

RE MAGAZINE AND THE POLITICS OF THE LITTLE MAGAZINE

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ABSTRACT

Jesse Adams Webb: *Re Magazine* and the Politics of the Little Magazine (Under the direction of Dr. Samir Husni)

The little magazine played a widely significant role in the political and cultural history of Western civilization. Literary and ephemeral in nature, the little magazine gave birth to Modernism in the early 20th century by publishing the works of little known authors such as William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot to name a few. Later, the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States of America recognized the influential role of the little magazine and began funding magazines that spoke to the anti-communist left in Europe and in the Americas at the beginning of the Cold War. While the political weight of the little magazine has been largely recognized by scholars, the reasons for its unique ability to affect cultural and political movements have not been closely studied. The unique form of the printed magazine—its departmental structure, its binding, and its curation of diverse voices under a single theme or call to action—allowed editors and contributors to reframe the dialectics of the era. In the digital age, that form's relevance has been questioned. Nonetheless, the printed magazine still plays a valuable role in modern culture and should not be abandoned simply because new forms arise.

Re Magazine, a new publication that curates public domain content with striking relevance to current events, demonstrates the continued relevance of print in the digital age. A distillation of the elements that made little magazines influential in the 20th century, *Re Magazine* prompts readers to relive the past, and to reconsider the future.

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Introduction

The art of dialogue is the crux of civilization. Humankind's ability to converse first allowed us to settle conflicts by means other than harm. Oral traditions established a continuity of culture in early societies. The ancient Greeks recited epics to extol virtues they held dear and to condemn vices considered detrimental to the public order. Then came the written word, the Latin Bible, and the Christianization of Europe. Then came Johannes Gutenberg and the printing press; Martin Luther, the Reformation, and the Thirty Years War; William Tyndale and the rise of the vernacular. The politics of the printed word and the literary dialectics it begot would thereafter shape every conflict and cultural development in European and, ultimately, global history.

Fast-forward several centuries and cross the Atlantic. The year is 1741 and John Webbe approaches Andrew Bradford with Ben Franklin's idea; they publish the first magazine on the continent, aptly named *The American Magazine*; three days later, Franklin publishes *The General Magazine*.¹ Though both magazines only last for three issues and six issues respectively, the periodical form would soon flourish in the United States.²

The influence of the magazine as it evolved in the 19th and 20th centuries—in America and abroad—should be considered in its own right, separate from that of other

1. Roland E. Wolseley. *The Magazine World: An Introduction to Magazine Journalism*. (New York: Printice-Hall, Inc., 1951), 11.

2. Ibid.

periodical forms. Gutenberg's press may have allowed for the mass distribution and permanence of increasingly vernacular dialogues, which undoubtedly elevated the political position of the commoner, but the magazine gave new *form* to these dialogues. Particularly at the turn of the 20th century, the magazine played a crucial role in making sense of a fragmented world. The plurality of voices offered by the polymedial form along with its periodical structure constituted of bound issues created a new method of dialogue. Poetry, prose, literary criticism, editorial opinion, political discourse, news commentary—all of these and more worked together in the magazines of the fin-de-siecle to represent and attribute meaning to the complexities of the modernizing world.

One aspect of the magazine that endowed it with influence is its periodical structure. The periodical press developed alongside the Industrial revolution and thus became the popular method of discourse. However, 'periodical' is a broad category, implying only that the publication is printed at regular intervals. As Dean Mott remarks, "the newspaper [...] never has been fully accepted in that status and for more than a century has been recorded under its own name, as distinguished from the periodical."³ Thus, the term 'periodical' came to be applied to publications for reasons other than just their printing schedule. Other periodicals may take the form of pamphlets, newsletters, or book reviews, but the magazine stands out as the most deliberately assembled member of the category. Sven Birkerts, author of *The Gutenberg Elegies*, posits:

What animates the process of publishing a magazine is the underlying belief in the importance of this curating. There is a mandate to create an expressive totality, but also to memorialize a distinct and unrepeatable passage in

3. Ibid., 8.

our ongoing collective experience. Here everything has bearing. The look of the cover, the kind of visual portfolio that we have selected. This assembling needs to happen in real time and real space. If we did not have the anchoring dimensionality of it all, we would be doing nothing more than sending one single flare or firework into the night sky.⁴

The magazine, then, can be understood as an elevated form of periodical—one whose binding and cover, departmental organization, and attention to the curation of disparate elements imparts the unique ability to “create an expressive totality.” The magazine has a longer shelf life than the newspaper, pamphlet, or other less deliberately assembled periodicals because of the “anchoring dimensionality” of its mutually dependent parts.

Magazines can also play a unique plurality of roles. Modern magazines can serve as educators, informants, reflectors of society, entertainers, initiators of new ideas, purveyors of literature, and influencers of culture.⁵ They can target consumers or tradesmen; they can personify a brand or even a faith; they can connect members of organizations, or they can circulate pornography.⁶ The myriad functions of the magazine highlight the literary form’s flexibility and permeation in contemporary culture.

The purpose of this research is to illuminate the historical influence of one such role taken on by the little magazine in the 20th century. Either political or literary in nature—but more often both—these magazines came into vogue in the 18th century, but did not mature until the end of the 19th century. In maturation, they gave birth to

4. Sven Birkerts, “The Little Magazine in the World of Big Data,” *Sewanee Review* 123, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 230.

5. Samir Husni, “The Role of Magazines in the 21st Century” (presentation at the University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS, September, 2016).

6. Ibid.

Modernism and all of the societal developments accompanying the art movement. One of the Modernists who owed their careers to the little magazine, William Carlos Williams, extolled the virtues of the literary form:

The little magazine is something I have always fostered; for without it, I myself would have been early silenced. To me it is one magazine, not several. It is a continuous magazine, the only one I know with an absolute freedom of editorial policy and a succession of proprietorships that follows a democratic rule. There is absolutely no dominating policy permitting anyone to dictate anything. When it is in any way successful, it is because it fills a need in someone's mind to keep going. When it dies, someone else takes it up in some other part of the country—quite by accident—out of a desire to get the writing down on paper.⁷

As will be explored in greater depth, the little magazine played a crucial part not only in launching the careers of the 20th century's greatest writers, but also in giving a voice to marginalized counterpublics. As a purveyor of literature in all its forms—literary criticism and political editorial as well as poetry and fiction—and as a part of a “succession of proprietorships that follows a democratic rule” the little magazine developed its own politics, particularly during the inter-war period of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. The dialectic form embodied by the little magazine reflects—and arguably affected—the changing cultures of 20th century societies as they responded to the disorienting aftermath of the First World War.

By first examining the development of the periodical as a literary form, and then elucidating the impact of little magazines on 20th century culture and politics, I will reveal that the politics of the little magazine developed primarily because of its form and, finally, that this form should not be abandoned in the digital age. The dialectic of the

7. Kurowski, Travis. “An Oral History of the Literary Magazine: 1953-Present.” *Mississippi Review* 36, no. 3 (2008): 212-217.

printed magazine is a perfected one, and should not be considered dated simply because new forms present themselves.

1 | The Magazine Dialectic

The philosophical implications of the magazine as a journalistic and literary form took more than two hundred years to gestate before manifesting in Modernism at the turn of the 20th century. This long period of development can be explained by examining the history of the periodical as it evolved in tandem with the enlightened world.

Periodicals and newspapers shared many of the same characteristics in the 18th century. For instance, Britain's first periodical, published by Daniel Defoe in 1704, covered the same areas as the newspapers of the time—domestic affairs, national policies, and book reviews.⁸ But *The Review*, or “Defoe’s Review” as it came to be known, did diverge from traditional journalism in one major respect: a department devoted entirely to “literature, manners, and morals.”⁹ This department would become the basis on which a new branch of journalistic periodicals would grow. Inspired by Defoe’s *Review*, Richard Steele and Joseph Addison would publish the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* in 1709, publications that better fit the definition of the magazine and that claimed as their purpose “to influence public taste and morality as well as politics.”¹⁰ This ideological split would help establish a defined space for magazines in the media landscape. The magazine sought to influence rather than just to inform; it commented on the meaning of the news and embraced editorial opinion as its *raison d'état*. The magazine also

7. Wolseley, *The Magazine World*, 10.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

published less frequently than newspapers, allowing its contributors to digest a week's or a month's worth of news before forming a conclusive opinion and disseminating that opinion to the reader.

The physical characteristics of the early magazines further distinguished them from newspapers. By the mid-19th century, newspapers were printed on sheets up to five feet long that required multiple folds to stay together; in contrast, magazines were folded once, and fell apart so often that publishers began to bind them.¹¹ Consequently, magazines became defined by their covers and binding, a tactile difference that carried profound psychological implications.

The normalization of periodicals during this era meant that a multitude of publications with a variety of printing schedules competed in the same marketplace. Mark W. Turner noted that “the periodical press was both one of the innovations of modernity that reflected shifting understandings of time and of the ‘schedules and patterns [that] shape ... everyday life’ and a source of the anxiety that accompanied those shifts.”¹² In the industrializing and imperial world of Britain, the periodical changed not only the form in which readers learned information, but also the timeframe. The periodical created a tension between novelty and stability, between the anticipation of the next issue and the amassing archive of past issues¹³. No one needed to read yesterday's

¹¹ Ibid., 8.

¹² Mark W. Turner, “Periodical Time in the Nineteenth Century,” *Media History* 8, no. 2 (2002): 187-188.

¹³ James Mussell, “Of the making of magazines there is no end: W.T. Stead, Newness, and the Archival Imagination,” (*English Studies In Canada* 41, no. 1, March 2015), 70.

issue of the newspaper, but the content in magazines and other periodicals had a longer shelf life.

As magazines evolved and became more and more distinct from newspapers and other periodicals, they also confronted issues such as British imperialism in markedly different ways. In the second half of the 19th century, for instance, the *Illustrated London News* struggled with the “rhetorical problem of representing increasingly vast and heterogenous spaces” to Londoners who did not register at the time how complex and far reaching the British empire had become.¹⁴ Newspapers had to compress global affairs onto limited page space in order to make the news digestible. Meanwhile, the media landscape had diversified to a great extent during the 19th century.¹⁵ Collier argues that these forces, along with a growing sense of alienation in England that disrupted the Victorian program of optimism and convention, forced readers to consider the medium through which they received information in new ways. He describes how “the increasing multiplicity and complexity of journalistic forms [...] contribute to a landscape of gathering awareness that language, form, and medium are ‘arbitrary and conventional,’ an awareness that undergirds the transition to high modernist formalism.”¹⁶ In short, the periodical form had become conventional, but the tide of progress occurring at the fin-de-

¹⁴ Patrick Collier, “Imperial/Modernist Forms in the *Illustrated London News*,” *Modernism/modernity* 19, no. 3 (September 2012): 488.

¹⁵ Jessica Pressman, *Digital Modernism: Making it New in New Media*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

¹⁶ Collier, “Imperial/Modernist Forms,” 511.

siecle brought more attention to this form, its obstacles and opportunities for representing an increasingly complex and unfamiliar world.

While Collier's analysis focuses on the *Illustrated London News*, his conclusions certainly apply to the magazine. The *ILN* grappled with the problem of condensing an entire empire's affairs into the limited space of the paper, but magazines undertook the burden of articulating opinions on, and ascribing meaning to, these affairs. As Margaret Beetham notes, "what distinguishes periodicals from most other commodities is that their primary function is to signify, to enter into the construction of meaning."¹⁷ The magazine proved to be an ideal medium for this construction at the end of the 20th century. The form itself—a collection of various literary and journalistic approaches to equally varied topics—opposed the "anxious Victorian belief in the power of form to model a centralized, comprehensive gaze that could keep a fragmented world in order."¹⁸ The newspaper, which condensed the world, could not accomplish what the magazine, which embraced the fragmented nature of the world, could in this era. James Mussel illustrates the qualities of the periodical that allowed it to thrive at this juncture:

No single issue [of a periodical] exists in isolation, but instead is haunted by the larger serial of which it is a part. [...] It insists on a formal continuity, repeated from the past and projected onwards into the future, providing a mediating framework whose purpose is to reconcile difference and present it in a form already known to readers. The new, whether it is the next installment of a story, a one-off essay on a

¹⁷ Margaret Beetham, "Towards the Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre," In *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, edited by Laurel Brake, Aled Jones, and Lionel Madden, 19-32. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1990.

¹⁸ Collier, "Imperial/Modernist Forms," 511.

new subject, or a piece of news, is always tempered, regulated within a formal framework that readers have seen before.¹⁹

In short, the periodical offered a sense of tradition, or convention, while simultaneously asserting its novelty with each new issue. Victorians could digest the changing world around them while placing each piece of news within the context of the issues that came before.

Moreover, the magazine served as a forum for dialogue over the issues facing modern society. Their proliferation by the turn of the century meant that this dialogue could take place over myriad forms and could include voices from otherwise marginalized sectors of society. Magazines exploited “the periodical’s capacity to produce publics and counterpublics via its rhythms of serialization, patterns of mediation and remediation, and production of alternative historiographies.”²⁰ They approached a fragmented world with a fragmented form, inviting interactions between readers and authors, creating communities of like-minded people. In so doing, magazines amplified the voices of the peripheral counterpublics. In this way, the magazine was the ideal medium for the birth of Modernism.

An apt comparison of the little magazine’s relationship to modernism would be the coffee house during the Enlightenment. Just as cafes in France promoted free, often contentious discussion and brought communities of prolific thinkers together, so did the

¹⁹ Faye Hammill, Paul Hjartarson, and Hannah McGregor, “Introducing Magazines and/as Media: The Aesthetics and Politics of Serial Form,” *English Studies In Canada* 41, no. 1 (March 2015): 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

little magazine. Except now, due in part to the commercialization of the periodical press, these dialogues were made permanent and available to all. The little magazines were not just receptacles of contemporary writing, they were “cultural productions created by individuals and communities who knew one another, who knew one another’s work, and who frequently criticized or outright attacked one another in the very pages which carried modernist writers into the literary marketplace.”²¹ Within the magazine, each page interacted with the next; even paratextual material—the masthead, advertisements, covers, etc.—played a role in this interaction. The purpose of these interactions was to assign meaning to the changing world. Faye Hammill argues that this “construction of cultural value is also a political act, and these different types of periodicals align themselves with different cultural strata not only through their visual and stylistic choices but also through their intermedial engagements.”²² The world of the magazine was not a vacuum, but a polymedial platform on which contributors and editors could test the conventions of form, interacting with media of all types including radio and eventually television, to create a fragmented and material representation of the modern world.

When the periodicals of the late 19th century are viewed in retrospect, their contribution to a larger social movement can be easily discerned. As each issue contributes to the larger periodical structure, “spontaneous and unexpected staccato-

²¹ Eric G. Waggoner, “Little Magazines & Modernism: New Approaches,” *William Carlos Williams Review* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 212.

²² Hammill, “Introducing Magazines and/as Media,” 12

movements are transformed into an ever broader curve.”²³ In this way, as Pierre Bordieu theorized, “the gathering together of the authors [...] that make up a literary review has as its genuine principle [...] social strategies close to those governing the constitution of a salon or a movement.”²⁴ Compared to the coffee shops and novels that fueled the Enlightenment, these periodicals were better suited to materialize the contests between public and counterpublic spheres that erupted at the fin-de-siecle. The structure of the literary review itself resembled that of social movements. Thus, the Victorian sense of control and convention was shattered by the democratizing effect of the modern periodical, particularly the little magazine.

²³ Matthew Philpotts, “Through Thick and Thin: On the Typology and Agency of Literary Journals,” *International Journal Of The Book* 7, no. 4 (September 2010): 62.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

2 | The Little Magazine

The little magazine exists across time and space, adopts a variety of physical forms, and plays many different roles in affecting the progress of society. But despite its nebulous properties, the little magazine has a unique personality when understood in the context of the history of intellectualism. Ephemeral and experimental in nature, the little magazine has been the object of much critical study and literary debate, particularly regarding its contribution to the birth of Modernism. As the medium for some of the greatest writing in the twentieth century, it is crucial to recognize the little magazine's contribution to the political zeitgeist not only as a collection of influential arts and letters but also as a physical form that is conducive to this influence.

The most illustrative way to distinguish the little magazine from other literary forms is by comparison to the 'thick journal.' Whereas the thick journal is an extensive body of work with a broad conceptual scope representing a variety of discourses and often lasting for decades, the little magazine, or 'thin journal,' can be as small as a pamphlet, lives short life spans, and in most cases operates according to some literary or social agenda.²⁵ The distinction, then, lies not only in the physical dimensions of the journal (i.e. number of pages) but even more significantly in its conceptual framework.

The thick journal mediates broad literary and social criticism targeted toward a small class of intellectuals and serves to set and defend the literary standards of the society to which it belongs. For instance, the thick journal in Russia (*tolsty zhurnal*) and

²⁵ Ibid., 55.

in Germany (*kulturzeitschrift*) formed the backbone of these nations' intellectual cultures during the 19th and 20th centuries.²⁶ These dense, compendium-like publications valued breadth, quality, and tradition above all else and thus occupied a conservative space in the sphere of contemporary literature.²⁷ While they gambled every once in a while on publishing an unknown writer, thick journals generally favored established authors.

Publishers invested in journals like *Merkur* and *Die neu Rundschau* for one reason: brand equity. By subsidizing thick journals, publishers attached their brand name to the product and expected the prestige earned by the journals to reflect back on that brand, effectively translating symbolic capital into economic capital.²⁸ This institutional patron model helped the thick journals bring in reputable contributors and provided certain economic freedoms to the publications, but it also limited their ability to purvey progressive ideas and criticisms.²⁹ Ultimately, their reason for existence was to support an institution rather than the art of letters itself.

In contrast, the little magazines of the 20th century operated under a conceptual framework of novelty and experimentation. Endowed with relatively little economic or symbolic capital, small magazines were scrappy in their attempt to bring bold new work by unknown authors into the literary field. Ezra Pound gave three endearing names to the

²⁶ Ibid., 56, 57.

²⁷ Ibid., 57.

²⁸ Ibid., 58.

²⁹ Ibid., 55.

little magazine: “free,” “impractical,” and “fugitive.”³⁰ All three are apt. The little magazine is not bound by tradition, motivated by profit, or inclined to institutionalization. Rather than contribute to an longstanding intellectual dialogue (often accessible only to highly educated members of society), the little magazine sought to carve out space in the literary sphere for new dialogues, new methods of writing, and new perspectives. The befittingly named magazine *Others*, published in New York City between 1915 and 1919, exemplifies the ethos of the little magazine; as Flinn points out, “the magazine’s motto —‘The old expressions are always with us, and there are always Others’—deftly pushes the notion not of demolition or revolution but of a separate realm where the new formal opportunities afforded by free verse could be explored.”³¹ As a “separate realm” of conversation, the conceptual frameworks and anatomical structures of these magazines reflected, and even preceded, the changing political landscape at the turn of the 20th century.

The little magazine sprouted in America at the beginning of the 21st century and quickly took root. While the *North American Review*, America’s first literary magazine, had been operating in Boston since 1815, *Poetry* (1912) was the first American magazine that fit the conceptual framework of the little magazine. As Ezra Pound remarked in his discussion on what makes good poetry, “*Poetry* provided a place where the tennis about these ideas could be played. Miss Monroe never pretended to adopt either contemporary,

³⁰ Ezra Pound, “Small Magazines,” *The English Journal* 19, no. 9 (November 1930): 689-704.

³¹ Flinn, Anthony. “The Little Magazine *Others* and the Renovation of Modern American Poetry.” *William Carlos Williams Review* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 203.

European, or international criterion. Certain principles that Europe had accepted for eighty years have never penetrated her sanctum.”³² It is not exceptionally clear whether Pound meant this as praise or criticism (probably a mixture of both), but the program followed by *Poetry*'s founder and publisher Harriet Monroe proved successful nonetheless—*Poetry* remains one of the few magazines founded before the First World War that is still in circulation today. That program was one that welcomed unknown poets and allowed them room to test conventional forms and ideas. Among these obscure up-and-comers were Robert Frost, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Vachel Lindsay, and Edgar Lee Masters.³³

Following *Poetry*, little magazines came to dominate the literary scene in America. *The Little Review* in Chicago published its first issue in 1914, with *Others: A Magazine of the New Verse* printing the following year in New York City. Also in 1915 was published the first regional magazine, *The Midland*, in Iowa City. Meanwhile, expatriates were busy in Europe carving out a market for American literature.

One of these expatriates, Ezra Pound credited these seminal magazines with *civilizing, i.e. bringing international standards to*, American literature. By 1920, he surmised, his home country had arrived “at a new condition of things” where American literature could actually compete (economically and critically) on the international stage.³⁴

³² Pound, “Small Magazines,” 691.

³³ *Ibid.*, 692.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 698.

By the 1940s, little magazines like the *Kenyon Review* became associated with well-defined literary and academic circles. Others became overtly political. Leftist magazines gained increased readership as the Great Depression induced a greater appeal in Americans to communist sympathies. The Workers (Communist) Party of America launched *New Masses*, a reincarnation of *The Masses* (1911-17), in New York City in 1926. Initially moderate, *New Masses*, featured writing by a wide array of independent authors including Upton Sinclair, Ralph Ellison, and Langston Hughes. By the 1930s, though, *New Masses* came to represent the radical left, becoming a bastion for Marxist theory and proletarian literature. Other notable leftist magazines of the decade were *Modern Quarterly* (1923–40), *The Anvil* (1933–35), *Blast* (1933–34), and *Partisan Review* (1933–2003).

As little magazines aligned themselves with more clearly defined intellectual, theoretical, or political spheres, governments took notice. The social role of the little magazine was readily apparent, and with the end of the Second World War, it didn't take long before the paranoid victors found ways to weaponize the literary form.

Enter the Congress for Cultural Freedom, established in 1950 by the Central Intelligence Agency.³⁵ Headquartered in Paris, the CCF provided the CIA with “an opportunity to guarantee that anti-Communist ideas were not voiced only by reactionary speakers.”³⁶ The activities of the CCF were manifold, but most notably included advancing the notion of America's cultural sophistication in Europe and combatting the

³⁵ Patrick Iber, “Literary Magazines for Socialists Funded by the CIA, Ranked.” *The Awl Online*. August 24, 2015.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Soviet Union's propaganda efforts on the continent. One of the chief activities of the CCF was its funding and still-murky intervention in the affairs of little magazines in Europe and America, most notably the journal *Encounter*.

Encounter was published in London between 1953 and 1991. Edited by the American essayist Irving Kristol and English poet Stephen Spender, the magazine espoused left-of-center political discourse that was rarely critical of American foreign policy. Though unknown to its founders, the magazine received covert funding through the Congress for Cultural Freedom as part of a joint effort between the CIA and MI6 to combat the notion of Cold War neutralism. Their efforts succeeded. Historians often credit *Encounter* "with helping shift the British intellectual scene away from socialism and toward an 'Atlantic,' pro-U.S. outlook."³⁷

Encounter was not the only vessel of the CIA's agenda in the Cold War, nor were the agency's operations limited to the European continent. Many of the anti-communist leftists that the Congress for Cultural Freedom supported were the editors of American magazines.

Best known for first publishing Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail," *The New Leader* launched in the 1920s with the goal of giving voice to American socialism. When Sol Levitas took the reins in 1940, the magazine donned a strong anti-Soviet rhetoric presumably encouraged by the CIA. That being said, "the CIA actually thought that Levitas's anti-Communism was too ferocious, unrelenting, and

³⁷ Ibid.

‘conservative.’”³⁸ The CIA’s intention was to promulgate anti-communist sentiments within the left, rather than support outright conservatism.

Even the *Kenyon Review* and the *Paris Review* were tangled in the Congress for Cultural Freedom’s web in the 1950s and 1960s. Along with the *Hudson Review*, the *Sewanee Review*, *Poetry*, *Daedalus*, *Partisan Review*, and *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, the *Kenyon Review* “had hundreds and even thousands of copies purchased for distribution abroad by the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and sometimes received grants more directly.”³⁹ Likewise, the *Paris Review* benefited financially from interactions with the CCF mainly by way of advertising exchanges, reprints of *Review* interviews in other magazines in the CCF’s stable, and “joint employi” arrangements where both organizations teamed up to hire editors in Paris. While these entanglements can be seen as relatively harmless, the political implications were grand. For one, “America’s most celebrated apolitical literary magazine served, in part, as a covert international weapon of soft power.”⁴⁰ Moreover, the CCF’s mission and methods were antithetical to each other. In the attempt to bring the values of democracy and free society to the far corners of the world, the CCF undermined those values by subsidizing “free” magazines with government resources.

No matter the morality behind the Congress for Cultural Freedom, its extensive involvement in the ecosystem of little magazines indicates the power and necessity of the

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Joel Whitney, “Exclusive: The Paris Review, The Cold War and the CIA,” *Salon Online*. May 27, 2012.

literary form in free societies. By supporting these magazines, the CIA inadvertently fostered a boom in the American literary scene. The *Paris Review*, and the *Kenyon Review* have long been credited as the finest little magazines in the nation. The fact that both are still published today can be attributed in large part to the CIA's seed funding. Not only did the CIA's involvement attest to the political power wielded by little magazines, it legitimized future efforts by these magazines to investigate the social and political dynamics of American culture.

3 | The Contemporary Lit Mag

Excluding the major players like the *Paris Review* and the *Kenyon Review*—which had garnered enough readership to contest their inclusion in the category—little magazines more or less went underground during the 1960s. The avant garde movement revived the form by way of the underground press, but the magazines produced in this decade wielded limited influence beyond the small counterpublics to which they belonged. Among these were titles such as *New York Quarterly*, *Aphra*, *A Feminist Literary Magazine*, *The Little Magazine*, and *The American Review*.

Discussions about the literary magazine in the 21st century are often somewhat grim. Sven Birkerts, author of *The Gutenberg Elegies*, asked a telling question in his appraisal of the little magazine in the digital world: “are we publishing ourselves into oblivion?”⁴¹ The cynical answer here may be the best one: yes. In 2013, the number of literary magazines listed in *Poets & Writers* magazine’s database reached 866.⁴² The cause of this saturation can chiefly be attributed to the proliferation of MFA and other writing programs that each support their own publications at colleges and universities. In 2009, these programs numbered 822.⁴³ Also contributing to the explosion of literary magazines are advances in printing technology that have enabled independent or

⁴¹ Birkerts, “The Little Magazine,” 226.

⁴² Gabe Habash, “Literary Magazines Adapt to the Digital Age,” *Publishers Weekly* 260, no. 10 (March 11, 2013): 4.

⁴³ Andrew Richard Albanese, “The Staggering Work of Publishing Genius. (Cover story),” *Publishers Weekly* 257, no. 8 (February 22, 2010): 26.

alternative small presses to crop up across the United States. Sven Birkerts sees the contemporary literary magazine “as an item, an entity, in what has become a truly vast field of such entities, and also, increasingly, a pulsation in an almost borderless stream of electronic/digital pulsations.”⁴⁴ Though the literary magazine has always existed as a node in a larger ecosystem of publications, the overwhelming saturation of these magazines in the 21st century threatens to dilute their influence and undermine their politics.

The primary distinction between the contemporary literary magazine and the little magazines of the early 20th century is the loss of the feeling of “other.” As Birkerts points out, “Not entirely de-fanged, but subversion itself has been mostly ruled out in our saturated age.”⁴⁵ He illustrates the dramatically altered core ethos of these publications.

The literary journal, print and online, now looks to make its way in a culture of saturation. It caters—not strictly but significantly—to writing-program students and graduates eager to “credential” themselves, whether en route to book publication or teaching positions. The biographical notes confirm it. This is not an independent subculture as in former days, but a wing of the flourishing, university and college-based mainstream. Which is not to say that the work itself is mainstream in its character (though much of it is), but that the little magazine no longer serves a literature that is *other*—I don’t know that there even *is* such a thing. Maybe a consequence of the saturation is that we have lost that polarity: everything is . . . everything.⁴⁶

While the independent, little, or “free,” literary magazine may not bear easy comparison to those of the seminal years of Modernism, they still perform the crucial function of

⁴⁴ Birkerts, “The Little Magazine,” 225.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 228

introducing emerging writers to the literary marketplace. And yet, the politics of the little magazine has largely left this marketplace. Contributors to the independent reviews write not for an audience of readers, but of future employers, or else, simply to see their name on the contributors page and to include the publication's title in their bio.

All of this being said, there are still those literary magazines—few and far between—that stay true to the literary form's potential. Most notably among these must be *n+1*, the New York based project of Harvard Graduates that posits itself as a successor of the *Partisan Review*. Launched in 2003, *n+1* formed a reaction to the state of American politics and culture as the nation went to war in Iraq. One of the founding editors, Marco Roth, remarked, “for those of us who had been in college in the 1990s, [...] after the fall of the Berlin Wall, we were told it was the end of history, that there were no new ideas, and we either had to get on board or jump off.”⁴⁷ Moreover, the editors of *n+1* were frustrated by the state of literary magazines of the time. Journals like *The New Republic* and *The Believer*, they argued, had divided the purpose of the little magazine, the former devoting its pages to academic critique and the latter to fiction. “There had been a time,” Roth remembered, “when these were the same world. And you could encounter these in the same place, and there is no reason that academics can't read fiction in a journal, and that fiction writers might decide that they want to read an essay with philosophical bent.”⁴⁸ Indeed, the convergence of literary forms was the hallmark of

⁴⁷ Fred Rowland, Marco Roth, Keith Gessen, and Andrew Lopez, “n+1: The Temple University Libraries Interview,” *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* 2, no. 1 (2013): 2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

little magazines in the twentieth centuries, one of the key elements that endowed them with political force.

n+1 has in many ways modernized the core ethos of the early little magazines. Particularly as a voice for leftism during the Bush administration, *n+1* created space in the highly commercialized literary marketplace where intellectualism could be at once defended and advanced. While one critic of the magazine argued that “any actual influence enjoyed by the magazine was secondary to its role in the progressive imaginary,” that role is still important.⁴⁹ Progressivism in America has always carried with it a quixotic undertone. Within the pages of *n+1*, that quixotism could be critiqued and explored. The front of the book carries a section on the state of intellectual life, followed by a section on politics, which is in turn followed by the editorial well comprised of essays, fiction, translations, critiques, and memoirs.⁵⁰ This form allows all of these genres to interact with one another in a deliberate way. Marco Roth expands on this, saying “one thing we’ve also managed to do is combine genres. So as much as the essays in the well can be split up into the memoirist and the more analytical, we also have this funny way of blending them.”⁵¹ *n+1* clearly shows reverence for the potential of the printed periodical as a method of publication that enhances the politics of the contents by placing them within the context of a larger structure.

⁴⁹ Berk, Jamie. “The Intellectual Situation of *n+1*.” *American Circus*. December 23, 2011, par. 2.

⁵⁰ Rowland, “*n+1*: The Temple Universities,” 3

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

The hurdle, then, for the editors of $n+1$ was not to discover a new format in which to publish, but to reconcile the periodical's ideal structure with the increasing pressure to be present on the internet. Unsurprisingly, this hurdle looms before every member of the publishing industry.

4 | Magazines in the Digital Age

As the purpose of this research is to illuminate the role of the periodical form in amplifying the politics of the little magazine, it would be negligent not to consider the future of this form. The internet can at once be seen as the ideal evolution of the periodical form or as the death knell in its relevance. While no clear answer presents itself in the relative nascency of the internet, certain realities can be identified.

First, the democratizing effects of the internet cannot be understated. There are virtually no boundaries preventing any writer from publishing their work (allowing that ‘published’ can be applied to anything uploaded to the web). Seeing the opportunity, “a generation of tech-savvy, culture-minded writers have spawned a wave of DIY presses not unlike the alternative record labels that once energized the music industry.”⁵² These presses offer outlets for writers flustered by the increasingly closed off publishing industry. Moreover, many see the internet as a venue where literature can not only be purveyed, but can actually thrive. Michael Hennessy, editor of the online poetry magazine *Jacket2*, believes that the availability of the internet “complements poetry’s zero-sum economic realities [...] there’s a great freedom in not being limited by the material or chronological constraints of traditional print publishing.”⁵³ The internet, then, solves the economic problems that have perpetually faced little magazines while at the same time removing the physical “constraints” of print publishing.

⁵² Albanese, “The Staggering Work,” 26.

⁵³ Habash, “Literary Magazines Adapt,” 4.

But along with these democratizing effects come certain costs. For one, little magazines no longer play the role of gatekeeper, at least not in any significant way. The ease of publishing appeals to authors, but it does nothing to help the reader who is presumably already overwhelmed by the sheer number of literary outlets available to them. The influence of *Poetry*, for instance, is rooted in Harriet Monroe's willingness to publish unknown poets, but the value of that willingness would have been diminished had she published *every* unknown poet. Secondly, the "material and chronological constraints" of traditional print publishing also add material and chronological *value* to the work. As discussed in length already, the ability to place a piece of writing in a specific place and time and to position that piece deliberately within a larger, defined context stimulates the construction of meaning. Moreover, the tangibility of a publication like a printed magazine has its own psychological effects on the reader. As Sven Birkerts insists, "The root of everything for me remains material, tactile, possibly even fetishistic. It has to do with possession, covetousness, about the reality of a made thing."⁵⁴ Admitting that 'reality' has lost some of its meaning in a society pervaded by digital augmentation, this sentiment still holds weight. When a reader holds a magazine in hand, they possess it; the writing and images therein belong to them. A two-dimensional screen has no such effect.

Another reality of digital publishing is the death of context. The *Illustrated London News* of the 19th century compressed the known world into an England-centric configuration, belying the complexity of the British Empire and the cultures it interacted

⁵⁴ Birkerts, "The Little Magazine," 230.

with. Just so does the framework of internet aggregation. For instance, *n+1*'s Marco Roth, in discussing the differences between writing for the internet and writing for print, remarked, "the way people quote you on the web is different. In some ways, the rules become stricter, Your argument better be in your first paragraph, there better be something for the reader to hang onto."⁵⁵ Due to the current methods of interactivity on the web, i.e. social media, the content itself must adapt to the reality of short attention spans and the decontextualizing effects of 'sharing.'

Despite these challenges, magazines are finding ways to do just that: adapt. In fact, Lorin Stein of the *Paris Review* argues that "this moment belongs to the little magazines [...] While subscriptions to the glossies keep going down across the board, ours keep going up. Their ad sales are plummeting; over the last year, ours more than doubled."⁵⁶ The lauded and longstanding magazine's success in the transition to hybrid print/digital publishing encourages optimism. "The trick with new technologies and platforms," says Stein, "is figuring out how they can help you—rather than tailoring your mission to match what they can do."⁵⁷ Clearly, the wealth of opportunity provided by the internet in regard to magazine publishing has yet to be fully explored. Considering the nascency of the digital realm, there is much room for experimentation. In Ezra Pound's words, "honest literary experiment, however inclusive, however dismally it fail, is of infinitely more value to the intellectual life of a nation than exploitation (however

⁵⁵ Rowland, "n+1: The Temple Universities," 6,7.

⁵⁶ Habash, "Literary Magazines Adapt," 5.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

glittering) of mental mush and otiose habit.”⁵⁸ Whether the printed periodical has become “otiose habit” can be argued, but its endowment of influence to little magazines should certainly not be understood as the *only* method by which they can achieve political relevance.

Ultimately, the assimilation of literary magazines into the digital realm should be approached with enthusiasm tempered by deliberation. The opportunity to experiment with form and function is great, but the forms that have already proved successful should not be abandoned. The printed magazine and the digital magazine have complementary strengths and weaknesses. Keith Gessen, another founding editor of *n+1*, provides valuable commentary at this juncture:

I would like for them [supporters of digital publication] to start thinking a little bit differently about the web, as something that has its own rules, that has its own politics, and its own way of being. And it’s not just going to become a conduit for these other things, right, especially not for print. So, you know, it’s differences of economics, but it’s mostly differences in the way that people experience it.⁵⁹

The politics of the little magazine is inextricably tied to its physical, periodical form. By no means should that indicate that the internet cannot endow literature with its own politics. Still, perhaps the periodical is not made obsolete by this new virtual medium. Sven Birkerts suggests that the little magazine need only change the role it plays in society to remain a literary form with its own politics, its own point of view, its own ability to construct meaning:

⁵⁸ Pound, “Small Magazines,” 699.

⁵⁹ Rowland, “n+1: The Temple Universities,” 7.

If the original mission of these culturally marginal magazines was to push back against the entrenched mainstream, to move forward—artistically—then part of their function now might be more *conservative*, at least in the root sense of that word. I mean: the literary magazine's function might be to run counter to the streaming evanescence of the world as it has become, to arrest the attention of readers, offering aesthetically rich aggregations that have a chance to become reflective occasions.⁶⁰

What was once culturally marginal has now become mainstream, which is not to abjure the little magazine's relevance but rather to re-asses its function. As a now-conventional literary form, perhaps the little magazine should no longer bear the burden of experimentation but instead embrace an aesthetic of tradition. It is poised now to represent an ideal, a perfected form by which to compare innovations occurring in the digital realm.

⁶⁰ Birkerts, "The Little Magazine," 231.

The culture of literary magazines is as vibrant as ever, but something is missing. Universities and generous patrons may fund more and more magazines and the costs associated with running these magazines may plummet by way of digital publishing, but how will this ever-expanding ecosystem of journals find readers? Moreover, as the sheer amount of literature in the world increases with each new day, the critically important dialogues produced yesterday disappear into a sea of perceived irrelevance. But anyone who studies history understands that the mistakes made a month ago, a year ago, or even a century ago must always be remembered lest they be made once more.

Introducing *Re*, the magazine of borrowed writing curated to re-inform our dialogues, reinvigorate our literature, and reframe our history. Each issue will purvey writing by the dead, for the living, deliberately organized according to the current landscape of the human condition and our relevant past. *Re* Magazine is a new quarterly publication that makes the past accessible to a young generation of readers. Comprised of public domain writing with contextualizing introductions, *Re* is the model for the future of print. Its content will never compete with digital publications, but rather complement them. A reader may scan their newsfeed for daily generated content, but only in the printed pages of *Re* will they spend time with content written by the dead, for the living.

Re Magazine currently exists as an executable business plan, which can be found in the appendix, accompanied by a prototype of the first issue. *Re* Magazine won the Magazine Innovation Center's inaugural award for best new magazine concept in April of 2017.

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APPENDIX

Re

*

The magazine of borrowed writing curated to re-inform our dialogues, reinvigorate our literature, and reframe our history. Each issue will purvey writing by the dead, for the living, deliberately organized according to the current landscape of the human condition and our relevant past.

*

Published quarterly in themed issues

Cover Price: \$9.99

Subscription Price: \$31.96 for 4 issues

Projected Circulation: 50,000

Ad Rate: \$3,250 for full color page

CPM: 65

Executive Summary

I sat at a tiny desk in a room full of books reading two hundred pages of garbage. My job was to sift through manuscripts submitted to the literary agency, all the while hungering to read the books already published and staring down on me tauntingly. As I gazed at the shelves that spanned every wall of the office, I realized that before I read all of these contemporary novels I should read the classics—the Woolfs and the Steinbecks and the Austens. But where would I find the time or motivation to flip through tomes with stale covers and small print as I worked toward a degree and started a career?

The answer would become *Re Magazine*, a quarterly publication that reinvigorates the past so that we may reimagine the future. *Re* curates public domain content—be it novels, journalism, fiction, radio transmissions, artwork, letters, speeches, and more—that bears striking relevance to current events. Guided by the history being made every day, *Re* presents the reader with the surprising similarities and stark, often comical, contrasts of life as it was lived a century, or even longer, ago. Our motto, *by the dead, for the living*, bears *Re*'s message that the lives and creations of our ancestors were meant to continually inform the progress of mankind.

With every passing day, our collective memory bends to the might of the internet, our mistakes repeat themselves, and our poetic spirit diminishes. The lessons learned from our histories wither as our newsfeeds regenerate. *Re Magazine* will renew the dialogues of our forbearers. Particularly in this age of “fake news,” distrust in journalists, and google-induced information overload, readers are looking for content that they can trust. In the pages of *Re Magazine*, they will find classic literature that they never got around to reading, enlivened by modern typefaces and abridged or serialized for easy digestion. They will find influential articles, groundbreaking speeches, and chilling radio transmissions that even their parents forgot existed. In the pages of *Re*, readers will find the past reborn.

By presenting the literature and dialogues that have shaped the world we live in today and revamping them with a modern aesthetic, *Re* is on a mission to heal the collective memory of our readers, to allow them a brief moment in their day to read content that matters, and that has mattered for some time.

Departments

Reader,

Quarterly letter summarizing current issue and recalling relevant current events since past issue.

Re:

Letters from readers will be featured in the front of the book to address content in past issues. This department will extend the conversations prompted with each issue and will also make up much of *Re*'s online presence.

Rewind

The front of the book will feature a graphic timeline of all events discussed in the issue as well as events that contextualize the focus of the issue.

Recurrent Events

By republishing public domain articles from newspapers and magazines, speeches, radio transcripts and other relevant content, this department will shed light on those past events that bear striking resemblance to the modern world.

The Cellar

Vintage literature revitalized by modern typefaces and accompanying images. Public domain novels, nonfiction, and drama will be abridged and/or serialized over the course of several issues depending on the length and topic of the novel as well as the themes of the subsequent issues.

So Runs the World Away

The most famous and influential authors often lived unconventional lives. How those lives ended has always sparked curiosity and intrigue in the general public. This department will share stories of the fascinating lives and deaths of the most prolific writers and artists in history.

To The Yet Unknowning

Countless academics and professionals today boast valuable wisdom concerning the people and events in their fields of interest. This department will publish transcripts of conversations between three experts in diverse, but complementary fields.

Storehouse

This sponsored section will give companies the opportunity to tell the history of their brand. The only requirement for contributing sponsors is to focus on the story rather than any particular product.

Rememory

How do we remember history today? This feature section will explore various ways that attention toward our histories manifests in modern culture.

Audience

Re Magazine will target audiences who are enthusiastic readers of literature, who consider themselves up to speed with current events, and who only read material from sources they trust. As there are no magazines quite like *Re*, we will look for an audience in readers and advertisers of magazines operating in the genre of literature. In this way, we will be “digging a hole,” filling a need by delivering respected writing to readers without gambling on the quality of the contemporary literary landscape.

Target Demographics:

- 50% male, 50% female
- Median age: 30
- Median household income: \$20,000

Target Psychographics:

- 30% of readers spend 3 or more hours reading every day
- 75% of readers keep every issue they buy
- 25% of readers have had an article or book published
- 75% of readers consume spirits
- 60% of readers graduated college

Re Magazine Personification

Re Magazine is a disillusioned American exhausted by the pontifications of contemporary media, outwardly skeptical but inwardly idealistic in his vision of the future, and egotistically proud of his own status as a well-read global citizen. *Re* Magazine is an expat who found out he hated Paris so he eventually settled for a teaching job back home. But in the small town he moves back to, he is the epitome of culture and forward thinking. He spends his free time reading old or out of print newspapers, magazines, and literature and contemplates their relevance in the world he lives in now. *Re* Magazine is ambitious, young, and always seeking to show off his knowledge. While some might find him high-brow, they cannot argue that he doesn't know his stuff, and secretly, they want to know it too.

Competition

Public Domain Offerings

There are no public domain publications quite like *Re Magazine* in its mission for relevance and accessibility. That being said, websites like The Public Domain Review and Project Gutenberg do publish collections of public domain content, including essays, novels, etc. Still, these sites operate more like independent presses, selling or giving away individual, themed books. Therefore, these sites will serve less as competition, and more as resources.

Literary Magazines

The literary magazine landscape is quite large, but few titles appeal to a mass audience. Famed publications like *The Paris Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, *Granta*, *Deadhorse*, and many others operate largely on the patron donor model and target their content toward small coteries of intellectuals. While *Re Magazine* is literary in nature, it diverges significantly from traditional literary magazines by making its content accessible and attractive to a much larger audience.

Consumer Magazines

Re Magazine will compete with consumer magazines more on the basis of audience than on the basis of content. In other words, the magazine will not be very similar to the magazines whose audience we'll try to steal. Commercial literary publications like *The Oxford-American* and *The New Yorker* have consistent readers that I believe will be attracted to *Re Magazine* for many of the same reasons that they currently read our competition. Inevitably, *Re Magazine* will compete with all consumer magazines on the newsstands. As our content will have a wide range of perspectives, even readers who typically pick up *People* or other consumer magazines at the airport or at Barnes and Nobles might be inclined to read the variety of literature in *Re Magazine* instead.

Non-magazine Competition

There are many presses that reproduce public domain work. They all do it poorly. Penguin Classics, for instance, repackages old writing in stale, boring, and sometimes depressing covers and small print. *Re Magazine's* mission will be not only to republish old writing, but to reinvigorate it. The style of the magazine will have a very contemporary feel, and will make the old writing appear just like contemporary writing.

Advertising

The advertising in *The New Yorker* and *The Oxford-American* is a great example of what might be found in *Re Magazine*. Examples might include Netflix and other premiering television shows, watch/jewelry companies, newly published books (we will publish excerpts of contemporary literature), colleges and preparatory schools, credit card companies, museums and other cultural institutions, spirits brands and more. These advertisers will flock to *Re Magazine* because unlike magazines that publish contemporary literature, *Re Magazine*'s content will be fully established as top-notch writing. Furthermore, they will see that *Re Magazine* appeals to ambitious, wealthy, and culturally involved readers. Advertisements can also be uniquely positioned with appropriate content. For example, Armani might buy a page across from *The Great Gatsby*, REI across from *Call of the Wild*, Kay Jewelers across from *Persuasion*, etc. People who read classic literature like to imagine themselves as the characters, so what better way than to buy products that contribute to those lifestyles. Advertisers might even be encouraged to use renderings of these characters in their advertisements. Especially considering the trend in Hollywood toward remake after remake, these movie and television productions can advertise next to the actual literature that inspired them. The next Marvel movie can advertise in a reproduction of one of those comics, the new James Bond movie across from writing by Ian Fleming. The possibilities are endless.

Our target audience is split gender (leaning male), educated, and upper-middle class to upper class. Our advertisers will reflect this. Here's a list of potential advertisers who already buy space in our competition:

Citi Group
Netflix
Penguin
HarperCollins
Rolex
Microsoft
Hermes
MailChimp
American Express
Morgan Stanley
Burberry
Jack Daniels

Summary

Concept: Reinvigorating public domain content for the modern reader, curating histories with striking relevance to current events, telling important stories through diverse and complementary literary forms.

Audience: Disillusioned millennials and avid readers of any age. 50/50 male/female split.

Competition: Not-for-profit literary magazines (*The Paris Review*), consumer literary magazines (*The New Yorker*, *The Oxford-American*), consumer magazines on newsstands (*People*, *Vogue*, *Cosmopolitan*, *GQ*, *Esquire*, *Rolling Stone*, etc.).

Advertisers: High-end consumer goods, spirits, publishing houses, cultural institutions, entertainment companies, and more. CPM = 65.

Circulation: Targeted 50,000 circulation by end of year 2. 80/20 subscribers/newsstands.