of *The Maximus Poems* appeared:

A magazine does have this “life” to it (proper to it), does  
    have streets,  
can show lights, movie houses, bars, and, occasionally,  
                    for those of us who do live our life quite  
                    properly in print  
                    as properly, say, as Gloucester people  
                    live in Gloucester  
you do meet someone  
and I met you  
on a printed page.<sup>20</sup>

We could then discuss the curious dis/relation between the sociality of inhabiting a place (“Gloucester people live in Gloucester”) and the imagined communities enabled by print periodical culture (“I met you / on a printed page”). Olson, of course, goes on to criticize Ferrini for impropriety, for succumbing to what now goes by the term “po-biz”: “what sticks out in this issue is verse / from at least four other editors / of literary magazines.” The excoriating ending of Olson’s poem demonstrates that the little magazine is a key entity within the public sphere, whose terrains are constantly shaped by inclusions and exclusions:

It’s no use.  
There is no place we can meet.  
You have left Gloucester.  
You are not there, you are anywhere  
where there are little magazines

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<sup>20</sup> Charles Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, ed. George F. Butterick (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 28.

will publish you.<sup>21</sup>

Considering Frank O'Hara's work would be crucial as well—from the cameo that *New World Writing* makes in "The Day Lady Died" to the meta-editorial moment of "Personal Poem," first published in *Yūgen* 6 (1960), which describes O'Hara and Baraka in interpersonal agreement: "we don't like Lionel Trilling / we decide, we like Don Allen."<sup>22</sup> The latter might introduce an examination of *Kulchur*, to which O'Hara and Baraka contributed as editors. Similarly, reading "A Young Poet," O'Hara's tribute to John Wieners, could nicely introduce a discussion of Wieners's *Measure*: "He / has started his little / magazine, and plans a city issue / although he's scared / to death."<sup>23</sup> Indeed, O'Hara's "A Young Poet" might also teach well at an introductory undergraduate level. Starting a little magazine—or even a zine—can be a daunting prospect. Lower-level students who are tasked to execute such an endeavor, however streamlined, might find it heartening to know about the ambitious, if apprehensive, poet-editors like Wieners that came before them.

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<sup>21</sup> Olson, 29.

<sup>22</sup> Frank O'Hara, "Personal Poem," *Yūgen* 6 (1960), 51.

<sup>23</sup> *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. Donald Allen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 279.

## For Further Reading

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- Warren French, "The Little Magazines in the Fifties," *College English* 22.6 (May 1961), 547-552.
- Beverly Gross, "Culture and Anarchy: What Ever Happened to Lit Magazines?" *The Antioch Review* 29.1 (Spring 1969), 43-56.
- Elliott Anderson and Mary Kinzie (eds.), *The Little Magazine in America: A Modern Documentary History* (Yonkers, NY: Pushcart Press, 1978).
- Jayne E. Marek, *Women Editing Modernism: "Little" Magazines and Literary History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995).
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- Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips (eds.), *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960-1980* (New York Public Library/Granary Books, 1998).
- Mark S. Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905-1920* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001).
- David Miller and Richard Price, *British Literary Magazines: A History and Bibliography of 'Little Magazines'* (The British Library/Oak Knoll Press, 2006).
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- Dean Irvine, *Editing Modernity: Women and Little-Magazine Cultures in Canada, 1916-1956* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).
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- Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman, *Modernism in the Magazines: An Introduction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).
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- Eric B. White, *Transatlantic Avant-Gardes: Little Magazines and Localist Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).
- Ian Morris and Joanne Diaz (eds.), *The Little Magazine in Contemporary America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
- Evangelhia Stead, "Reconsidering 'Little' versus 'Big'"

Periodicals,” *Journal of European Periodical Studies* 1.2 (Winter 2016), 1-17.

Sophie Seita, “Tom Raworth’s Little Magazines: *Outburst*, *Before Your Very Eyes!*, and *Infolio*,” *Critical Quarterly* 59.2 (July 2017): 11-33.

Eric Bulson, *Little Magazine, World Form* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

### *Web Resources*

- Modernist Journals Project. <<http://modjournal.org/journals.html>>. “The Modernist Journals Project is a major resource for the study of modernism in the English-speaking world, with periodical literature as its central concern. Our primary mission is to produce digital editions of culturally significant magazines from around the early 20th century and make them freely available to the public on our website.”

- RealityStudio. <<https://realitystudio.org/>>. “RealityStudio is the web’s leading resource dedicated to William S. Burroughs and the underground press in the 1960s.”

- Jacket2 Reissues. <<http://jacket2.org/reissues>>. “Jacket2 Reissues is an archival platform for magazines committed to poetry and poetics. We publish fully searchable facsimile PDF editions, scanned in high resolution and organized with bookmarked content.”

- Blue Mountain Project: Historic Avant-Garde Periodicals for Digital Research. <<http://bluemountain.princeton.edu/exist/apps/bluemountain/index.html>>. “The Blue Mountain Project is the common work of scholars, librarians, curators, and digital humanities researchers whose mission is to create a freely available digital repository of important, rare, and fragile texts that both chronicle and embody the emergence of cultural modernity in the West.”

- Open Door Archive. <<http://opendoor.northwestern.edu/archive/>>. “Open Door Archive is a digital repository and exhibition space dedicated to the print culture and multi-media archives of multiethnic poetry in and beyond the US. As our name suggests, we commit to providing free and open access to understudied, neglected, or previously inaccessible materials.”

*This consciousness within her  
uncurled itself upon the rollers of objective experience  
printing impressions  
vaguely and variedly  
upon Ova  
in place of the more formulate education  
coming naturally  
to the units of a national instigation*

—Mina Loy  
*from "Ova, Among the Neighbors"*

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- 9 Cultural Shape-Shifters: *Cartonera* Publishers  
by Ksenija Bilbija
- 10 Teaching the Little Magazine  
by Michael Leong