

**Make Contact:**

**Contributive Bookselling and the Small Press in Canada Following the Second World War**

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines booksellers in multiple roles as cultural agents in the small press field. It proposes various ways of understanding the work of booksellers as actively shaping the production, distribution, reception, and preservation of small press works, arguing that bookselling is a small press act unaccounted for in existing scholarship. It is structured around the idea of “contributive” bookselling from Nicky Drumbolis, wherein the bookseller “adds dimension to the cultural exchange [...] participates as user, maker, transistor” (“this fiveyear list”). The questions at the heart of this dissertation are: How does the small press, in its material strategies of production and distribution, reshape the terms of reception for readers? How does the bookseller contribute to these processes? What does independent bookselling look like when it is committed to the cultural and aesthetic goals of the small press? And what is absent from literary and cultural records when the bookseller is not accounted for?

This dissertation covers a period from 1952 to the present day. I begin by positing Raymond Souster’s “Contact” labour as an influential model for small press publishing in which the writer must adopt multiple roles in the communications circuit in order to construct and educate a community of readers. I then examine the bookseller catalogue as a bibliographic, critical, and pedagogical genre of publication that mediates productive encounters between readers and books. I next position the material, affective, and effective labour of the bookseller within the small press gift economy. Finally, I theorize the bookstore as a potential small press archive that functions as a viable counterweight to institutional collection and preservation. My reconsideration of the labour of the bookseller realigns relations between production, distribution, reception, documentation, and preservation of

small press publications, making possible a more complete accounting of the histories of the book and of the small press in Canada.

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“A book has neither object nor subject; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds. To attribute the book to a subject is to overlook this working of matters, and the exteriority of their relations. It is to fabricate a beneficent God to explain geological movements. In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification. Comparative rates of flow on these lines produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary, of acceleration and rupture. All this, lines and measurable speeds, constitutes an *assemblage*. A book is an assemblage of this kind, and as such is unattributable.”

—Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (4)

“The only exact knowledge there is, is the knowledge of the date of publication and the format of books.”

—Anatole France, quoted in Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library” (60)

## Introduction

### “the gesture made by a future reader”

“The bookseller is a transcendental reader: she provides her clients with the conditions of possibility for reading. [...] The election and presentation, the whole argumentative, rhetorical, and encyclopedic apparatus of which the bookstore is the material machine in action, and of which booksellers are the inventive soul, all of that leads to the gesture made by a future reader.”

—Jean-Luc Nancy, *On the Commerce of Thinking: Of Books and Bookstores* (36-37)

“Bookselling was and is for me a cultural and political expression, an expression of progressive change, of challenge to oppressive authority, of a search for a community of values which can act as an underpinning of a better world. The true profit in bookselling is the social profit; the bottom line, the measure of the impact of the bookshop on the community.”

—David Schwartz, quoted in Jeremy Garber,  
“Bookselling in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: There Will Always Be Bookstores”

This dissertation examines booksellers in multiple roles as cultural agents in the small press field. It is exploratory, rather than exhaustive, proposing various ways of understanding the work of booksellers as actively shaping the production, distribution, reception, and preservation of small press works through a series of case studies. Instigated by Robert Darnton’s assertion that “more work needs to be done on the bookseller as a cultural agent” (78), I argue that bookselling is a small press act unaccounted for in existing scholarship, and that the bookseller is a cultural agent that must be considered when studying the formation of literary communities and the circulation of their works. Bookselling is traditionally viewed as marginal to more ‘central’ acts in the communications circuit (such as writing or publishing);

this marginality gives it a particular resonance with small press labour, itself a centrifugal force in Canadian literature. My reconsideration of the labour of the bookseller realigns relations between publishing, distribution, documentation, and preservation of small press publications, making possible a more complete accounting of the small press in Canada.

Understanding the history of the small press in Canada necessarily involves attending to the history of the book and the history of Canadian literature, and all three require closer attention to the bookseller as a cultural agent than has previously been given. It is easy to disregard bookselling as a middle step, as a financial necessity that occurs between writing, publishing, and reading, but the work of the bookseller is vital to that more visible and recognized work and certain acts of bookselling are not only in keeping with the terms of their cultural setting (in this case, the small press), but actively intervene in and influence the shape of the cultural field around them. Citing D.F. McKenzie's landmark assertion that the "essential task of the bibliographer is to establish the facts of transmission for a particular text" (McKenzie, "Printers of the Mind" 61), Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker argue,

the multiple forces which have worked and still work to allow books to survive for us to study so that we can have a "history of the book" at all are little understood [...]. The function of the book as text, as a vehicle carrying information within it, is obvious, but the information that it provides by virtue of its mere survival and the existence is not less important because less obvious. (37).

Asserting that "[s]urvival is a cumulative process" (38), Adams and Barker focus their discussion broadly on the combined efforts of all manner of cultural agents to ensure the survival of texts (including writers, readers, collectors, librarians, and archivists). They also

insist, however, that the “desire to preserve books is ingrained in all sorts of people but in none so important as the bookseller, particularly the second-hand bookseller” (35). This is especially apparent when considering the small press bookseller, whose contributions to the “survival” of books (both historical and contemporary) demand attention.

The small press does not distribute books in traditional professionalized ways, rendering its publications difficult for bookstores, libraries, and archives to locate and collect. It publishes work that eschews categorization under poetry, fiction, or non-fiction, instead finding liberation in the rejection of such labels and consequently rendering its products difficult to fit into bibliographies and library catalogues. It produces books that are at times physically too small or too large to be adequately accommodated by traditional bookshelves, creating difficulties for librarians and institutions that are interested in collecting such work, as well as for mainstream bookstores. Moreover, these actions are motivated by a fundamental rejection of the pursuit of traditional consecration (in forms such as prizes, prestige, fame, and financial reward) and of the institutions that confer it. Small presses, because they are outwardly hostile to centralizing principles, disrupt such modes. The small press bookseller thus has an important role to play in the initial circulation and subsequent re-circulations (that is, the survival) of such books. The bookseller is an active cultural agent again and again in the life of a book. She or he can distribute a book during its initial life, but can also later relocate and redistribute it in the second hand market, evaluate cultural, aesthetic, and economic value, establish and circulate bibliographic data, as well as intervene in institutional processes of consecration and critical affirmation. The contributive small press bookseller does all of the above and makes possible the continued production of new

small press work through a number of practices deeply entrenched in small press ideas and attitudes.

The questions at the heart of this dissertation are: How does the small press, in its material strategies of production and distribution, reshape the terms and demands of reception for its readers? How does the bookseller contribute to these processes as more than simply a disinterested agent of capitalism? What does independent bookselling look like when it is committed to the cultural and aesthetic goals of the small press? And what is absent from literary and cultural records when the bookseller is not accounted for? In order to answer these and other questions, I look closely at the bookseller catalogue as a genre of publication that facilitates the redistribution of small press material, contains vital bibliographic data, allows the bookseller to wield a critical voice, and mediates productive encounters between readers and books; I consider the labour of the bookseller within the small press gift economy, proposing that certain booksellers adopt materialist, affective and effective strategies that exceed traditional capitalist exchanges; and I consider the bookstore as a potential small press archive that functions as a viable counterweight to institutional collection and preservation.

This labour on the part of the bookseller is done in service to what Jean-Luc Nancy describes in the epigraph above as a “gesture made by a future reader” (37). The bookstore (whether in the form of a storefront, an online store, or a mail order catalogue) is one key site at which the “conditions of possibility for reading” (36) are generated. The bookstore is, in Nancy’s terms, the “material machine in action” of an “argumentative, rhetorical, and encyclopedic apparatus” (37) that makes possible encounters and interactions between readers and books. Nancy ascribes significant agency to the bookseller, the “inventive soul”

(37), responsible for orchestrating productive and generative encounters, suggesting that the bookstore is more than a site of commerce and that the bookseller does more than simply take money in exchange for books. David Schwartz expands on this, arguing that bookselling is “cultural and political expression” that derives its “true profit” not from capital, but from “the impact of the bookshop on the community” (qtd. in Garber, “Bookselling in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”). How does the bookseller make possible gestures by future readers? How do the particular literary and aesthetic concerns of a given bookstore modulate the gestures of its customers? What is the nature of the agency possessed by booksellers, and what are the potential benefits reaped by their communities?

The previous two decades have borne collective witness to the dismantling and reconfiguration of print culture through increasing digital mediation. One reads and hears regularly about the crises facing print books and brick-and-mortar bookstores, and the loss of each store or press that closes is mourned in concert with the ongoing cutbacks to libraries, archives, and their funding, as well as the crises facing the study of the humanities at the university-level. When the shuttering of another bookstore or a further cut from the budget of Library and Archives Canada is publicly decried, however, it tends to be in vague terms. The figure of the independent bookseller is described reverently, but abstractly. When stores close, or in the months before they might potentially close, independent bookstores are described as “fixtures in their community” (Howlett), yet one rarely reads about the specific ways that bookstores and booksellers actually contribute to intellectual and aesthetic communities. In his November 2016 article at *LitHub*, “Bookselling in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: There Will Always Be Bookstores,” Jeremy Garber exemplifies this tendency to romanticize

bookselling practices. Garber cites the “advent of e-readers, online commerce, declining readership, fewer author tours, and the like” as “but a few of the myriad reasons [...] for the *inevitable* dissolution of brick and mortar bookselling.” Garber deploys a common, non-specific image of the bookseller as somehow *special*:

No industry is immune to the vagaries of the capitalist marketplace or the oft-erratic economy, but booksellers are in a singular position of offering far more to their customers than mere widgets, impulsively purchased frivolities, or unnecessary luxuries. [...] We are purveyors of the printed word, champions of free expression and unfettered speech, conduits for ideas and wisdom collected throughout the millennia, curators of bound, stitched, glued, and stapled bastions of thoughts and feeling, arbiters of the profound and profane, and unabashed stewards of culture, knowledge, and progress.

Booksellers, Garber tells us, “long ago established themselves not only as pillars of the community, but as *sources* of the very community their customers so enthusiastically sought.” Garber’s article is impassioned, but does not explain how it is that booksellers established themselves as “pillars of the community,” or how they work to “champion free expression and unfettered speech.” The responsibility of being the “unabashed stewards of culture, knowledge, and progress” is great, but Garber, like so many, does not move beyond this abstract, romantic ideal.

Yet bookselling, like the history of small press publishing, like institutional archives and libraries, is not abstract; it is a set of practices with traceable material histories. The independent bookseller does work to do all that Garber and others claim she or he does, but these acts are grounded in material practices that must be documented and analyzed in order

to understand what is at stake when celebrating their victories and mourning their losses. This tendency to abstraction instead of specificity can be found in scholarly writing as well as popular outlets (blogs, newspapers, magazines). The bookseller hovers in the margins of academic studies of publishing, culture, and the nation. When the bookseller is named, it is in passing. Studies of the small press and independent writing and publishing in Canada most often exclude the bookseller, and that exclusion is a disservice to, among other things, alternative publishing histories and traditions of literary production, distribution, and reception. It is an oversight that needs correction.

The histories that this dissertation analyses often come into direct conflict with the cultural agents traditionally viewed as responsible for delineating the boundaries of the field of Canadian literature. Booksellers, existing outside of academic communities and outside of libraries and archives, occupy a negative position in the cultural field. Although their labour often helps to establish and uphold bourgeois principles of legitimacy, certain booksellers also work to actively interrupt such centralizing forms of consecration. This is perhaps one reason for the general disregard of the cultural labour of booksellers in existing studies, and is certainly one site of affinity between independent bookselling and small press publishing (specifically, an interest in artistic production that actively considers and critiques its own modes of production, distribution, and reception).

The bookseller is a difficult cultural agent to locate in Canadian book history studies. There are informal records, such as memoirs from specific booksellers (including Dora Hood and David Mason), and the trade magazine *Canadian Notes and Queries* regularly publishes interviews with booksellers and articles chronicling bookstores. In terms of formal scholarship, George L. Parker's *The Beginnings of the Book Trade in Canada* (1985) is, to



date, the most substantial study of bookselling practices in the country. As its title makes clear, however, its focus is historical and its analysis ends at the beginning of twentieth century. *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada / Cahiers de la Société bibliographique du Canada* has published the most scholarship dedicated to Canadian booksellers; articles like the collaboratively written “The Bibliography of Canadian Bibliographies: Some proposals for its future” (1977), W. Kaye Lamb’s “Seventy-Five Years of Canadian Bibliography” (1985), and George L. Parker’s “Distributors, Agents, and Publishers: Creating a Separate Market for Books in Canada 1900-1920” (2005) take seriously bookseller contributions to literary culture, while Sandra Alston’s “Canada’s First Bookseller’s Catalogue” (1992) contextualizes and reprints a bookseller catalogue from 1800 (“Catalogue of Books for Sale, 3 Mountain St. Quebec, 1800”).

The history of bookstores in Canada dates to the eighteenth century. Yvan Lamonde and Andrea Rotundo, writing in *Volume One: Beginnings to 1840* (2004) of *History of the Book in Canada*, place bookstores “at the heart of cultural development in the colonies of British North America” (124). In the eighteenth century, books could be purchased in “the office of the printer of a local newspaper, who made his primary living by job printing [...] and printing texts of laws, school books, and religious works, and pamphlets, which he sold at his shop along with imported titles” (125). Books could also be purchased, however, at “the general store and in hardware stores, apothecaries, and other specialized shops” (125). As George L. Parker notes, the trade was “organized to import books and periodicals, just as other mercantile activities brought in manufactured goods: this was a corollary of being a colony, which existed to absorb excess populations and to serve as a market for home products, as well as to ship out raw materials” (*The Beginnings of the Book Trade* 13). Books

for sale were most often advertised in newspapers, though books were also sold at auction (Lamonde and Rotunda cite 90 auctions held in Montreal between 1778 and 1820 [127]).

At least four cities had bookstores by the late eighteenth century—Halifax, Saint John, Quebec, and Montreal—though these also sold stationery, offered bookbinding services, and were printers on occasion. Lamonde and Rotunda cite a catalogue from William Brown, proprietor of the *Quebec Gazette / La Gazette de Québec*, published in November 1781 in the pages of the newspaper, while the first separately published book catalogue is credited to John Neilson (Quebec) in 1800 (133-134). These earliest bookselling operations, even when not dedicated exclusively to books, “made an essential contribution to the formation of a distinct local culture” (135). Lamonde and Rotunda describe such early booksellers as “socio-cultural agents” (135), offering space for social interaction, cultural exchange, and political debate. Parker characterizes such spaces as follows: “Here friends from out of town could exchange gossip and news, or leave letters and packets in the care of the proprietor” (17). Greta Golick, writing in *Volume Two: 1840-1918* (2005) of *History of the Book in Canada*, expands on the developing roles of booksellers within communities. Among their contributions, Golick cites their involvement in “the developing Canadian postal service” (215), selling tickets for local theatres, and serving as a site to “leave information regarding lost articles or rental accommodations” (215). Other bookstores offered a “circulating library” service, making books available to those who could not afford to purchase them outright and producing an extra revenue stream. The trade began to professionalize in the late nineteenth century, with various trade magazines beginning to appear—*Canada Bookseller* in 1870, *Books and Notions* in 1884, and *Canadian Bookseller* in 1888. A new trade association, the Canadian Booksellers’ Association, held its first

meeting in March 1876 (Golick 224-225).

The majority of Canadian book history is focused either on publishing or on reading, ignoring what happens in between. There are studies of the law and the agency system (Eli MacLaren's *Dominion and Agency: Copyright and the Structuring of the Canadian Book Trade, 1867-1918* [2008]), of specific larger presses (Janet Friskney's *New Canadian Library: The Ross-McClelland Years 1952-1978* [2007] and Ruth Panofsky's *The Literary Legacy of the MacMillan Company of Canada: Making Books and Mapping Culture* [2012]), of the practical effects of Canadian law on authorship (Nick Mount's *When Canadian Literature Moved to New York* [2005]), of reading societies (Heather Muray's *Come, Bright Improvement! The Literary Societies of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* [2002]), as well as studies of nationalism, the post-Centennial cultural climate, and their impact on publishing in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.<sup>1</sup> Independent bookstores (under the heading "Specialized Bookstores") are given four paragraphs in *Volume Three: 1918-1980* (2007) of *History of the Book in Canada* (2007), while "Used Bookstores and Antiquarian Bookstores" are given two.

Even less common than finding the bookseller discussed as an active cultural agent is finding work related to booksellers with a particular investment in the small press and experimental literature. Ron Silliman, in "The Political Economy of Poetry," gestures towards the writer-as-bookseller when discussing the financially precarious position of being a writer: "Poets, for obvious reasons, tend to look at 'disguised unemployment' as time to write, which partly explains their gravitation to part-time service sector jobs, such as clerking in bookstores to proofreading for publishers and law firms" (28). Silliman's reference is

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<sup>1</sup> See Barbara Godard's work collected in *Canadian Literature at the Crossroads of Language and Culture* (2008), Frank Davey's *Post-National Arguments: The Politics of the Anglophone-Canadian Novel since 1967* (1993) and *Reading Canadian Reading* (1988), Charles Steele's *Taking Stock: The Calgary Conference on the Canadian Novel* (1982), or the three-volume *History of the Book in Canada* (2004) for entry points to this discussion.

peripheral; the poet-as-bookseller is not central to his argument. Nonetheless, it is representative of a common attitude. Bookselling is perceived as a way to pay one's bills; it is a "part-time service sector job" performed in order to afford time to write, rather than an active choice made in order to contribute to the literary community. The fact of a writer also being a bookseller is most often treated as trivial, by which I mean it is treated as a *piece of trivia* appended to biographical statements or profiles; it is a piece of interesting information to be acknowledged but not to be examined. Many critics perform this construction and reconstruction of the invisibility of the labour of the bookseller, however unintentionally (and this blind spot is particularly ironic in Silliman's work given the emphasis he places on literary networks and the circulation of books as commodities).

Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy's *Writing in Our Time: Canada's Radical Poetries in English (1957-2003)* (2005) is one significant site where this erasure is visible. The book includes two chronologies of "the little magazines, small presses, conferences, festivals, and other discursive/material sites that supported poetic experimentation in Canada" (1) in the second half of the twentieth century. Neither list includes a single bookstore nor any discussion of bookselling labour. The first chronology does include an entry for jwcurry's Room 3o2 Books, but does not note that Room 3o2 is in fact a bookstore in addition to being the umbrella that "publishes curry's countless imprints" (14). Neither do vital sites like Nicky Drumbolis's Letters Bookshop or Nelson Ball's bookselling business warrant inclusion. The only direct reference to bookselling in the book is an aside when discussing Lisa Robertson, wherein it is noted that she was "the proprietor/bookseller of Proprioception Books in Vancouver (1988-1994)" (217). In an essay in the book on "Poetry, Publishing, Politics, and Communities," Butling asserts that she is concerned with

the centrifugal function of locally identified publishers, conferences, and festivals; the community-building role of poetry readings; the importance of “working ground” magazines in providing discursive/material sites for new subjectivities and formal experiments; and the complex relationship of radical poetics to cultural nationalism (i.e., Canada Council funding) that partially sustains it. (29).

Butling and Rudy produce exactly the study they describe in their excellent and thought-provoking book. My intent here is not to criticize them for the absence of booksellers in their study, but rather to emphasize that bookselling practices are so far relegated to the margins that they are rarely acknowledged even when they would fit naturally within the scope of a particular project. The bookselling practices I discuss in this dissertation need not have been beyond the scope of the project as identified by Butling and Rudy; these practices unquestionably contribute actively to the “discursive/material” sites of *Writing in Our Time*.

More recently, the essay collection *Public Poetics: Critical Issues in Canadian Poetry and Poetics* (2015), edited by Bart Vautour, Erin Wunker, Travis V. Mason, and Christl Verduyn, similarly demonstrates the absence of bookselling from critical thinking surrounding the production, distribution, reception, and circulation of poetry in Canada. *Public Poetics* is an energizing and vibrant book full of challenging and insightful essays, and yet the bookseller is absent despite the introduction to the volume explaining that in the thinking of the editors, “poetics” includes “more than the circulation of poetry in public; it also includes those attempts to deliver poetry to a public and to generate discussion about poetics and the work of poetry” (4) and that, “moreover, the way an audience responds to and circulates ideas about poetry constitutes a poetics—a living, breathing, and dynamic mode of

public engagement” (3). *Public Poetics* takes on issues of gender, sexuality, race, colonialism, language, and publishing to think actively about how poetics are produced and circulated within Canada. We allow criticism, reviews, performance, correspondence, and myriad other forms of critical engagement into such accommodating definitions of poetry and poetics, and yet the bookseller is still so rarely admitted.

In this dissertation, I strive to reconstitute such definitions of public engagement to include specific acts on the part of the bookseller. In order to counter the prevailing absence of booksellers from the histories of Canadian literature and related book histories, I explore specific types of bookselling activity that demonstrate how and why booksellers are important to literary communities. This work is structured around the idea of the “contributive” bookseller, drawn from bookseller, publisher, and writer Nicky Drumbolis. Drumbolis’s distinction between distributive and contributive bookselling, the latter a model in which the bookseller “not only stocks books but somehow contextualizes what he or she knows/has at his or her command” (Truhlar) and works to “[add] dimension to the cultural exchange, compounds the distributive approach with passionate concern for the state of art, participates as user, maker, transistor” (Drumbolis, “this fiveyear list”), the former a purely capitalist, profit-driven enterprise, identifies the small press contours that mark this dissertation as well as my insistence that the bookseller be understood as an actively engaged cultural agent. The contributive bookseller is a “user” and “maker,” not a disinterested salesperson. The contributive bookseller works not only to facilitate the production and distribution of small press works, but is also often a writer, editor, publisher, and organizer of literary events, conceiving of these acts as related expressions of a single small press impulse. Bookselling thus becomes an additional way to contribute to and support the small

press community that derives from similar motivations as other small press acts but contributes in specific ways given the distinct resources of bookselling.

While the contributive bookseller is a particularly twentieth- and twenty-first-century model, marked by its contrast to the late capitalism of the post-Second World War era, it is also, in some ways, a return to a much earlier European mode of operating in which the bookseller was always also the publisher and the printer. These three acts used to be seen as reciprocal and natural parts of the same larger process. The post-industrial push towards rationalization in all things economic and commercial has obscured the origins of the bookseller as a much more variously engaged cultural agent than is commonly seen today. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery argue that early printers following in the wake of Gutenberg's moveable type revolution "combined printing, publishing, and bookselling roles, seeking out likely texts, purchasing rights to print, then attempting through various means to profit" (86). Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, in *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing, 1450-1800* (2010), note that Enlightenment-era booksellers "naturally interested themselves in things of the mind as well as in commerce, if only to conduct their business more profitably" (143). Finkelstein and McCleery and Febvre and Martin identify the complex relationship between profit and the perceived public and intellectual good of books. They ultimately posit a cynical model of the bookseller-publisher that is focused on profit, an attitude that can be traced today in chain bookstores.

The hyper-rational, big-box chain booksellers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries exemplify the distributive model that stands in contrast to the contributive one. Such stores retain the focus on profit discussed by Febvre and Martin above, and benefit from exploiting the perception of the moral and societal good of books. Laura J. Miller, in

her book *Reluctant Capitalists: Bookselling and the Culture of Consumption* (2006), expresses how a belief in books as objects of particular goodness creates contradictions in modern bookselling:

Throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, there has been a consistent belief in the distinctiveness of the book, an uneasiness with viewing books as “products” to be bought and sold like any other commodity. As Viviana Zelizer has argued, any enterprise that transgresses the boundary between the incommensurable sacred and the marketable profane must cope with structural ambivalence. Books, as storehouses of ideas and as a perceived means to human betterment, have long been viewed as a kind of “sacred product.” [...] Bookselling is not actually fundamentally different from the selling of hardware or office supplies or pharmaceuticals. (19)

This is where contributive and distributive models diverge. The contributive bookseller retains a belief in books as “storehouses of ideas” (to be understood and articulated prior to the act of selling books) and resists buying and selling them “like any other commodity.” The distributive bookseller, on the other hand, accepts the idea that bookselling “is not actually fundamentally different” from the selling of any other commodity, but deploys the sustaining belief in the perceived sacredness of books to drive sales. Whatever *good* (aesthetic, cultural, societal, moral) is perceived to reside in books, a distributive model to generate profit exploits it, whereas a contributive model labours in service to it.

Miller notes that in “the last four decades of the twentieth century, economic, technological, and cultural changes finally pushed the book trade to become more rationalized, that is, to calculate the most efficient means to sell books and then develop the



organizational forms and procedures necessary to that task” (4). Following Max Weber’s theory of instrumental rationality, Miller effectively describes how chain bookstores pursue profits via “standardized methods” (4), the increasing “specialization of tasks” (4), and a “more efficient division of labour” (4): “From selection, ordering, and advertising, to decisions about pricing, store décor, and the placement of sections and displays—to one degree or another, these functions are performed in a central office” (12-13). This is the antithesis of contributive bookselling; efficiency is not the end-goal of the bookselling examined in this dissertation. Rather, the careful reception and dissemination of book-objects as more than simply commodities is the focus of these cultural agents; these are demanding, resource-intensive, time-consuming practices directly at odds with instrumental rationality and the pursuit of profit. Books, for these cultural agents, are not commodities to be more efficiently and effectively produced, reproduced, and sold, but rather cultural, aesthetic, and ideological works of art that in their own original modes of production resist the capitalist impulse to rationalization and thus demand bookselling practices that strive to understand and support those acts of resistance. The booksellers I examine share a common impulse to locate, catalogue, preserve, and make available the marginal and ephemeral materials of the small press, resulting in an evolving model of the bookstore in constant pursuit of forms appropriate to showcasing experimental small press literature.

For much of the labour of the cultural agents I study here, particularly their bookselling work, there is little in the way of traditional scholarly paper trail. There are few papers and little previous scholarship to contend with focused on independent bookselling in the twentieth century. The only book-length studies are focused on the nineteenth century, or

on Europe. There has been little substantial academic thinking about contemporary booksellers in Canada. There are informal magazine articles, traces in primary documents, and the archives of booksellers themselves. As such, I follow Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker's call to open up book history to accommodate more than printed books by studying "bibliographic documents," by which they mean "something printed or written in multiple copies [produced] for public consumption" (13). This allows my incorporation of a wide range of non-traditional evidence. In this dissertation I examine correspondence, poems, essays, bookseller catalogues, embodied performance, and affective and effective gift-labour. Fundamental to my argument is a belief that small press acts of writing, publishing, editing, and bookselling, among others, cannot be properly understood independently of each other. A cultural agent's poems must be read beside her or his publishing acts, bookselling forms, bibliographic labour, and cultural work in order to more adequately perceive these relationships, but also the small press attitudes at the heart of each.

Temporally, my dissertation covers a period from 1952 to the present day. Chapter one begins with Raymond Souster's "Contact" labour (*Contact* magazine [1952-1954], Contact Press [1952-1967], and the Contact Poetry Reading Series [1957-1962]), positing it as both a paradigm for the development of small press publishing in Canada in the second half of the twentieth century, and as a clear and direct influence on the booksellers that I discuss in subsequent chapters. The small press, described by Derek Beaulieu and Jason Christie as an "amorphous totality" ("Six Notes" 7), is difficult to define. In this dissertation, I offer one (of many possible definitions) constituted by the intimate relationship it requires between publishing and reading. Following Walter Benjamin, I argue that the small press is marked by the effort to "demonstrate the attitude with which it is to be followed" ("The

Author as Producer” 233) in its material strategies of production and distribution, and to “induce other producers to produce” (233), thus facilitating the transformation of “readers or spectators into collaborators” (233). Small press cultural agents must necessarily adopt multiple roles simultaneously (as writers, publishers, editors, booksellers) in order to immediately sustain the small press as an active cultural field, to collect, document and ensure the survival of small press works, and to transform “readers into collaborators.” Via its material modes of production and distribution, the small press requires that its readers perceive its cultural effects as different from those of mainstream literary production, and therefore to adopt attitudes that are other to prevailing standards and to approach the act of reading as active cultural production.

Chapter two, focused on the contributive small press bookseller, argues that the bookseller catalogue is a genre of publication that is particularly suited to functioning contributively. The bookseller catalogue, in addition to facilitating the distribution and collection of small press material, contains otherwise unavailable bibliographic data and allows the bookseller to wield her or his critical and pedagogical voice in order to mediate productive encounters between readers and the symbolic and economic values of books. I examine the small press and bookselling labour of Nelson Ball (William Nelson Books and Nelson Ball, Bookseller, Toronto and Paris, 1972-) and Jay MillAr (Apollinaire’s Bookshoppe, Toronto, 2005-) in order to trace the personal and professional investments of the contributive bookseller, and to frame contributive bookselling as not a peripheral or purely transactional type of labour, but rather as a significant and central small press act. The work of such booksellers is sympathetic to and expressive of the same small press impulses that are commonly viewed as the domain of writers and publishers; the inclusion of the

bookseller broadens the cast of cultural agents that must be considered when studying the small press.

Chapter three considers the labour of the contributive bookseller within the small press gift economy. The small press, as an oppositional form of publishing, resists capitalist commodity exchange through its aesthetics and content and its material forms of publication and distribution; it favours a gift economic mode of exchange between participants. For the small press contributive bookseller, the small press resistance to the commodification of literature creates restricted economic prospects; however, the bookseller already invested in the small press must necessarily also be invested in these acts of resistance, and therefore often engages directly with the small press gift economy as a mode of exchange. Using the work of Nicky Drumbolis (Letters Bookshop, Toronto and Thunder Bay, 1982-) as exemplary, I argue that certain booksellers work to support small press production and distribution by undermining capitalist priorities and using the particular resources of the bookstore to contradict profit-driven commodity exchange. Drawing on theories of gift exchange and its relation to the small press from Lewis Hyde, Pauline Butling, and Ailsa Craig, I map how Drumbolis's labour offers material, affective, and effective strategies with which the bookseller can support the creation, circulation, and recirculation of small press works and establish communities of small press agents based on "feeling-bond[s]" (Hyde 56) and "being obliged to others" (Hyde 67).

Chapter four considers the small press bookstore as a potential archive for small press materials. Extending my consideration of the small press as an expression of experimental literary forms and marginal forms of publishing, I examine the relationships between small press literary production, the contributive bookseller, and the central archives that are

traditionally viewed as responsible for the collection, documentation, and preservation of literary works. I deploy Linda Morra's theory of the "minor archive" as a "private cache deliberately withheld from formal institutions, by which to critique the existing national arrangements of the archives" (6) and Diana Taylor's theory of repertoire and embodied performance as opposing and challenging "the supposedly stable objects in the [print] archive" (20) to examine jwcurry's bookselling (Room 3o2 Books, Toronto and Ottawa, 1986-) and cultural labour. His cumulative work as writer, publisher, editor, performer, bibliographer, librarian, and archivist resists the institutional authority of central archives and challenges the centrality of the printed page in literary expression.

There are, of course, many positions between the extreme and deliberately inefficient forms of contributive bookselling and the hyper-rational and efficient capitalism of chain bookselling. I use distributive bookselling to clarify and define the uncommon labour of the contributive bookseller precisely because of the intensity of the contrast between the two. Furthermore, my four primary bookseller subjects are all currently active—they exist in relation to chain stores within the larger cultural field. Although many of these practices date to the 1970s (or earlier), they are still active today. As with the variety among small press practices, there are many booksellers operating between these two poles—there are smaller and larger independent bookstores, more ethical and less ethical chains, as well as a range of concessions on the part of even these most extreme contributive agents towards some of the larger forces that their small press practices generally oppose.

I must also distinguish between the small press contributive bookselling that is the focus of this dissertation and other forms of used, second-hand, antiquarian, and trade bookselling. The booksellers that are my subjects have particular specialties (which is not

unusual among booksellers), and the form of bookselling they practice intersects with the others listed above. A bookstore with a general used stock sells books across a wide variety of genres and economic values. A rare and antiquarian bookseller deals in books, manuscripts, and other bibliographic documents with an emphasis on older and more expensive materials. Trade bookstores (independents and chains) sell new books produced for distribution to the general book trade (and thus a general readership). The small press contributive booksellers under consideration here operate across these lines, selling expensive and inexpensive items, new and used materials, and items in forms beyond the printed codex. Moreover, the intensity of the labour required to sell books contributively and the chosen specialties (primarily experimental poetry and other radical literary forms from the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries) generate a restricted readership, audience, and customer-base.

As I have already stated, this dissertation is exploratory rather than exhaustive. It looks closely at five cultural agents as exemplary of particular forms of small press labour and contributive bookselling. I am not making the claim that this group of cultural agents is a comprehensive depiction of the myriad relationships between bookselling and the small press in Canada. Rather, I have chosen these five because they illustrate particular conditions and characteristics of bookselling in relation to the small press. There are countless other possible routes through these histories that would highlight other agents, other priorities, and other traditions. My choices were made based on the connections between individual cultural agents and bookselling practices. Moreover, one focus of this dissertation is cultural agents that occupied multiple positions in the cultural field at the same time—the agents I study here

were not simply booksellers, or writers, or publishers, or editors, or archivists, or bibliographers, or organizers of events, but rather were any number of these at once.

As a consequence, there are many notable booksellers absent from this study that made substantial contributions to the history of bookselling in Canada, the history of the small press in Canada, and the history of Canadian literature. I do not intend to diminish their accomplishments or contributions. Indeed, many of the theoretical frameworks and terms that I put forward in this dissertation could be easily applied to these others agents, and I hope that they will be in the future. An impossibly partial list of Canadian booksellers and bookstores that intersect with my theoretical concerns includes: Dora Hood's Book Room (Montreal), founded in 1928, for her pioneering efforts as a Canadian bookseller; Bernard Amtmann's bookselling and auction businesses (Ottawa, Montreal), founded in 1948, for his public criticisms of Canadian archival practices and his tireless lobbying for recognizing Canadian history and Canadiana as worthy of collection and study; The Double Hook Book Shop (Montreal), founded by Judy Mappin, Helene Holden, and Joan Blake in 1974, for its exclusive focus on selling Canadian literature; This Ain't The Rosedale Library (Toronto), founded by Charles Huisken in 1979, for its emphasis on the small press and independent publishing; The Word (Montreal), founded in 1975 by Adrian and Luci King-Edwards, long a gathering site for writers; Octopus Books (Ottawa), founded in 1969, for its deep and continuing commitment to social justice; even William Hoffer's bookselling practice (Vancouver), founded in 1969, marked by his deep distaste for Canadian literature and small press literature more specifically, expressed through his aggressive and, frankly, hateful catalogues; and still others including Richard Shuh's Alphabet Bookshop (Port Colborne), Pages (Calgary), the Literary Storefront (Vancouver), Lisa Robertson's Proprioception

Books (Vancouver), Kemeny Babineau's Laurel Reed Books (Mt. Pleasant), Jo Treggiari, Alice Burdick, and Anne-Marie Sheppard's Lexicon Books (Lunenburg), Jeff Kirby's Knife | Fork | Book (Toronto), and Biblioasis (Windsor). I also have not reckoned with the street bookselling practices of Crad Kilodney, Stuart Ross, Lillian Nečakov and others in Toronto in the 1980s. Each of these, and the many I have no doubt neglected, is deserving of study and recognition for a range of contributions to literature and independent thinking in Canada. These exclusions also illustrate the depth and breadth of work yet to be done on bookselling in Canada. These are but a handful of the significant independent booksellers in the history of twentieth- and twenty-first-century bookselling in Canada, and these are focused almost exclusively on the small press and Canadian literature. There are countless other important booksellers that had other focuses.

Nor have I been able here to discuss relevant international precedents. Consider Sylvia Beach's famous Shakespeare & Company, opened in 1919 in Paris, and the reciprocities it reveals between modernist publishing, bookselling, and experimental and 'obscene' literature.<sup>2</sup> Bob Cobbing's work at Better Books in the 1960s in London operating the bookstore as a performance space, gallery, and cinema is also a useful referent. As Andrew Wilson writes, Cobbing's work at Better Books was "important as a catalyst in the experimental scenes in London in the mid-1960s [...] running [...] Better Books – not as a bookshop exactly, nor an art centre, more like a (counter-cultural centre where bookshelves could be wheeled away to provide room for an audience or a stage for readings, performance,

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<sup>2</sup> The original Shakespeare and Company closed in 1941 under German Occupation. A second store was opened (1951) and named after Sylvia Beach's original store in tribute in 1964. This second store also embodies much of what is at stake in this dissertation, perhaps most notably its notorious "tumbleweeds"—the store allows writers to sleep overnight at the store, in beds scattered throughout its retail space. In exchange, tumbleweeds must "read a book a day [...] help open and close the shop, work for two hours a day, and help out with the weekly readings" (Lye, "What It's Like to Live Inside the Legendary Paris Bookstore Shakespeare & Co.").



music, film, discussion – for ‘events’” (“THIS IS NOT AN ADVERTISEMENT” 89). So too is Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco, opened in 1953, the first paperback bookstore in the United States and publisher of important and controversial works like Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl and Other Poems* (1956). Each of these bookstores and their booksellers wield the agency of the bookseller as a tool to make a positive impact on artistic communities, and each is viewed as vital to communities of writers, publishers, artists, and readers. Indeed, each of these is a site at which cultural labour above and beyond simple bookselling is practiced.

There are myriad ways that booksellers can and have supported small press literature and small press communities, and myriad booksellers and bookstores are unaccounted for here. My modest contributions to mapping some of the relevant connections and contributions in this dissertation are intended as a preliminary foray into establishing a theoretical framework and set of terms with which to think more critically about the work of booksellers and to more fully understand the small press.<sup>3</sup>

Implicit in my argument is the idea that the small press and the kind of bookselling that actively supports it have never had significant stakes in financial viability. As a way of accumulating economic capital, small press bookselling is strikingly inefficient. Nonetheless,

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<sup>3</sup> The internet is only a minor presence in this dissertation, but is clearly the dominant force in the twenty-first-century distribution and circulation of the majority of cultural effects. It is the task of another scholar, in another project, to consider how the small press has supported and been supported by, accepted and resisted, and experimented with and remodeled the specific resources, applications, and consequences of e-commerce and distribution as well as the seemingly endless communication tools of the internet. The challenges faced by independent booksellers when confronted by chain bookstores have also intensified with the global rise of Amazon and its exploitation of digital tools. Questions also remain of the archival uses of digitization and the remediation of material print objects. These problems await booksellers in all fields in the coming years. For a few of the many entry points into existing scholarly debate on these issues, particularly as they pertain to bookselling, see Theodore G. Striphas’s *The Late Age of Print: Everyday Book Culture from Consumerism to Control* (2009), Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s *Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy* (2011), and Laura J. Miller’s *Reluctant Capitalists: Bookselling and the Culture of Consumption* (2006).

the forms of bookselling documented here have persisted since the 1950s in Canada. This dissertation traces six decades of related activities that show different ways that the relationships between the small press and bookselling have been conceived, how the two have adapted and existed symbiotically, and how each has benefited from the commitments and practices of the other. The small press and the contributive bookseller committed to the small press have collectively endeavoured to conceive of alternative ways of producing, distributing, collecting, preserving, and documenting experimental literature. The solutions they have found that I document are evidence of the deep and abiding relationships between these practices. Central to this relationship is a common small press belief that encountering such works should challenge the reader (whether at the level of content, material form, or mode of distribution). The small press, as it strives to generate *future readers* and their *gestures*, must “demonstrate the attitude with which it is to be followed” and transform “readers or spectators into collaborators.” This was the motivation of Souster’s Contact work, and it informs the contributive bookselling model adopted and adapted by the booksellers I study here.

Phyllis Webb, in “There *Are* the Poems,” writes, “[t]he proper / response to a poem is another poem” (14-15). That is to say, poems should breed poems; books should breed books; reading should breed future gestures by future readers. Jean-Luc Nancy echoes and broadens Webb’s lines:

For, in the end, the Idea of the book will always, from its very first conception, have been the Idea of its reading and, through that reading, the Idea of another book, of another writing that continues on from the first. Not necessarily the writing of another book, but at the very least the writing of

another tracing of thinking, another curve, volute, or meander or representation, of meditation, imitation, or creation. The Idea of the book is the Idea that there is no end to this very Idea, and that it contains nothing less than its own proliferation, its multiplication, its dispersion. (41)

The small press makes books that attempt to show the reader tracings of other previous books as well as possibilities for future books; the contributive bookseller works to document and transmit these tracings, to sustain and encourage the proliferation and multiplication and dispersion of this particular *idea of the book*. A book is both the precise, materially-determined object described by Anatole France (“The only exact knowledge there is, is the knowledge of the date of publication and the format of books” [qtd. in Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library” 60]) as well as the unattributable assemblage described by Deleuze and Guattari (“A book has neither object nor subject; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds” [4]). In the person of the contributive bookseller, and in the physical and symbolic spaces of the bookstore, these two states co-exist. The labour of the bookseller reveals the traceable material histories of books and their circulation as well as their impossibly complex “lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari 4) that implicate myriad cultural agents across generations. The bibliographic data of a book is fixed, but its material circulation is always open, always accruing new layers, always implicating new agents; the contributive bookseller locates that which is fixed and facilitates the endless opening and dispersal of that which is not.

## Chapter One

### Defining the Small Press: Raymond Souster's "Contact" Paradigm

"Small press is a process, an activity, a performance. It constitutes itself in play—in a range of activities that are not confined to the printed page."

—Daniel Jones, "Endnotes: Towards a Theory of Small Press" (22)

"Perhaps it's also a way of life."

—Stuart Ross, *Confessions of a Small Press Racketeer* (9)

The small press, whether defined broadly as a form of independent publishing, a rhizomatic "network of multiple, asymmetrical, interconnected nodes" (Butling and Rudy 29), an "amorphous totality" (beaulieu and Christie 7), or a form of opposition to the "prevailing discourses of modern society" (Jones 22), is constituted in part by the intimate relationship that it posits between writing, publishing, reading, and other stages in the communications circuit. Small press writers are, more often than not, also small press editors, publishers, organizers of events, critics, and primary readers. That is to say, the work of the small press writer demands a great deal beyond writing. In this chapter I examine a range of historical and contemporary working definitions of the small press; I propose a new model for defining the small press focused on the relationship it posits between publishing and reading; and I use the small press labour of Raymond Souster to illustrate one exemplary expression of these attitudes. Raymond Souster not only functioned as a catalyst in his contemporary moment but also shaped the future productivity of Canadian small press literature, and as such his work serves as a productive paradigm for the ways that this

dissertation conceives of the small press. In his editing and publishing work with *Contact* magazine (1952-1954) and Contact Press (1952-1967), and his organizational and curatorial work with the Contact Poetry Reading Series (1957-1962), one can discern Souster's emphasis on a total poetics praxis that necessarily involves small press labour explicitly oriented towards fostering productive conditions of reception for readers (and thus for potential future practitioners). This chapter reads poems beside critical statements, editorial practices, and publishing labour, treating each as evidence of the paths of thought that a cultural agent like Souster engaged in, displaying clearly the ideas underpinning his collected cultural labour.

My critical framework deploys the ideas of Walter Benjamin and Ron Silliman. Benjamin, in "The Author as Producer," argues that a literary work should "demonstrate the attitude with which it is to be followed" (233) and must "induce other producers to produce" (233) thus facilitating the transformation of "readers or spectators into collaborators" (233). Although he was not discussing the small press specifically, his ideas resonate with a publishing community invested in resisting dominant ideologies, in conceiving and creating models of production that realign the relations between writers, publishers, and readers, and in emphasizing collaboration between each position in the cultural field. Ron Silliman, in "The Political Economy of Poetry," takes a similar position that is more directly concerned with contemporary forms of small press publishing. Silliman argues that the "potential contents [of the] text are only actualized according to their reception, which depends on the social composition of the receivers" (25), and that consequently the "primary ideological message of poetry lies not in its explicit content [...] but in the *attitude towards reception* it demands of the reader" (31). The small press, as I conceive of it, is a form of writing,

publishing, distribution, and reception that demands its agents adopt these multiple roles in order to sustain itself in its present moment, in order to collect, document, and make available its own past forms, and in order to facilitate the future transformation of readers and spectators into collaborators. In other words, the small press, via its material modes of production and distribution, insists that the reader recognize its cultural effects as different from prevailing standards and subsequently adopt a new attitude regarding her or his own acts of reading and reception. Existing studies of the small press focus largely on the ways that the small press transforms modes of *production*; my analysis focuses on how the small press similarly transforms modes of *reception*.

### **Defining the Small Press**

The small press in Canada is difficult to define precisely. Small press activities today encompass a range of different types of productions, from the trade presses gathered together under the banner of the Literary Press Group, to the chapbook and micro presses associated with the Meet the Presses collective, to the range of little magazines that cover a spectrum from larger runs of perfect-bound, nationally distributed glossy magazines to handmade, photocopied efforts that circulate in hyper-local networks, as well as free handouts, public performances, websites, blogs, digital and electronic forms, and still other types of publications. There are myriad simple definitions that, while generally accurate, cannot but feel inadequate when one attempts to apply them to the breadth of small press activities that have taken place, and are taking place, in this country. David McKnight, in his entry on “Small Press Publishing” in *History of the Book in Canada* (2007), defines the small press as the “non-commercial production of books and periodicals with a literary orientation, issued

in limited runs for specialized readerships, and often dedicated to experimental writing or identity-based perspectives” (310). While not incorrect, it is a sterile definition that feels out-of-touch with the vitality, energy, and oppositional spirit of much small press labour.

Contrast McKnight’s definition with Louis Dudek’s emphatic and highly personal outburst to Raymond Souster, on February 11, 1952, at the moment of the conception and founding of Contact Press:

Yes, goddamit, let’s get ourselves out a book of our own, the three of us, and piss on the presses. The poet has to publish his own work henceforth, if he wants to print more than 12 pages in SIX YEARS ... The whole system stinks, when 1000000000 advertisements get mass distribution and a few poems get 250 copies on toilet paper. (qtd. in Gnarowski, *Contact Press*)

The small press, as it exists today, emerged in Canada in the 1940s and 1950s, motivated by a socialist spirit focused on seizing and re-orienting the available means of production. Small presses like Contact worked to foster the development and publication of work that was deemed unpalatable to large national presses; they directed energy towards the production of experimental, as opposed to commercially viable, art.<sup>4</sup> As Dudek exclaimed, the “whole system [stunk]” and something new was required.

Contact Press, during its fifteen years of operation (1952-1967), was the most important and influential independent publishing house in Canada. By the time it ceased

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<sup>4</sup> Irving Layton and Louis Dudek recognized shared socialist ideals in one another when they met. As Collett Tracey documents, during an early meeting between them,

[a]lmost immediately, each man sensed in the other a “unity of mind” [...]. Walking together to their homes, that evening, they recognized that, in addition to having experienced a similar feeling of ethnic dislocation, they shared strong philosophical and political leanings. More importantly, perhaps, they were alike in their conviction of the importance of poetry and its need to reflect the time and place in which they lived. (76)

In addition, Layton, “[h]aving seen, first-hand, extreme poverty, [been] concerned about issues of unemployment and social justice, and worked up by events overseas, including Mussolini’s rise to power, and Europe’s movement towards war [...] [had his] socialist leanings solidified” (Tracey 75).

operations in 1967, a number of new small presses had been founded in its wake (among them Weed/Flower [founded 1965], Coach House [founded 1966], Oberon [founded 1966], and House of Anansi [founded 1967]). As the small press gained momentum in Canada, readers, reviewers, and scholars began to try to formulate a working definition of just what these presses were doing. Wynne Francis, writing in *Canadian Literature* in 1967, described the small press as “[preoccupied] with new and experimental writing,” defined by its “idealism and amateurism and by its ephemeral and capricious nature” (56).<sup>5</sup> Francis made her comments in a special issue, “Publishing in Canada,” that restricted its attention to the small press to the seven pages of Francis’s own article. Six years later, in 1973, *Canadian Literature* published a follow-up special issue, “Publish Canadian,” that charted how attitudes had shifted. This second issue included a twelve-page article on literary magazines by Francis, a ten-page article on “Little Presses” by Sarah McCutcheon, as well as a fourteen-page questionnaire about Canada’s “New Wave in Publishing” that canvassed Shirley Gibson (House of Anansi), Dennis Lee (House of Anansi), Michael Macklem (Oberon Press), David Robinson (Talonbooks), Victor Coleman (Coach House), James Lorimer (James, Lewis & Samuel), and Mel Hurtig (M.G. Hurtig) for their opinions on the state of independent publishing in Canada. This issue contained a more refined understanding of the small press, greater evidence of small press activities in the country, and a greater willingness to allow small press publishers to speak for themselves. McCutcheon notes, “[small presses] are characterized by their co-operative nature and their dedication both to the literature itself and to the forms in which it is published. The work of the little press—publishing, editing and often designing, printing and binding books, is done in close working

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<sup>5</sup> Francis appended the evaluation that the primary weakness of the small press is “its compulsion to publish whatever is new and different, regardless of merit” (56).



relationships” (88). This is more nuanced than Francis's take six years earlier. McCutcheon identifies the important small press aims of performing as much work by hand as possible, and of performing the roles of writing, editing, and printing within the house.

These definitions, however, do not satisfactorily capture the range of small press work that was being performed in 1967 or 1973 respectively, let alone in the four decades since. “Small press” is often applied as a blanket term with little nuance. A micro press producing editions by hand in small print runs for a restricted audience distributed through underground networks bears little resemblance to a trade press with government funding and national distribution whose books are available in international chains. And yet, both are often referred to as “small presses.” Many small presses operating at the trade-level produce books that are indistinguishable from large international presses in their visual codes, the professionalism of their production and distribution processes, or the aesthetic content of their books. The writers, publishers, works, and other aspects of the small press that I discuss in this dissertation fall primarily on the micro-end of this spectrum, although each of these writers, publishers, and booksellers make concessions to large and conservative forms of publishing, distribution, and preservation. These definitions are fluid in practice, with a single press moving between forms throughout its life (such as BookThug’s transition from producing chapbooks and ephemera by hand to primarily producing perfect bound books intended for the general trade). The distinctions between positions can be internally or externally imposed in relation to market position, aesthetics, politics, or other markers of identity in the literary field.

The problem remains today of establishing a single definition capable of bringing such a wide range of activity together, and perhaps more interestingly, the question of

whether such a definition is even desirable. Jason Christie and derek beaulieu, introducing an issue of *Open Letter* dedicated to “Canadian Small Presses / Micropresses” in 2004, eschew definition and instead identify the small press as “a non-entity” (7) or “an amorphous totality impossible to capture precisely because of its fluidity” (7).<sup>6</sup> Christie and beaulieu go further and insist that attempting to define the small press “in its entirety” (7) would be counterproductive and in fact undermine the goals of the small press; under the umbrella of a singular definition the “small press would then be subject to the same ideological baggage of canon formation and capitalist obligation” (7) as the broader field of Canadian literature. A single, central definition would impose a power structure based on exclusion. In contrast to capitalist obligation, Christie and beaulieu assert that the small press is a gift economy; “If money is exchanged it is in the manner of a donation or pittance—a symbolic exchange—instead of a standard in a competitive market” (7). What marks the small press, for Christie and beaulieu, is that such publishing requires a “dedication unrewarded in a capitalist economy” (8). Christie and beaulieu settle on the idea that the “necessity of the small press’s amorphousness means that there should be no standard for what constitutes a small press document” (9), further opening the gates to an even wider range of activities.<sup>7</sup>

Other definitions are more combative. Daniel Jones, writing in 1992, describes the small press as being constituted by “play—in a range of activities that are not confined to the printed page” (“Endnotes” 22), and by freedom: “Small press exists within diverse and interconnected communities that are at once both local and international” (24). His definition,

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<sup>6</sup> The title of their issue, gesturing to the similarities and differences between the “small” and the “micro” presses, indicates one line along which the amorphous totality has been split—between increasingly professional “small” presses that outsource production and stubbornly amateur “micro” presses that perform work primarily by hand.

<sup>7</sup> In 2002, Stephen Cain edited an issue of *Open Letter* focused “Little Literary Serials,” or little magazines, another vital node of small press activity. Similar to the anxiety expressed in the small press definitions discussed above, Cain “question[s] whether there could be any consensus at all regarding the place, function, and tenability of the Little Magazine in Canada at this point in history” (“Introduction” 6).

however, also sets up the small press as a fundamentally political form of artistic production that functions as an oppositional force in modern society:

Through the act of naming itself, through the conscious act of differentiation that the modifier “small” suggests, small press sets itself apart from, as something other, and in opposition to, the prevailing discourses of modern society—those discourses that constitute modern society—in opposition not only to mass and literary culture but to the forms of production, distribution, and consumption these “larger” discourses engender. (22)

The small press, for Jones, is deliberately *small* in order to oppose the dominance of *large* dehumanizing modern discourses. Moreover, for Jones, the small press “opposes and negates the very concept of the nation-state” (24) and the “ideology of the small press is the negation of all ideologies, nationalist and otherwise” (24). Jones’s language here is militant, positing the small press as a call-to-arms for readers and potential practitioners. The small press offers a way out of restrictive industrial and capitalist ideology.

Nicky Drumbolis, writing under his pen name Arthur Cravan in *Ravings of a Backlane Historian: reflections on smallpress* (1997), declares in equally combative terms that the “smallpress evolved and remains quintessentially an encampment of opposition to the control of ethos by an erudite elite” (8).<sup>8</sup> The origins of the small press, in Drumbolis’s evaluation, are to be found in Ezra Pound’s “spreading disillusionment with credibility sanctioned by degree & pedigree, a dissension highly significant both to modernism & Canadian literature” (8-9). In addition to the small press as an act of dissent, Drumbolis argues that the fundamental difference between small press and other forms of publishing is

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<sup>8</sup> I choose to write “small press” as two words throughout this dissertation. Drumbolis most commonly writes “smallpress” as a single word, and I retain his arrangement when quoting directly.

“the difference they make with own h&z” (10), with his emphasis falling on the direct applied labour of the small press writer to write, publish, and distribute work by her or himself and others. The small press, for Drumbolis, is about investing one’s time, energy, physical work, and financial resources (or in Drumbolis’s terms, one’s “spirit & exertions” [17]) where available and required, not simply “[paying] someone else to bolt together a third person’s deliberations” (4).

One common and productive theoretical approach to understanding the “amorphous” and “fluid” small press of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, defined variously above, borrows the image of the *rhizome* from Deleuze and Guattari. The rhizome is defined by a number of principles: connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity, rupture, cartography, and decalcomania. The rhizome “always has multiple entryways” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 14) and “has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it overflows” (21). A rhizome “ceaselessly establishes connections” (8) and, most importantly, is “*a map and not a tracing*” (13): “What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented towards an experimentation in contact with the real. [...] The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions. It is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification.” (13). The biological metaphor of the rhizome is particularly suited to making possible novel understandings of Western artistic production, as Deleuze and Guattari make clear: “everything important that has happened or is happening takes the route of the American rhizome: the beatniks, the underground, bands and gangs, successive lateral offshoots in immediate connection with an outside” (21). Through the metaphor of the rhizome, one can sidestep discussions of experimental artistic production that rely on the

language of the avant-garde and the idea of a singular site of origin. The rhizome extends widely and variously in an expressly non-hierarchical fashion.

Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy, in *Writing in Our Time: Canada's Radical Poetics in English (1957-2003)* (2005), map the model of the rhizome onto Canada's poetic communities. They describe the "radical poetics field since 1960" as "a network of multiple, asymmetrical, interconnected nodes" (29):

With more than one line, and more than one site of intervention, the generative energy is localized and mobile. In both the plant rhizome and the literary networks, the nodes are where the action is, where the growth occurs. At the same time, nodes are interconnected via tendrils that circulate nutrients throughout the network. (29)

The strength of such a model, according to Butling and Rudy, is that it posits "a dynamic interconnectivity together with the possibility of intervention" (29). This de-centred model allows for a wide variety of small press expression without imposing an authoritative singular definition. It also resonates with Ron Silliman's argument that "the social organization of contemporary poetry occurs in two primary structures: the *network* and the *scene*. The scene is specific to a place. A network, by definition, is transgeographic. Neither mode ever exists in a pure form" (28-29). Sites of small press activity are thus conceived of as acting both individually and in concert; localized expressions are reconceived of as single nodes (or scenes) that are part of larger rhizomatic networks. These networks are sustained collectively via the underground transfer of "nutrients." Consequently, any attempt to provide a singular definition of the small press (in Canada or elsewhere) not only faces certain failure, but also fundamentally misunderstands the nature of small press work. It is

insistently varied, deliberately multiple, and constantly exceeding its own existing boundaries at the nodal sites of new growth. At stake in this chapter, and in this dissertation, is the question of where and how these sites of new growth are produced and sustained and what forms of cultural labour this work takes.

The rhizomatic model of small press labour also resists conceiving of the communications circuit as occurring in one direction on a single line. Darnton's working model of the communications circuit moved in a single direction with distinct roles for distinct cultural agents (author, publisher, printer, shipper, bookseller, and reader). The small press compresses the circuit down and single agents adopt its various roles simultaneously. Writers establish small and micro presses, functioning as publishers, printers, shippers, and often booksellers at once. These same writers constitute the primary market for small press books from other publishers. It is conceivable that a single person can fulfill each of these roles simultaneously within the circuit, moving between each as circumstance demands. The rhizomatic model is conducive to understanding this movement; there is no single line, no clear division between roles, but rather an interconnected network of nodes. The rhizomatic network model, simultaneously local and transgeographic, individual and collective, facilitates thinking about the small press and the cultural field in terms that accommodate varied and multiple expressions of small press labour.

While below I propose Raymond Souster and the various manifestations of his Contact labour as generative and influential foundations for small press labour in Canada, I do not suggest that his work is the only source for such models in Canada. I do position his Contact labour as a site, or more accurately as a series of sites, on which a variety of scenes and networks were produced and sustained, but this should not be read as an attempt to

isolate Souster's work from the larger rhizomatic network. Contact, in its many manifestations, forged new nodes of production and distribution in Canada, connected those nodes to international networks, and in the process of creating and sustaining itself located new readers and transformed those readers into new cultural agents that adopted the multiple roles demanded by small press engagement.

### **Raymond Souster's "Contact" Paradigm: Transforming Small Press Readers into Small Press Collaborators**

Raymond Souster's small press praxis illuminates both how the small press differentiates itself from 'large' presses, as well as how these differences reconstitute the role of the reader in the communications circuit. The small press asks its readers to engage with a set of particular material forms of publishing and distribution, and Souster's work exemplifies one especially influential strain of this type of publishing. Walter Benjamin, in "The Author as Producer," and Ron Silliman, in "The Political Economy of Poetry," furnish a critical language that will help clarify the adjustment required of readers when approaching the small press, and that is particularly suited to a reconsideration of Souster's editorial work. In the pages that follow I reconceive of his small press labour as disruptive, alienating, and productive.

Raymond Souster's reputation as a poet is built on his lyric poems of the 1940s and 1950s, culminating in his Governor General's Award for *The Colour of the Times* (1964), and is concisely articulated in Gary Geddes's assessment of Souster as "predominantly a poet of content" (129). He continued to write and publish until his death in 2012, leaving behind an astonishing number of poems, the scale of which is most clearly expressed by his 10-

volume *Collected Poems* (1980-2004) from Oberon Press.<sup>9</sup> Existing criticism of Souster includes textual analysis, bibliographic and archival research, as well as studies that document and analyse his work as an editor.<sup>10</sup> Frank Davey evaluates Souster's "editorial contributions to Canadian literature [as] amongst the most influential of the century" (*From There to Here* 244): "He has given much time and money to assisting young writers to come into print without having to submit to the tyrannies of financial pragmatism and academic conservatism" (246). His editorial work occurred at a nexus in Canadian poetry between the origins of literary modernism in the 1920s and the first appearances of influential poets and theorists of the postmodern turn in the 1960s and 1970s. The implicit relationships between his varied editorial practices are made clear by his use of the name "Contact" for each of his most substantial projects: Contact Press (1952-1967), the little magazine *Contact* (1952-1954), and The Contact Poetry Reading Series (1957-1962).<sup>11</sup> Collectively, these projects emphasize his concern with building and maintaining the community of Canada's poets.<sup>12</sup>

His Contact work constructed and educated an audience capable of receiving small press writing and publications in informed and productive ways. He enlarged the set of those who shared the experimental, modernist, small press codes of the writers he championed, and this in turn demanded new attitudes of reception from that same audience. His transformations of existing small press apparatuses in Canada made possible the increased

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<sup>9</sup> He published a further 10 books through Shelburne, Ontario's Battered Silicon Dispatch Box between 2006 and 2012. As well, his literary executor, Donna Dunlop, published one final book of his poems posthumously, *Come Rain, Come Shine*, under the revived Contact Press in 2014.

<sup>10</sup> See Frank Davey's *Louis Dudek & Raymond Souster* (1980), Stephen Cain's "Mapping Raymond Souster's Toronto" (2005), the bookseller catalogues of Nicky Drumbolis's Letters Bookshop, Bruce Whiteman's *Collected Poems of Raymond Souster: Bibliography* (1984), Michael Gnarowski's *Contact Press 1952-1967* (1971) and *Contact 1952-1954* (1966), and Ken Norris's *The Little Magazine in Canada 1925-1980* (1984).

<sup>11</sup> Souster also co-edited the little magazines *Direction* (1943-1945) and *Enterprise* (1948), and individually edited *Combustion* (1957-1960).

<sup>12</sup> Though it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, note also that Raymond Souster played an integral role in the formation of the League of Canadian Poets in 1966, further demonstrating his interest in supporting poets within Canada.



consumption for the sake of further production (rather than consumption for the sake of consumption) of small press literary works, instigating the small press explosion of the 1960s. Souster's interest in doing work by hand wherever possible (typing, printing, collating, binding, distributing), in pursuing a public and open program of self-education in experimental poetics, in trying to understand his own place in the lineage of North American and European modernism, and in fostering connections, creating *contact*, between poets across time and space (between generations and across geographical barriers) provides disciplinary lessons for subsequent cultural agents and provides insight into the ways that small press publishing is distinct from the work of mainstream publishing. In addition, Souster's efforts to create productive contexts within which readers could receive literary works, both past and present, confronted the material difficulties of distribution and in turn both created and mobilized an audience now capable of transforming consumption into production.

I conceive of Souster's Contact work (poetic, editorial, publishing) as a related series of sites (rhizomatic nodes and lines) that produced and distributed poetry in novel, disruptive, and productively alienating ways. In his Contact labour, Souster sought to produce context, and the potential for context, for the reception of modernist (and later, postmodernist) poetry in Canada, and to facilitate connections between producers and consumers. Souster's work dispensed with the individual (whether the individual poet, individual poem, individual press, individual reader), and instead promoted community. The reader, when confronted by Souster's particular modes of production and distribution, had no choice but to grapple with a set of publishing mechanisms that were *other* to established modes. In such a praxis, the reader is more than simply a reader. Souster's emphasis on using

mimeograph whenever possible, on live readings, and on modest production values that were clearly performed by hand (by *his* hands) collectively stripped away the illusion of distance between reader and writer, but also between reader and publisher. His work removed a degree of commodity-fetishism from literary publishing, producing messy little magazines and mimeographed collections instead of slick, clean, and professional looking publications.<sup>13</sup> Souster's publications showed their terms of production to the audience; they demonstrated the accessibility of the means of production, and the ability of an individual to work actively from modest means to foster the sort of art that the individual believed in. Moreover, via his larger framework of Contact editing and publishing, he generated productive spaces within which readers could experience these alienations and subsequently respond with their own acts of new production. To better understand this work, I turn to Benjamin and Silliman.

Walter Benjamin, in 1934, delivered an address to the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris. His talk, "The Author as Producer," continues to resonate in the twenty-first century because of its consideration of the relations between production, reception, and political motivation. Indeed, his call for a "directing, instructing stance on the part of the writer" (233), one that he felt was "demanded more than ever" (234) in his day, in hindsight anticipates the small press model that has been articulated by others above. Benjamin demands that writers (and artists more generally) produce work that will "[alienate]" the audience "in an enduring manner" (236). Alienation here implies estrangement from

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<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that many of these collections have since accrued substantial economic values, but at the time that Souster produced them the emphasis was on making books that were inexpensive and accessible. Even Contact Press's more professional, non-mimeographed books were inexpensive. As editor Peter Miller sarcastically recalls: "The books' prices were exorbitant: even obscene. Originally the public had to scrounge \$2 for paperbacks or (only universities could afford this) \$3 for clothbound copies. The sales at these dollar levels seduced the editors into a life of luxury and decadence. Later, at least one title rose to \$3 paper and \$4 cloth: the effect of inflation and the publisher's rapacity" ("Contact Press: The Later Years" 6-7).

habituated modes of reception; it is an act of defamiliarization that is accomplished via a “principle of interruption” (234) at the level of form. When the form of works and the forms through which they are encountered are unfamiliar, they hold the potential to produce new forms of reading and reception. Artworks that alienate their audiences productively resist easy consumption, which in turn interrupts a passive, disconnected relationship to the world.

Benjamin calls for critics to consider not the “attitude of a work to the relations of production of its time” (222) but rather a work’s “*position*” (222) within them. For Benjamin, it is not enough for a work of art to argue a political position only at the level of content. Rather, a work of art, if it is to produce “functional transformation” (228) of society, must consider its material relationship to the means of production of its time and subsequently adopt a material form that is consistent with its political content. Individual works must be understood as part of a larger embedded cultural praxis, not merely reduced to content. Benjamin uses photography as one example of an art form that adopts what he perceives to be a correct political *attitude* without then going on to adopt a correct political *position*. By way of “well-known picture anthology” (230) *A Beautiful World!*, he argues that bourgeois principles have successfully “[transformed] even abject poverty, by recording it in a fashionably perfect manner, into an object of enjoyment” (230). This, for Benjamin, is “a flagrant example of what it means to supply a productive apparatus without changing it” (230). A productive apparatus is a set of material forms of production and distribution that, when deployed correctly, hold the potential to transform modes of reception. Benjamin demands a further step of the artist that photographs poverty in order to deploy her or his apparatus productively: “What we require of the photographer is the ability to give the picture the caption that wrenches it from modish commerce and gives it a revolutionary

useful value” (230). The photographer must actively frame her or his works in such a way that they resist simple assimilation into already dominant ideologies, thus reconstituting the relationship of the audience to the work of art.

The most successful example that Benjamin sees is the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht. Brecht’s plays, reliant on “the most primitive elements of the theater [...] succeeded in changing the functional connection between stage and public, text and performance, director and actor” (234). Brecht’s disruption of the theater-going experience by disregarding “wide-ranging plots” (234) and “[contenting] himself, by and large, with a podium” (234) worked to change the “functional connection between stage and public” by “constantly [counteracting] an illusion in the audience” (235). By disrupting the ability of the audience to suspend its disbelief, by insisting that the audience recognize that they are watching a staged performance that represents reality as opposed to reality itself, Brecht “[compelled] the listener to adopt an attitude vis-à-vis the process” (235). The audience was placed in a new relationship to the performance, no longer passive observers but rather agents engaged in the production and reception of the meaning of a play. Brecht’s epic theater, in Benjamin’s model, demanded that the audience attend not for placid distraction but rather to be alienated and thus compelled to action in the world outside of the theatre.

For Benjamin, this means that a work of art must “demonstrate the attitude with which it is to be followed” (233). This is the “directing, instructing stance” that a writer must adopt, and it is carried through the content of a work but also its material apparatus of production and distribution. This is where Benjamin’s model intersects with contemporary ideas about the small press and its function:

*An author who teaches writers nothing, teaches no one.* What matters, therefore, is the exemplary character of production, which is able first to induce other producers to produce, and second to put an improved apparatus at their disposal. And this apparatus is better the more consumers it is able to turn into producers—that is, readers or spectators into collaborators. (233)

The small press, whether through its interest in “non-commercial production” as per McKnight, its construction of co-operative “close working relationships” between publishing, editing, and printing as per McCutcheon, its radical and de-centred rhizomatic networks of production and reception as per Butling and Rudy, or most extremely its “negation of all ideologies” as per Jones, is engaged in trying to imagine and construct exemplary models of production that understand the relationship between producers and readers to be one of collaboration. These models, in their content but also in their material forms of production, ask that the reader take on a more active role at the moment of reading but also in the moments that follow. The small press survives by transforming “consumers [...] into producers—that is, readers or spectators into collaborators” (233).

Ron Silliman’s “The Political Economy of Poetry” (1981), collected in *The New Sentence* (1987), contains a similar language and set of concerns to Benjamin. A central piece of Silliman’s larger argument concerning the “complex and sometimes contradictory economic relations [and] social organization of contemporary poetry” (28) is his assertion that the “primary ideological message of poetry lies not in its explicit content, political though it may be, but in the *attitude towards reception* it demands of the reader” (31). The primary question for Silliman is not “whether a poet will be read in five or fifty or five hundred years, but whether that poet can and will be read by individuals *able and willing to*

*act* on their increased understanding of the world as a result of the communication” (30). An audience being both able and willing to act depends on whether the audience is knowledgeable enough to understand the relations (aesthetic, political, ideological) between a producer, a work of art, a reader, and the larger field of cultural production. According to Silliman, “[w]hat can be communicated through any literary production depends on which codes are shared with its audience” (25). Social codes, aesthetic codes, codes of status both cultural and economic—these represent the “primary context of any writing” (25). The burden therefore falls to the writer, the publisher, and the reader to produce, transmit, and consume works of art in such a way as to acknowledge such codes wherever possible.

Within these models, the small press must question existing modes of production, not reinforce existing structures, and alienate its audience by drawing its attention to the mechanisms of production and distribution. This alienation needs to be disorienting enough that first, it endures, and second, it requires a new apparatus of response. A large, commercially oriented press would not have an investment in this type of alienation, but rather would work to produce and sustain that which is familiar and comfortable to readers (in terms of content and form). Benjamin’s example above, in which photography “[supplies] a productive apparatus without changing it” (230), illustrates the transformation of something that should be uncomfortable and alienating into something easily consumable via the use of familiar forms. When Silliman insists that “consumption *for further production* is a moment of production itself—it *is* action” (30), he echoes Benjamin asserting that the apparatus of production “is better the more consumers it is able to turn into producers—that is, readers or spectators into collaborators” (233). Their common denominator is an interest in how and what particular material forms for the production and reception of art communicate. Each

asks how specific forms of art can realign the relationships between producer, production, receiver, and reception. For Silliman, reception is itself a form of production when the attitude of the participants is oriented correctly. For Benjamin, production must create new and better forms of production that can simultaneously induce further production from existing producers and transform readers into collaborators. I do not use either here to suggest that there is a single correct set of beliefs required in order to gain entry into the small press community; rather, the ‘correct’ attitude is a mode of inquiry and curiosity without fixed or ideal results. Navigating the nodes and lines of the small press rhizomatic network requires an attitude towards writing and reading that is open and multiple; it is a way of approaching texts that texts themselves work to elucidate. The texts and their material forms of production and distribution educate readers about how to approach and receive them productively. These attitudes are a discernible and significant presence in Souster’s editorial work.

Souster made few explicit critical statements during his career. He had no formal training as a poet or as an academic, but rather dedicated his time to creating conditions from within which he could educate himself. His lifelong small press work performed a critical position; instead of publishing formal criticism calling for particular actions, he pursued (and thus modeled and made possible) the lines of inquiry and types of action he felt were lacking. Among his most important published critical statements is his brief preface to his own poems in *Cerberus*, the three-headed book that launched Contact Press in 1952. Contact Press was conceived and created by Souster, Louis Dudek, and Irving Layton collectively.<sup>14</sup> Michael

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Miller became an editor in 1958 when Irving Layton withdrew from the press. Despite his substantial investment of time and money in keeping the press operational following the 1950s, he is marginalized in histories of the press, with his editorial contributions subordinated to those of the founding editors. However, he provided renewed editorial vigor, contributed time and financial resources, and translated work by Octavio Paz,

Gnarowski, Frank Davey, Collett Tracey, and others have documented the history of Contact Press in their scholarship, and as such I will not belabour that history here. Briefly, the press was a result of growing frustration among the three poets with the scarcity of available publishing opportunities for the young modernist poets of Canada (recall Dudek's call-to-arms quoted above). Contact Press was created in order to seize the means of production and distribution. This was intimately connected to the goals of the poets, taking seriously the modernist injunction to "make it new" by extending that spirit to not only their writing, but also to their means of publishing and distribution.

The revolutionary spirit of Benjamin's "The Author as Producer" was tied to the particular historical conditions of class struggle in 1930s Europe. Though not identical, the motivation behind the founding of Contact Press (and Souster's other editorial work) was in part derived from a similar spirit. Souster began his work in the small press during his time spent on an RCAF base in Nova Scotia during the Second World War (there he co-founded his first little magazine, *Direction* [1943-1945]), and his work during the following decades was in part a response to post-WWII conditions in Canada and abroad. Along with his Contact Press co-founders Louis Dudek and Irving Layton, he shared a sense of horror at the sudden and dramatically increased capacity for military destruction, at the seemingly bottomless capacity for human cruelty, at the increasing influence of global capitalism, and at the negative effects that these conditions were having on the production of art. Frank Davey,

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Alain Grandbois, and Anne Hébert for publication. Following Miller's arrival, Contact Press published significant early collections by Al Purdy, Alden Nowlan, Milton Acorn, Gwendolyn MacEwen, George Bowering, John Newlove, and Frank Davey among others, as well as Margaret Atwood's *The Circle Game* (1966), winner of the Governor General's Award for Poetry. He must be credited with professionalizing the operation to a large degree, contributing both poetry and editorial labour, working to organize the distribution system, as well as travelling to sell Contact books in Canada and in New York City. Louis Dudek, writing to Miller on September 7, 1961, declared: "We're not a 'Press', not even a cooperative one, unless we have a good distribution and promotion, and that we had always lacked—until you came along" (Miller, "Contact Press" 5).



in *From There to Here*, characterizes Souster's poetry as concerned with "the dehumanization [the urban, industrial man] suffers as a result of burgeoning technological and institutional structure" (243). The small press, and the kinds of writing that it nurtures, counter the dehumanization, industrialization, and violence of the first half of the twentieth century. As Souster writes in "The Lilac Poem" (1952), first published in *Cerberus*,

Because there is so much made of strength and wealth and power,  
 Because the little things are lost in this world,  
 I write this poem about lilacs knowing that both  
 Are this day's only: tomorrow they will lie forgotten. (4-8)

In its content, "The Lilac Poem" asserts a love for the small and fragile in the face of "strength and wealth and power"; in its material form, it asserts the necessity of taking control of one's own means of production and distribution as part of a larger, holistic small press praxis. It is human scale in form, humane in content, and fiercely anti-institutional.

These concerns, shared by Souster, Dudek, and Layton, are delineated in the editorial statements each contributed to *Cerberus*. I quote from each at length in order to make these common concerns clear:

Louis Dudek: "We three in this book share the same affirmations and therefore the same negations in the face of the present. For all three of us the external horrors of the world today, as well as its scattered beauty, are much the same. If our affirmations are not filled with more hallelujahs, it is only because all affirmations are pushed aside by the threatening destructiveness that faces us all. Our theme is love. But who can sing of love at the walls of Hiroshima, Belsen, Korea?" (13-14)

Irving Layton: “What brings us together in *Cerberus* is the belief that to write poetry is to say a loud nix to the forces high-pressuring us into conformity or atomic dispersion. Also, that the best part of any man today is the hell he carries inside him; and that only poetry can transmute that into freedom, love, intelligence.” (45)

Raymond Souster: “S. [Souster] in closing wishes that the universities might wake up and produce something besides gutless scholars and chemical engineers. How about a few poets? Or have they already killed off the potential crop for the next fifty years?” (76)

The three collectively see the necessity of poets taking control of the art's production and distribution if it is to function as a meaningful counterforce in the world. Souster even identifies his early and enduring concern with how poets (and poetry communities) are produced and sustained. He connects institutions to “gutless” scholarship and inhumane science, and fears that such acts are making the production of poetry impossible. Contact Press, from its first publication, declared that poets must work in response and opposition to a set of global conditions that were increasingly oriented towards the large and the larger, towards similarity, and towards destruction. The small press, in its deliberate *smallness*, counters large forces of conformity and destruction by producing and distributing idiosyncratic work that encourages and supports the production of other unique small press works. Contact Press, beyond providing an outlet for the iconoclastic work of its three editors, presented a viable apparatus for others to model new small presses on. It forged a

new node in the larger rhizomatic network, and made clear the ideal attitude with which it was to be followed.

The rest of Souster's *Cerberus* preface is representative of his writing and publishing life, marked by his characteristic modesty as well as his wide-ranging curiosity. He begins with a note of self-deprecation: "Souster (hereafter S.) never went past high school, and has learned everything about poetry the hard way [...]. Shouldn't say 'learned,' for he's still learning, hopes he'll go on learning; when he stops doing that, the poetry will probably stop with it" (75). Souster notes his own lack of formal education, reduces his name to a single letter, and modestly insists that "learning" is the primary goal driving his poetic exploration. This is borne out in his other labour. Reflecting on *Contact* magazine in an interview later in life, Souster explained that he "saw [the magazine] as part of [his] broader education in poetry" (Tremblay 190). In creating conditions within which he could personally receive an education in poetry, Souster made that same education available to the growing and receptive audience in Toronto and elsewhere.

This modesty of tone is representative of his writing practices, but also his editorial and publishing practices. As Bruce Whiteman notes, Souster's works "emphasize[d], not the ego, but the primacy of the perceived world. [...] The loss to himself which Souster's self-deprecation entailed was the gain of those writers whose cause he championed, for he channeled much of his energy into promotion efforts on behalf of his contemporaries" (*Raymond Souster and His Works* 29); or, in Nicky Drumbolis's description, "Souster's exceptionally charitable view of community has always worked best behind the scenes" (*A Modern Air*). The contact he sought to facilitate was self-serving insofar as he lacked formal opportunities to encounter such material in his education or professional life, and he thus

needed to create such opportunities for himself. The greater benefits of this work, however, were received by those he encouraged and supported. Souster's *Cerberus* preface continues,

S. has always believed (and still believes) that the primary function of poetry is to communicate something to somebody else. Not too important what that something is, the big thing is to get it across, "make contact." If you fail here all that follows, everything else you throw in, is wasted, and you might as well start all over again. (75)

Souster is discussing writing in this case, suggesting that the poem must make contact with its reader, but that spirit of making contact possible is the defining feature of his decades of labour in Canadian poetry. Its central place in the impulses driving his work as a poet, editor, publisher, and organizer of literary events, is clear from his repeated use of "Contact" to name these activities.

Despite the dearth of critical writing by Souster, his poetry reveals many of his small press attitudes. Among his most well-known poems is "Get the Poem Outdoors" from his collection *So Far So Good* (1969). In addition to being one of the most clear and direct articulations of his poetics, the poem also helps to identify the ways in which his poetics are analogous to his small press work. The poem reads, in full:

Get the poem outdoors under any pretext,  
reach through the open window if you have to,  
kidnap it right off the poet's desk,  
then walk the poem in the garden, hold it up  
among the soft yellow garlands of the  
willow,

command of it no further blackness, no silent  
     cursing at midnight, no puny whimpering  
     in the endless small hours, no more  
     shivering in the cold-storage room of the  
     winter heart,  
 tell it to sing again, loud and then louder so it  
     brings the whole neighbourhood out, but  
     who cares,  
 ask of it a more human face, a new tenderness,  
     even the sentimental allowed between the  
     hours of nine to five,  
 then let it go, stranger in a fresh green world, to  
     wander down the flower beds, let it go to  
     welcome each bird that lights on the still  
     barren mulberry tree. (1-21)

Most commonly, the poem is read as an aesthetic statement, one in which “laws and conventions must be broken in order to create joy” (Davey, *Louis Dudek & Raymond Souster* 105). Frank Davey notes the fundamentally “iconoclastic role” (105) that Souster posits for poetry here. The poem must be liberated from the restrictions of being indoors in order to exist in the garden, where it is freed from blackness, silence, cold, and isolation. I propose, however, that it can also be read as an editorial statement.

Published in 1969, “Get the Poem Outdoors” reflects back on twenty-five years of Souster’s labour editing magazines and running a small press. Getting the poem “outdoors”

can be read as a metaphor for publication. When read as an editorial manifesto, the poem addresses publishers and editors: “reach through the open window if you have to, / kidnap it right off the poet’s desk” (2-3). The “outdoors” of the poem is a public space within which the poem can be received. Souster calls for poetry to “sing again, loud and then louder so it / brings the whole neighbourhood out” (12-13); the poem must no longer perform “silent / cursing at midnight” (7-8). Souster wants literature to break free from the isolation and potential insularity of the creative act. It must exist in the world and create contact across any number of rhizomatic nodes and lines. Once the poem has been placed in its proper outdoor context (fulfilling the role of the editor and publisher), Souster states that one must “let it go, stranger in a fresh green world, to / wander down the flower beds” (18-19). The poem, released into the world, will create contact, facilitating further contact. The poem, when properly framed, is a generative node, one available to “each bird that lights on the still / barren mulberry tree” (20-21). The “barren” tree needs to be populated with work; poems respond to and breed further poems and small presses respond to and breed further small presses. The cultural field is reflective of the cumulative relations of its individual parts. The poem must be placed in the field in order to fulfill its role. The conscientious editor and publisher works to create conditions in which poems can be released into the garden. Souster’s collected small press labour ensured that other poets, editors, and publishers capable of receiving poems and engaging with them productively occupied the garden. Souster’s articulation of this role in 1969 reflected his previous decades of labour, years during which he worked to perform exactly this work in such a way that it demonstrated for interested readers and potential collaborators just how it could be followed and responded to productively.

Contact Press was initially intended to publish work by the three founding editors, but it would go on to publish important work by established and emerging Canadian poets. David McKnight argues that Contact “played a monumental role in advancing modern and experimental poetry in Canada and set the stage for the New Wave Canada poets who would burst onto the literary scene in 1967” (“Small Press Publishing” 312). During its fifteen years of operation, Contact Press published work (often early or even first books) by Milton Acorn, Margaret Atwood, George Bowering, Daphne Marlatt, Victor Coleman, D.G. Jones, Gwendolyn MacEwen, Jay Macpherson, David McFadden, John Newlove, bpNichol, Michael Ondaatje, Al Purdy, W.W.E. Ross, F.R. Scott, Fred Wah, Phyllis Webb, and dozens of others. Souster describes his own contributions modestly, suggesting, “as [he] was a silent third party in the Montreal operation, with no funds to contribute and living in Toronto as well, the real responsibility for the press fell on Louis Dudek and Irving Layton” (“Getting on With It” 315). The facts, however, contest his assessment.

Souster’s publishing program within the press was unique. According to Collett Tracey, the press’s editorial policy was informal: “Each poet had equal say in suggesting what might be published, and if they felt strongly enough, it was generally printed. Usually, however, they passed proposed manuscripts among themselves and ‘voted and agreed on everything by correspondence’” (116). In practice, this creates lines in the bibliography of the press denoting who was responsible for what work. Three of Souster’s editorial contributions at the press deserve particular mention here for their articulation of the contact that Souster strove for in his activities, balancing new, young voices with established but often underserved elder voices.

The first part of this balance was Souster's consistent support for young and developing poets. He was responsible for publishing two anthologies through Contact Press: *Poets 56: Ten Younger English Canadians* (1956) and *New Wave Canada: The New Explosion in Canadian Poetry* (1966). The emphasis of these anthologies falls on the words "Younger" and "New." *Poets 56*, mimeographed by Souster, collected work by Avi Boxer, Marya Fiamengo, William Fournier, Daryl Hine, D.G. Jones, Jay Macpherson, John Reeves, Mortimer Schiff, Peter Scott, and George Whipple. *New Wave Canada* collected work from Daphne Buckle (Marlatt), Victor Coleman, David Cull, Scott Davis, David Dawson, Gerry Gilbert, E. Lakshmi Gill, William Hawkins, Robert Hogg, George Jonas, Barry Lord, Roy MacSkimming, David McFadden, bpNichol, Michael Ondaatje, James Reid, and Fred Wah. Although *New Wave Canada* has proven more influential over time, with a remarkable number of its young poets having gone on to shape Canadian poetry for decades, the impulse behind both anthologies was the same: to present and make available experimental work from new, young poets.

The second part of this activity was to acknowledge and help support the work of previous generations, to create contact with the established poets of Canada's literary history. To this end, Souster's published the first book by W.W.E. Ross to bear a publisher's imprint, *Experiment: 1923-1929* (1956), in a mimeographed edition of 100 copies. The publication was described in the first issue of *Combustion* (January 1957) as follows:

Earliest work of a reticent, long-neglected pioneer of modern Canadian poetry, published for the first time in a modest format in the hope that others will do something more substantial. For directness and economy of statement,



for a delicate, deliberately underwritten lyric quality, he is surpassed by few of his contemporaries. (2-3)

Souster's editorial work consistently oscillates between these two poles, moving from the young and the untested to the established and accomplished (if underappreciated). His publishing work created new nodes while also illustrating that there was a longer history of experimental nodes that needed to be engaged with, and his little magazine work and the Contact Poetry Readings sustained this balance.

The name Contact Press was derived from Souster's solo-edited *Contact* magazine. Subtitled "An International Magazine of Poetry," *Contact* worked to put Canadian poets in direct dialogue with American and European modernists. The first issue, published in January 1952, three months before the appearance of *Cerberus*, included an article by Louis Dudek ("Ou sont les jeunes?"), and poems by A.G. Bailey, George Nasir, Kenneth Patchen, Louis Dudek and Irving Layton. In ten issues, from January 1952 to March 1954, *Contact* published a wide range of poets, including Anna Akhmatova, Guillaume Apollinaire, Gottfried Benn, Avi Boxer, Jean Cocteau, Cid Corman, Robert Creeley, Larry Eigner, Theodore Enslin, D.G. Jones, A.M. Klein, Denise Levertov, Charles Olson, P.K. Page, Octavio Paz, Phyllis Webb, William Carlos Williams, and others. It was an international magazine, placing Canada's emerging modernist poets alongside vital international influences, both foundational and contemporary. The international character of *Contact*, as well as the press, reading series, and magazine's sustained interest in supporting poets from outside Toronto and from earlier generations, demonstrates Souster's investment in both *scene* and *network*, to use Silliman's terms. Souster's immediate scene was localized to

Toronto, and to the poets active around him. His greater network, however, was consistently global, reaching across Canada and into international scenes to forge connections.<sup>15</sup>

Sabrina Lee Reed, in her dissertation on the influence of American poets on Souster, Dudek, and Layton, quotes Souster describing himself as “the first Canadian poet that was almost totally influenced from the States” (61), citing his reading of and correspondence with William Carlos Williams, Cid Corman, Charles Olson, Kenneth Patchen, and Robert Creeley as key to his development. She continues, “[h]is contact with them made him particularly eager to expose the rest of Canada to American poets” (61). Reed provides a compelling reading of Souster’s poetry alongside the poetry of these dominant American influences, showing clear relationships between Souster’s reading and writing. Souster’s own narrative of these years leans heavily on American influence:

I’ll always remember the day [...] Louis Dudek throwing the first two issues of Cid Corman’s *Origin* down on the picnic table and saying “this is typical of what the nuts in New York are doing these days.” I remember casually flipping through both copies and then giving them back to him—I was not yet ready for Charles Olson and Robert Creeley. But the next year [1952] something led me back to those two issues, and then Louis came to Toronto in May and left me as a gift *The Collected Later Poems of William Carlos Williams*. From that time on my world of poetry assumed largely its present shape. (Souster, “Some Afterthoughts” 1)

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<sup>15</sup> I do not intend to invoke historical arguments among Canadian poets between the relative values of “native” and “cosmopolitan” lines of literary influence derived from terms introduced by A.J.M. Smith in *The Book of Canadian Poetry* (1943). I do, however, want to emphasize that Souster’s willingness to pursue international contacts and disseminate the work of international poets stood in contrast to the dominant attitudes of magazines contemporary to *Contact* and *Combustion*, and to position his attitudes in this regard as part of his greater program striving to create contact across different temporal and spatial lines.

Souster's exposure to American poets changed his own reading, writing, and publishing practices, and in these practices one can trace a desire to similarly change the work of others.

In a 2002 interview, reflecting on the legacy of the Contact Poetry Readings, Souster explained:

It was [the Contact Poetry Reading Series] more than the magazines that had, I believe, the greatest impact on Canadian poets of the 1960s. [...] it brought the world to us. When the fledgling Canada Council gave us money for the Series, we were able to bring some of the best poets in the world to Toronto. [...] these Black Mountain and City Lights people were avenues to the wider world of human intrigues. Toronto and Canada felt restrictive and parochial by contrast. When they started to come, our own poets started to change. It was like flowers germinating. (Tremblay 200)

His description of international contact effectively pollinating Canadian poets fits nicely with the rhizomatic model of small press work—the transgeographic transfer of nutrients between different scenes (or nodes) creates and sustains larger networks. His international focus contrasted other Canadian literary magazines of the era that were often explicitly Canadian. *First Statement* (1942-1945) identified itself as “A Magazine for Young Canadian Writers” on the cover of its first issue, and in its opening editorial proclaimed that in “the present stage of Canadian literature, a gesture would appear to be important. A display of activity may symbolize a future, and plant a suggestion in someone’s mind. [...] We intend to go through the ceremonies, in our Canadian literary youth” (1); *Northern Review*'s (1945-1956) front cover clarified that it was a review “of Writing and the Arts in Canada”; *Contemporary Verse* (1941-1952) described itself as “A Canadian Quarterly”; *CIV/n* (1953-1954) opened its first

issue with a plea to readers to purchase Irving Layton's *Love the Conqueror Worm* (1953), arguing that the "way to support Canadian literature is to buy and read the work of our best writers" (Collins, *CIV/n* 15); Louis Dudek's *Delta* (1956-1966) developed into the press Delta Canada, as of issue 6 (January 1959) was itself called *Delta (Canada)*, and declared in its opening editorial, "*Delta* is primarily a local affair: it is a poetry magazine for Canada with a job to do here. We'll have, certainly, contributors and readers from outside; but it is the situation in Canada that brings us into existence" (2). Contrast these self-consciously nationalist positions with *Contact* branding itself "An International Magazine of Poetry."

Souster's publishing work, in addition to its international focus, was also distinguished from its contemporaries by its visual signifiers. Like many of the books he produced through Contact Press, *Contact* was a mimeographed production, crude in appearance.<sup>16</sup> Souster did the labour by hand, typing stencils, running copies through the mimeograph machine in his basement, gathering, stapling, and mailing out copies. Frank Davey identifies productive connections between the minimalism of Souster's poetry and the unrefined production values of his editorial work: "Minimalism declares that the inconspicuous, the unpretentious, the simple, have more innate power than their inflated, decorated, extended or complicated counterparts" (*Louis Dudek & Raymond Souster* 127). Davey extends this line of analysis to a critique of commodity fetishism that he perceives in Souster's work:

At the level of language, Souster's poems do not resemble aesthetic commodities because he avoids [...] all semblance of carefully machined or manufactured surface. As John Sutherland remarked of Souster's earliest work, "Mr. Souster has . . . tried to look as little like a poet as he could . . . he

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<sup>16</sup> See Figures 1 and 2 in Appendix C.

writes in a plain unvarnished manner that avoids all but the simplest technique as literary affectation.” Souster’s language is visibly non-literary and appears selected with minimal care. (131)

This resistance to ostentation reflected in his poetry is connected to the same impulse in his publishing. His continued use of mimeograph as a means of printing, his resistance to all but the simplest cover designs, and his insistence on gathering and stapling pages himself wherever possible collectively resist idealistic notions publishing. It is physical labour done in service of a greater community, emphasizing the work above the presentation of the work and striving to produce physical objects that were affordable and accessible.

Jerome McGann, in *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism* (1993), asserts, “different presses [...] generate different sets of textual signifiers” (12). The modernist drive for literary experimentation carried with it a similar interest in manipulating visual, textual, and bibliographic codes in the service of producing and supporting experimental literature. Souster’s manipulation of the material terms of production was modest based on his use of inexpensive and accessible modes of production (the mimeograph, primarily), but his work was nonetheless visually distinctive in its time. Souster’s minimalist production values and his “inconspicuous” and “unpretentious” modes of printing and distributing poetry are analogous to the disruptive transformation that Benjamin identified in Brecht’s epic theatre in the ways that they insist their readers recognize that such works are produced by human hands. Readers of Souster’s magazines and books were placed in a different relationship to the written material and its material form. Souster’s magazines *Contact* and *Combustion* bear little physical resemblance to their most immediate contemporaries—*First Statement*, *Contemporary Verse*, *CIV/n*, *Northern Review*,

and later, Louis Dudek's *Delta*.<sup>17</sup> These publications, while not lavish and still clearly small press efforts, strove to achieve the highest level of clean, professional production available to them. Souster, however, was content with mimeographed work.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, the books he mimeographed and stapled for Contact Press (among them his own *A Dream That is Dying* [1954], *Walking Death* [1954], *For What Time Slays* [1955], W.W.E. Ross's *Experiment: 1923-1929* [1956], and the anthology *Poets 56* [1956]) stand in visual contrast to other publications from the press printed by professional printers in paperback and hardcover editions, as well as the books of poetry being published elsewhere in Canada by the likes of Oxford University Press, The Ryerson Press, and McClelland and Stewart.<sup>19</sup> Souster's layout and printing were often messy and cramped, unlike the cleaner and more professional efforts of others.<sup>20</sup>

Michèle Rackham, in her Master's study of Betty Sutherland's design contributions to Contact Press, First Statement Press, and related magazines, notes Souster's initial resistance to both the appearance and the cost of producing a nominally professional magazine.

Rackham notes that Dudek had to convince Souster to pay for a printed cover for *Contact*,

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<sup>17</sup> Souster's magazines do bear a resemblance to *Preview* (1942-1945), another letter-sized, mimeographed magazine that held an editorial position similar to *Contact*. The first issue (March 1942) declared in its opening editorial, "we hope to make contact, as a group, with new writing movements in England, the United States and other parts of Canada" (1). See Figure 8 in Appendix C. *First Statement* also began as a letter-sized mimeograph effort, but later was printed by editor John Sutherland on a press, beginning with Volume 2 in August 1943 (Fisher 5).

<sup>18</sup> See Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7 in Appendix C.

<sup>19</sup> See Figures 9 and 10 in Appendix C.

<sup>20</sup> Even when a Contact Press book from Souster was printed elsewhere, as in *New Wave Canada* being printed at the Rubicon Press in Toronto, it still bore the marks of Souster's physical labour. In the case of *New Wave Canada*, at 172 pages it was too large for Souster to print himself. However, he collated and gathered the pages at home, with the help of the community he had been laboring to create: "A dozen or more volunteers arrived early that Saturday morning. I had spent the previous evening removing all six inside doors of our bungalow, then making crude tables of them in the basement with whatever came to hand. These were then piled high with the pages of *New Wave Canada* in exact order. We were printing 900 copies, 160 clothbound, the balance in paper. All day long the group toiled faithfully at their collating task in that cool basement. [...] The following day only four of us toiled at the piles beginning to shrink significantly; the third and last day I worked alone, finishing the now-hateful job early in the afternoon, then collapsing into bed with a bad head cold" (Souster, "Getting on With It" 317).

and moreover, that Dudek disapproved of Souster's choice of legal size paper: "The big sheet is awkward, not like a mag" (Rackham 55). Souster's reservations centred on the cost of "an expensive cover for a mimeographed little magazine" (Rackham 55). Dudek went on: "we want to make the mag look as good as possible, it gets the stuff more careful reading (the writing is ragged and bold enough as it is...)" (Rackham 55). Souster eventually acquiesced to using a linocut by artist Betty Sutherland (simply the word "CONTACT") beginning in the third issue, but the disagreement with Dudek is illuminating.<sup>21</sup> Souster, via the material choices that he made regarding design, printing, and distribution, was deliberately small and iconoclastic. He did not want his little magazines to "look as good as possible"; he wanted them to be functional, inexpensive (ideally free), easy to distribute, and to display clearly that they were made by his own hands.

*Combustion*, begun in 1957 three years after *Contact* ceased, was published without a cover; it simply had the word "Combustion" printed at the top on the same font and size as the rest of the magazine's contents.<sup>22</sup> Printed on legal paper, *Combustion* was folded in half, stapled shut, and addressed on the back cover for mailing. Souster's approach was amateur, messy, and in some cases led to confusion, but his resistance to making ostensibly professional changes to his modes of production are entirely in keeping with his small press ethos.<sup>23</sup> His resistance to making publications "look as good as possible" alienates the reader,

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<sup>21</sup> See Figure 1 in Appendix C for Sutherland's linocut.

<sup>22</sup> See Figure 3 in Appendix C.

<sup>23</sup> Souster rarely published his own work in *Contact* or *Combustion*. In fact, he did not publish any of his own poetry in *Contact*, restricting himself to editorial statements and a small number of reviews. In *Combustion*, he published two of his own poems. However, he did so without attaching his name, and as a result one of his poems was later collected under Charles Olson's name in the collection *Archaeologist of Morning*. According to Bruce Whiteman,

[t]he poem in question is "Queen Street Burle-Q." It was first published, unsigned, in *Combustion* #1 (January 1957), p. 6, where it followed Olson's poem "The Loves of Anat, 1". As Souster explained (in a letter to the present writer): "I had a little space left on Page 6 of the first number so inserted my short poem as a space-filler . . . As editor of *Combustion* I

presenting a visibly alternative mode of production and distribution.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, his magazines were distributed for free. The first issue of *Combustion* (January 1957) announced at the top of the first page, “COMBUSTION is distributed solely by mailing list: a postcard confirming your interest will bring it to you regularly. Donations, of course, are always welcome” (1). Souster transformed the physical terms of publication in order to shift the expectations of the reader and to allow for greater reach by keeping production costs low. The material forms of his publishing work were distinguishable from those around him by their visual cues and material forms, and demonstrated a functional model that could be followed by others. It demonstrated an attitude towards production that could be followed, and made clear to readers that they could themselves become publishers and collaborators.

Following publication, Contact had to locate a readership and find ways to distribute their books. Souster’s approach to these problems was characteristically modest and personal. In *Cerberus*, the first book published by Contact, the reader finds Souster’s home address (28 Mayfield Avenue, Toronto) given as the distribution centre for the press. This was sustained until 1964 when Peter Miller’s address (9 Ivor Road, Toronto) began to be used for the same purpose (Tracey 147). Clearly, however, such actions were unavoidably insular in their reach. One had to know the editors personally, or already have one of the books, or already read one of the literary magazines in which the books were advertised, to locate the address. Although some bookstores did stock this material, distribution was a

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didn’t want my name to appear on any of the material used in the mag.” George F. Butterick and Albert Glover, the editors of *Archaeologist of Morning* and Olson’s bibliographers, understandably assumed that “Queen Street Burle-Q” was by Olson and hence included it in the Olson book, which was published after the poet’s death. (*Collected Poems* 73-74)

<sup>24</sup> Coach House, often regarded as the closest spiritual successor to Contact Press, effected a similar transformation of the visual signifiers of poetry publishing in Canada. However, instead of relying on unadorned mimeograph techniques, Coach House went to the opposite extreme deploying a wild array of different paper stocks, ink colours, and printing and binding techniques. Their books, in the same spirit as Souster (if a different execution), announced via their visual cues that this poetry was going to demand something different of the reader.



problem that dogged the press for the duration of its life. Small press lines and nodes existed in Canada, and elsewhere, but it was often difficult to find them and establish contact. To this end, Contact Press also worked as an occasional distributor for other presses via the direct personal correspondence of its editors with other writers. Nicky Drumbolis's Contact Press inventory cites thirteen titles that Contact played a role in distributing, among them titles from Robert Creeley's The Divers Press (Mallorca, Spain), Cid Corman's Origin Press (Ashland, MA), Jonathan Williams/The Jargon Society (Highlands, NC), Migrant Books (Worcester, UK), and Serif Books (Edinburgh, Scotland). Souster corresponded voluminously with poets around the world and he facilitated direct connections between these poets whenever he was able. His desire to achieve contact in these ways identifies the experience of isolation endemic to Canadian poets in the 1950s and 1960s. For example, on receiving an invitation in 1950 to participate in a new initiative of Dudek's, the "Poetry Mailbag," Souster's enthusiastic response betrays his feeling of isolation: "It's like getting a letter of acceptance while in a concentration camp" (Davey, *Louis Dudek & Raymond Souster* 10).<sup>25</sup>

The most literal expression of Souster's desire for contact is found in the formative poetry reading series that he founded and organized in the late 1950s. The Contact Poetry Reading Series, organized and run primarily by Souster and fellow poet Kenneth McRobbie from 1957-1962, was a landmark in Canada, establishing a successful model for future poetry reading series while engaging Canada's poets in new dialogues with international writing and publishing communities. Among the forty-four poets hosted during the five years of the series were many of the leading Canadian poets of the day; A.J.M. Smith, Margaret

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<sup>25</sup> Frank Davey discusses the mailbag briefly in his study *Louis Dudek & Raymond Souster* (1980). A more detailed discussion, including primary documents, is available in Lorna Knight's "Louis Dudek's Grapevine" (*Canadian Notes & Queries* 48:1 [1994]: 13-17).

Avison, Leonard Cohen, Jay Macpherson, and Al Purdy all made at least one appearance. But the series also featured writers from the vanguard of mid-century American poetics such as Denise Levertov, Charles Olson, Louis Zukofsky, and Frank O'Hara. The Contact Poetry Reading Series marks the emergence of a fundamental form of modern literary expression in Canada.<sup>26</sup>

The novelty of the series is emphasized in several ways. It was the first reading series to receive funding from the Canada Council for the Arts, beginning in 1959 with a small grant of \$845.00 (Canada Council, *Third Annual Report* 82). As Souster recalls, the Canada Council “gave us about \$50.00 a reading, and we were able to give the poet something, and pay their expenses” (Telephone Interview). The series was funded initially, however, under the category of “Opera, Theatre, Ballet, etc.,” occupying the tenuous “etc.” of the title. In 1972, the category “Public Readings by Canadian Writers” was established, and distributed \$26,639.00 to 37 organizations (Canada Council, *Sixteenth Annual Report* 56-58). In 1976/77, twenty years after the founding of the Contact Poetry Reading Series, the Canada Council distributed \$190,430.00 to 189 organizations, illustrating the rapid spread of similar series across the country (Canada Council, *Twentieth Annual Report* 29-33). Co-organizer Kenneth McRobbie, writing to the Council in order to justify funding the series, explained that “[t]hese poetry readings were started on an experimental basis about two years ago. The idea was to give poets a chance to read their own work in public, to give those interested a chance to hear it and ask questions—and to prove that both poet and audience actually exist”

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<sup>26</sup> For further discussion of the significance of the Contact Poetry Readings, and their relationship to the histories of federal arts funding and the rise of public readings, see my articles “‘poet and audience actually exist’: The Contact Poetry Reading Series and the Rise of Literary Readings in Canada” in *Journal of Canadian Studies / Revue d’études canadiennes* 49:1 (Winter 2015) and “‘setting widespread precedent’: The Canada Council for the Arts and the Funding of Poetry Readings in Canada (1957-1977)” in *Amodern* 4 (March 2015). A full list of readers and dates is available in an Appendix A.

(Letter to Peter Dwyer, 30 June 1959). That the organizers felt it was necessary to prove the existence of poet and audience to one another drives home the stark reality that to have been a poet in Canada in the 1950s was to have worked largely in isolation and moreover, that for readers, writers were rarely physically present in their communities. Many poets reading in the series noted that it was their first public reading in Canada. According to a letter from McRobbie to Peter Dwyer on June 9, 1960, Ralph Gustafson and A.J.M. Smith had not read in Canada before. Nicky Drumbolis includes Al Purdy, Alden Nowlan, and D.G. Jones in the list of first-time readers (*Catalogue 12*). Such claims indicate that reading opportunities were rare indeed.

This problem had been identified two years earlier at the Canadian Writers' Conference (CWC) of July 1955 at Queen's University. The conference welcomed writers, publishers, editors, librarians, and booksellers to discuss "writing and its dissemination" (Whalley, *Writing in Canada* 3). Co-organized by poet and scholar George Whalley, the CWC questioned the anemic state of Canadian literary criticism, the lack of availability of Canadian texts for teaching and research, and the financial and logistical difficulties of publishing in Canada. F.R. Scott, in his introduction to the published proceedings, *Writing in Canada* (1956), lists some of the primary questions that prompted the event:

Have Canadian writers such a sense of community? Do they mostly know one another and work together in the same informal way, or are they isolated and cut off from themselves and from the public? What problems do they face in such a country as this, in the days of mass communication and rapid economic expansion? Have they adequate opportunities for the publication of their

work? Is their concern with “the book,” in any form other than a paper-back, perhaps outmoded? (1)

Scott’s questions reflect a developing cultural climate in which the existence of Canadian literature as an active cultural field was beginning to find preliminary acceptance. Though participants felt that the writer in Canada was generally “suffering from neglect” (3), they were also able to see themselves as participants in a tradition as well as members of a community of peers (as evidenced by the simple fact of their collective presence at the CWC). Writers began to interrogate their circumstances, and the 1950s provided opportunities to improve conditions.

The CWC hosted a series of informal poetry readings by Irving Layton, Louis Dudek, James Reaney, Miriam Waddington, Phyllis Webb, and others. The published proceedings contain a report by Jay Macpherson on these poetry readings that identifies both the value of such events as well as the lack of other similar events in the country. She writes: “to many of us these two short sessions were the most useful part of the whole Conference” because few of the assembled poets “have [had] much opportunity of trying new poems out on a sympathetic ear” (“Report on Poetry Readings” 137). She continues:

I for one came home to Toronto wanting to read poetry from roof tops and street corners. Probably the cause lies in the sense of community that I have mentioned. Whereas a novel or other work with an obviously factual structure can draw reasonably articulate and specific comments from its readers, to the poet his reader generally remains a faceless head on a dubious body. Besides one’s friends—the specialists among them—one has no notion of by whom one is read or, to put it flatly, why. Anything, then, that brings home to us the

sense of our community as a lively reacting organism, to be pleased or thwarted or argued with or transfigured, gives us something of which most of us stand in continuing need. (138)

Two years would pass before Toronto had a viable poetry reading series that was able to regularly offer the sense of community as “a lively reacting organism” that Macpherson describes. The Contact Readings, like much of Raymond Souster’s editorial work, strove to encourage and produce the sense of community celebrated and longed for by Macpherson, Scott, and other participants of the CWC.

Peter Middleton, in *Distant Reading: Performance, Readership, and Consumption in Contemporary Poetry* (2005), emphasises the public performance of poetry as a particularly significant “form of sociality” (75). According to Middleton, public performance is “part of the long biography of poems, part of the distribution from poet to readers, and readers to readers, which takes place through silent reading, memory, active analysis, discussion, performance, publication, and all the many processes whereby thoughts, feelings, and knowledges circulate” (102). The poetry reading is a vital component of the larger scenes and networks through which poetry circulates; travelling to read in other cities is a significant mode through which different scenes make contact in order to establish networks. Moreover, other theorists of the poetry reading ascribe to it a spirit of resistance. Charles Bernstein, in *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (1998), conceives of the poetry reading as a “plural event” (9) that denies singularity and stability, instead emphasizing interrelation, adaptability, the physical body, and the specific material conditions and audience composition of a given event. The poetry reading, for Bernstein, creates “a space of authorial

resistance to textual authority” (9) as a distinct medium that interrogates and modifies the printed word.

The Contact Poetry Readings as public performance, for Souster, worked on behalf of both writer and audience to create opportunities for direct engagement and for education. To the poets, the series offered the chance to read, payment, and conclusive proof of the existence of both an audience and other poets. To the audience, the series offered a venue in which to hear and engage with poets, both emerging and established, and an ongoing education in developing North American modernism. The series actively constructed and educated a poetry audience in Toronto in a manner that paralleled Souster’s work with little magazines and Contact Press, literarily staging a dialogue with peers and influences.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, this work can be understood historically to be of a kind with the spirit of resistance underscoring the emergence of the small press in Canada. It was an important “form of sociality,” in Middleton’s terms, producing new opportunities for the contact Souster sought, generating new lines and nodes, while simultaneously multiplying the available means of production and distribution for experimental poetry. In its “resistance to textual authority,” in Bernstein’s terms, the readings expanded where and how poetry could be encountered by interested readers.<sup>28</sup> Based on the rapid and widespread growth of poetry

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<sup>27</sup> The summaries written to the Canada Council establish that the audiences grew to include people who were not necessarily poets. Kenneth McRobbie documents the attendance of high school students, painters and art students, professionals and “New Canadians” (Letter to Peter Dwyer, 20 March 1960).

<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the Isaacs Gallery (host to four of the five years of readings) had become a site for selling modern poetry, with a regular stock held outside of the readings. This extended the role of the series. Not only did the series challenge the primacy of the printed word in the reception of poetry in Canada during these years, but by distributing experimental poetry outside of the readings themselves, the Contact Series and the Isaacs Gallery extended the reach of books that were otherwise substantially more difficult to encounter.

In addition, gallery-owner Avrom Isaacs established his own small press imprint: Gallery Editions. Gallery Editions produced three books: *Eyes Without a Face* (1960), poems by Kenneth McRobbie with art by Graham Coughtry; *Place of Meeting* (1962), poems by Raymond Souster with art by Michael Snow; and *Sketch Book: Canadian and European Sketches* (1962), by Tony Urquhart. The books, as well as being beautifully produced and illustrated, remain valuable documents of the interaction that occurred between poets and artists in the Greenwich and Isaacs Galleries.

readings in Canada in the 1960s, and sustained in our present moment, the Contact Readings were successful in transforming, in this case, literal spectators into producers and collaborators. Just as the readings were at the vanguard of the establishment of an important literary form in Canada, Contact Press and *Contact* magazine were generative of the explosion of small press and little magazines in Canada in the 1960s, 1970s, and beyond. Souster's collected work under the name "Contact" effectively illustrated the attitude with which it was best received and followed, and facilitated the transformation of readers and spectators into collaborators, writers, and publishers in the decades since.

### **Conclusion**

Souster, reflecting on the legacy of *Contact* magazine, writes, "[i]n retrospect, *Contact* appears to have formed a bridge over into the Fifties in which the modern Canadian poetical movement could begin its slow but determined march" ("Some Afterthoughts" 2). This statement holds equally true for Contact Press and the Contact Poetry Reading Series. Locating and creating a context within which the value of a piece of writing can become apparent is a defining feature of Canadian small press. Souster's repeated use of "Contact" to identify his varied small press labour expresses the same idea. The resting condition of those in the fields of Canadian poetry in the 1940s and 1950s was, predominantly, isolation. The contact that Souster yearned for in his own life became the impulse driving his work as a poet, a publisher, an editor, and an organizer of literary readings. He worked to create new conditions in the field that would allow the production and reception of literature in ways that were sensitive to the distinct values of the works of writers, presses, and books. Souster referred to the magazines as "little centres of energy": "Small in the greater scheme of things,

but important to many who were looking for a place to display their work” (Tremblay 189). The responsibility of the small press, following Souster and Contact, was to foster conditions within which the productions of the small press, past and present, could be encountered productively. Publishing on its own was not enough; contact had to be established, and ideally, contact would instigate new production.

In Benjamin’s terms, Souster’s editorial and publishing work clearly demonstrated “the attitude with which it [was] to be followed”; or in Silliman’s terms, the “attitude towards reception” demanded by Souster’s Contact labour was one of realignment of the terms between writing, publishing, and reading. Souster, through the modes of small press publishing (many of which he helped to conceive of and establish in Canada), reformulated the position of the reader in relation to the published work. The visual signifiers of his publications, in their handmade, mimeographed, unrefined codes, showed their own terms of production, evidence of Souster’s own physical labour, as well as the possibility of producing and distributing poetry in ways other than professional publishing houses. The Contact Poetry Readings expanded the catalogue of ways that poetry could be encountered and received, challenging the primacy of the printed word and bridging the physical distances between poets across Canada and poets from other countries. In pursuing a program of self-education in a series of public gestures, Souster fostered the education of an audience in Toronto and elsewhere, establishing his various Contact endeavours as a collective set of sites at which poetry could be produced, published, distributed, and received in novel ways and that would consequently facilitate new production. Souster’s work identified itself to existing and potential readers as different based on its visual cues, its modes of distribution, and its laying bare of its own terms of production. His work was simultaneously alienating



(in that it disoriented readers conditioned to encounter poetry in other ways) and generative (in that it encouraged new production and made clear how that production could be accomplished).

## Chapter Two

### **“i’m here to support the continuum”: Contributive Bookselling and the Bookseller Catalogue as Small Press Labour**

“[T]he contributive bookseller adds dimension to the cultural exchange, compounds the distributive approach with passionate concern for the state of art, participates as user, maker, transistor.”

—Nicky Drumbolis, “this fiveyear list”

In “What is the History of Books?”, Robert Darnton remarks, “more work needs to be done on the bookseller as a cultural agent, the middleman who mediated between supply and demand at their key point of contact” (78). In this chapter, I am interested in examining the bookseller as more than simply a “middleman” existing between supply and demand.

*Contributive* booksellers operate from a position of multiple investments and interests, both professional and personal, in the material that they choose to stock and sell. This chapter documents and evaluates the relations between such booksellers and the small press by looking at Nelson Ball and Jay MillAr, whose work as booksellers, publishers, and poets illustrates the complex interactions of contributive bookselling practices. I contend that a particular strain of post-Second World War bookselling in Canada must be understood as a small press act, as a type of cultural labour that exists on the same continuum as what is more commonly understood as small press labour. I make this argument by exploiting already contested and amorphous definitions of the small press, by drawing on my own definition of the small press in the previous chapter that emphasized its role in shaping particular “attitude[s] towards reception” (Silliman 31) and facilitating productive encounters with its publications via strategies of production and distribution, and by deploying Nicky Drumbolis’s theory of contributive bookselling. This chapter contends that the goals of such

bookselling activities are sympathetic to, and expressive of, the same impulses that are traditionally viewed as the domain of the small press. Despite the various definitions circulating of the small press that insist on its variety and fluidity, bookselling is rarely considered or included. If the small press recognizes and encourages seeing writing and publishing as correlated acts, surely bookselling, a type of cultural labour that facilitates the discovery and exchange of texts and ideas, must be accounted for as well.

By combining Souster's understanding of the small press as being marked by a drive to “make contact” with a conception of the bookseller as an actively engaged cultural agent, I seek to answer the following questions: What does independent bookselling look like when the bookseller is committed to the cultural and aesthetic goals of the small press? What contributions can bookselling make to the small press continuum, and how can bookselling be part of a larger program of individual small press praxis? How does the small press bookseller conceive of her or his responsibility to consolidate, preserve, and critique small press history? Below I consider the bookseller catalogue as a particularly active site at which the bookseller can wield her or his critical and pedagogical voice and mediate productive encounters between readers and the symbolic and economic values of books, and examine the specific relationships between bookselling, publishing, and writing using Nelson Ball and Jay MillAr as case studies.

### **Contributive Bookselling and Bookseller Catalogues**

For several decades now, Nicky Drumbolis has been among the most active and articulate small press workers in Canada. Drawing on his direct experience as a bookseller, publisher, and writer, he makes an argument for the central importance of the bookseller in

collecting, distributing, preserving, and documenting the material objects of literature (and of the small press more specifically). Drumbolis has developed a theory of what he terms “contributive” bookselling, encompassing a range of activities not commonly associated with the bookseller in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: “Well, one of the terms that i use is ‘contributive bookselling’ as opposed to ‘distributive bookselling’ only, which for me means that the bookseller acts as a kind of cultural... what?... midwife or traffic cop or something like this & not only stocks books but somehow contextualizes what he or she knows/has at his or her command” (Truhlar). The obligation of the bookseller is not to generate profit for the capitalist market, but rather to “notate, to record the cultural artifacts that they handle” (Truhlar). The bookseller is not simply a disinterested agent of capitalism operating between production and consumption; rather, the bookseller is an actively engaged cultural agent using her or his resources in ways that contradict profit-driven commodity exchange in order to be of use to the small press community. The bookseller must work to understand the conditions that surrounded the writing, publication, and reception of a given book-object, and subsequently contextualize that same object in catalogues, in conversation with customers, and on store shelves. The contributive bookseller, for Drumbolis, “adds dimension to cultural exchange, compounds the distributive approach with passionate concern for the state of art, participates as user, maker, transistor” (“this fiveyear list”).<sup>29</sup>

The contributive bookseller needs to be distinguished from the distributive bookseller. A distributive model for bookselling prioritizes moving books as quickly and cheaply as possible in order to maximize profit. Books are valued for economic not symbolic

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<sup>29</sup> Drumbolis’s idiosyncratic use of punctuation, capitalization, symbols, diction, and syntax is a fundamental part of his small press identity. He makes these choices deliberately, and I have reproduced them precisely throughout this dissertation in order to accurately reflect the intent and tone of his work. These practices are in keeping with his small press ethos as necessarily and implicitly alternative. His texts in their formal resistance to convention display Drumbolis’s larger resistance to conventional practices across his activities.

reasons. A large chain like Chapters-Indigo forgoes the potential community role of the bookstore, and instead recast books as pure commodities. Chapters's tagline, "Great Books Are Just the Beginning," illustrates the increasingly subordinate role that actual books play to non-book commercial goods in such stores. Melissa Dunne, profiling Chapters's efforts to diversify its stock, notes that while "books become a harder sell, Canada's only national bookstore chain is stocking everything from dolls to Poppin office supplies to toasted coconut marshmallows" ("Are Canadian bookstores headed towards extinction?"). Frédéric Brisson, in *The History of Book in Canada*, sets up the distinction between chains and independents as follows: "The independents emphasized their passion for books, as opposed to the quest for profits, which, they claimed, was the sole *raison d'être* of the chains. The chains defended themselves by pointing to the need to democratize books by making them accessible to everyone" (398). The personality of the individual bookseller and the community investments of a bookstore are unimportant under a distributive model, or perhaps, allowing for the best possible intentions of a chain retailer, deep devotion to a particular subfield is impossible given the scale of such stores.

Brisson notes that Coles opened the "World's Biggest Bookstore" in Toronto in 1980, a 70,000 square foot retail space. This requires stocking more books than one can possibly develop a "passionate concern for," in Drumbolis's terms. The intentions and material structures of such primarily distributive stores are fundamentally different from those of contributive operations. Laura J. Miller, in *Reluctant Capitalists: Bookselling and the Culture of Consumption* (2006), articulates the efficiency and impersonality of the corporate structure of a chain:

The bureaucratic structure of the chains makes it possible for a multitude of

far-flung outlets to be administered from a central headquarters. Bureaucratic organization also encourages specialization of tasks, resulting in a more efficient division of labour, and making it easier to train workers and deploy personnel where needed. As uniform procedures produce consistent, predictable results, the chains have favoured standardized methods and a standardized style across all outlets. This allows distant managers to be assured that each outlet is offering a relatively uniform bookstore experience, one that is in keeping with the image the company is trying to project. Furthermore, the chains are able to achieve significant economies of scale by centralizing and standardizing many key activities. From selection, ordering, and advertising, to decisions about pricing, store décor, and the placement of sections and displays—to one degree or another, these functions are performed in a central office. (12-13)

The “more efficient division of labour” of a distributive chain stands in stark contrast to the deeply personal and deliberately inefficient work of the contributive bookseller. In keeping with his conception of the small press, Drumbolis conceives of the bookseller as a vital and necessary outlet for making available the publications of the small press in ways that transcend simple commodity exchange. The small press writer, publisher, and bookseller collectively share the burden to seek out, uncover, and understand past expressions of the small press, to challenge existing critical evaluations, and subsequently to share and make available this knowledge. This work is not suited to the bureaucratic structures described above by Miller.

Contributive bookselling is largely about creating productive contexts within which

interested readers can access books. Drumbolis argues that he “wouldn’t sell something before [he] took the time to describe the thing & somehow extrapolate [its] information” (Truhlar), and calls the small press as a “continuum [which] i’m here to support” (Truhlar). That continuum includes the bookseller as a vital agent capable of providing one valuable setting within which to receive small press material. The responsibility of the bookseller is to answer the question, “what context does that value [of a book] become apparent in?” (Truhlar). The bookseller must first strive to understand the complex conditions within which small press publications come to be, and second must annotate and contextualize those same publications. The drive for self-education is a crucial dimension, and one of the most productive nodes, of the small press ethic (that is, the drive to create conditions of possibility in which readers can encounter texts, writers can create texts, and publishers can print texts that are responsive to the past, present, and future of small press work). Souster’s Contact efforts were driven in part by a desire to provide an education for himself and others within which to encounter and understand experimental literature and publishing forms; it was pedagogical, if informal. Bookselling, that is, *contributive* bookselling, locates other nodes in the rhizomatic network; it makes visible connections between nodes across temporal and spatial lines; it facilitates discovery of existing nodes and the creation of new ones; and it identifies and distributes “nutrients” that might otherwise be lost. If the small press, in part, works to deconstruct the book-as-commodity in terms of its modes of production and distribution, and in turn recasts the roles of each cultural agent in the communications circuit by demanding new attitudes for distribution and reception, the bookseller with particular interests and investments in the small press must enact a bookselling practice equally invested in deconstruction and disruption.

The bookseller catalogue perhaps best demonstrates the contributive work of independent booksellers and their deconstructive and disruptive potentials. In its simplest form, a bookseller catalogue is a list of books for sale. Historically, they have been distributed through the mail, but are increasingly distributed through electronic means. They are typically composed of book listings with complete bibliographic data, prices, bibliographic references for the information contained therein, and in the case of the contributive bookseller catalogues that are the primary focus of this chapter, varying degrees of critical and editorial evaluation, commentary, and intervention in the form of notes attached to listings and occasional essays. Archer Taylor, in *Book Catalogues: Their Varieties and Uses* (1957), describes the value of catalogues: “catalogues are lists of books which actually exist, or once existed, and have been seen by the maker of the catalogue. This fact gives them particular value as reference works. However obscure or confusing an entry in one of these catalogues may be, it concerns a book that was once in existence” (92). Such entries can prove “peculiarly valuable when the books listed have enjoyed little or inadequate bibliographical attention” (Taylor 78), a description that efficiently captures the state of the small press in Canada.

Catalogues, however, do more than simply document the existence of books; the catalogues of the booksellers discussed in this dissertation actively shape small press culture and increase the knowledge of its participants. As H.R. Woudhuysen asserts, catalogues increase the value of books “by describing their appearance, history, and contents, [and] by placing them in context with books of a similar kind” (125). Taylor makes similar claims of the “wider uses” (124) of catalogues, including “the investigation of the nature and structure of knowledge in former times, [and] the description of the cultural climate of an age or



country” (124). The bookseller catalogue can provide both objective, factual information as well as subjective, symbolic information. Catalogues are never neutral documents, and this is especially true in the case of small press contributive booksellers. Such catalogues operate deliberately and consciously as practical objects of commerce *and* as working reference and pedagogical documents that construct and contest knowledge. Catalogues are less comprehensive than large-scale bibliographies, but are more responsive to their contemporary moment and can supplement supposedly comprehensive bibliographies.<sup>30</sup> This critical tool, when wielded by booksellers with particular investments in the oppositional and disruptive publishing forms of the small press, can itself be oppositional and disruptive.

Michael Warner’s *Publics and Counterpublics* (2005) is a useful point of entry to considering the particular ways that the bookseller catalogue can facilitate and shape the development of a field. In addition to the public as “a kind of social totality” (65) as well as a secondary public that is “a concrete audience [...] bounded by the event or by the shared physical space” (66), Warner asserts a third kind of public: “The kind of public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation” (66). This kind of public, writes Warner, is composed not by “texts themselves [...] but the concatenation of texts through time” (90). It is composed by the “ongoing life” (97) of texts; “A text, to have a public, must continue to circulate through time, and because this can only be confirmed through an

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<sup>30</sup> For example, the largest bibliography of Canadian literature then-in-print, Reginald Eyre Watters’s *A Check List of Canadian Literature and Background Materials (1628-1959)* (1959) catalogued roughly 12,000 items in its attempt “to provide as complete a record as possible of the separately published works that constitute the literature of English-speaking Canada” (Watters, *A Check List* vii). However, bookseller catalogues issued contemporaneously with *Check List* make clear the Sisyphean task of striving to achieve the “comprehensive” in bibliography. Following the publication of *Check List*, Montreal-based bookseller Bernard Amtmann issued *Catalogue 141: Canadian Literature* in 1961. Part one listed English-Canadian literature, listing 1,126 items, and cited *Check List* as its bibliographical authority. If an item appeared in Watters’s bibliography, it included a brief annotation indicating the page number on which it could be found. 214 items in *Catalogue 141*, or 19%, include no such annotation. This underscores an implicit problem with large-scale published bibliographies—if the field documented within them is contemporary, as in the small press in the case of Watters’s *Check List*, it continues to grow following publication.

intertextual environment of citation and implication, all publics are intertextual, even intergeneric” (97). Warner’s words resonate back to Pierre Bourdieu’s assertion that “the production of discourse about the work of art is one of the conditions of production of the work” (*The Field of Cultural Production* 35). Warner asks that we consider the modes by which texts circulate and recirculate in service of constructing a meaningful public within which members can recognize relevant works as well as each other. For the small press booksellers, publishers, and writers in this dissertation, we are discussing a kind of public that fits into both the second type (a concrete audience, as at a reading, for example) as well as the third type, that which exists in relation to texts and their circulation. The bookseller catalogue is an important yet understudied site at which the ongoing concatenation of texts can be observed.<sup>31</sup> The catalogue is a site of discourse, as well as a site for the circulation and recirculation of texts. Catalogues can hail existing members and welcome in potential new members. Catalogues are part of the greater intertextual and intergeneric life of the small press community and the larger written discourse that surrounds the production of meaning of its texts. The bookseller catalogue concretizes the pedagogical function of the contributive bookseller, and in it we can trace the bookseller’s work as a critical and cultural act.

Catalogues from booksellers specializing in the small press share characteristics with catalogues from independent booksellers with different aesthetic or philosophic affiliations or subject areas, but also have features that distinguish them as a genre. Most bookseller catalogues contribute to the construction of a public shaped by an “intertextual environment of citation and implication,” as described by Warner, and do so by describing the “appearance, history, and contents” of books. Contributive catalogues focused on the small

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<sup>31</sup> Warner even cites Whig booksellers from 1670 as creating dangerous publics via their daily circulation of scribal newsletters.

press are distinguished by their subject matter, by their irrational investments of time, labour, and resources (above and beyond the possibility of being adequately compensated in capitalist terms), and by their emergence alongside the growth and expansion of the small press in Canada during the 1960s and 1970s. These catalogues, and the labour that produces them, are made distinct by the degree of their investment in these processes, demonstrating a willingness to forgo financial reward, stability, and traditional markers of consecration (academic or otherwise).

Bookselling catalogues focused exclusively on Canadian literature date to the late 1950s. Montreal-based bookseller Bernard Amtmann (1907-1979) is widely credited within the book trade as being “the first post-war bookseller in Canada to deal with Canadian literature” (Hoffer, “Cheap Sons of Bitches” 25).<sup>32</sup> William Morley, Curator of Special Collections at Queen’s University during Amtmann’s career, writes that “Amtmann’s early catalogues were more influential than any single source in raising Canadiana from the level of the dusty five- and ten-cent shelf to the respected realm of antiquarian books” (qtd. in Mappin 5). Frédéric Brisson, writing about bookselling in the third volume of *History of the Book in Canada*, explains, “when Bernard Amtmann opened his bookstore in Montreal [...] there were too few individuals and institutions interested in Canadian books for them to be treasured as rare books, and the reputation of [Canadian] antiquarian books still remained to be established” (400). Amtmann’s 1957 publications, *Catalogue 78: Canadian Poetry* and

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<sup>32</sup> Amtmann was a bookseller, book trade advocate, cultural critic, and bibliographer. He was born in Austria in 1907 before fleeing to France in 1938, where he fought in the French resistance during the Second World War. He arrived in Canada in October 1947 at age forty with “two suitcases of books and a few dollars in Canadian currency” (Mappin 20). He established his bookselling business in Ottawa in 1948, and moved to Montreal in 1950. He co-founded the Antiquarian Booksellers’ Association of Canada (hereafter ABAC) in 1966, Montreal Book Auctions in 1967, and published the trade journal *Abacus* as well as the first thirteen issues of *Canadian Notes & Queries*. His catalogues led directly to his publication *Contributions to a Short-Title Catalogue of Canadiana* (1971-1973), a five-volume bibliography of approximately 30,000 books that had passed through his hands as a bookseller. Additionally, he was a vocal critic of Canadian culture, publishing polemics accusing librarians and archivists of behaving irresponsibly in their roles as custodians of Canadian history and letters.

*Catalogue 91: Canadian Literature*, are anecdotally held to be the first used and/or antiquarian bookseller catalogues produced in Canada focused solely on Canadian literature (Hoffer “Cheap Sons of Bitches” 25). Brisson and Morley make the point that Canadian books (across subjects) were not yet perceived to be of value, and that Amtmann’s catalogues performed diligent and significant work to raise the profile and perceived value (cultural, economic, scholarly) of Canadian books generally. That it took until 1957 for a used bookseller to produce a catalogue focused solely on Canadian literature is indicative of the significant work that remained to be done to establish Canadian literature as a field of study and a visible cultural force in Canadian intellectual life. The small press, as an even smaller component of the larger field of Canadian literature, and one even less visible to libraries, institutions, and scholars in the late 1950s and early 1960s, existed at a further remove from traditional forms of consecration.

The earliest secondhand bookseller catalogues focused exclusively (or at least primarily) on Canadian small and micro press publications appeared in the early 1970s. These earliest catalogues were mapping a field that had not yet been mapped, tracing books, presses, writers, and kinds of publications that were unaccounted for by formal bibliographies and institutional catalogues. Martin Ahvenus’s *The Village Book Store* (Toronto, 1961-1991) distributed its *Catalogue of Contemporary Canadian Poetry* in November 1970—this is the earliest catalogue I have located that fits the genre.<sup>33</sup> Nelson Ball’s earliest catalogue, *List No. 1: Canadian Literature*, was published in May 1972.

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<sup>33</sup> The 756 items in the list were broken down into five sections: Contemporary Canadian Poetry; Criticism, Biography, Bibliography, Etc.; Prose and Related Publications; Periodicals; and Addenda. This list documents the depth and range of Ahvenus’s support of the small press from the time he opened his doors in 1961 to its publication in 1970, offering a substantial library of pre-1970 experimental contemporary Canadian poetry. The periodicals list is extensive, totaling 63 items, and including conventional magazines such as *Canadian Poetry* as well as experimental material like *The Ant’s Forefoot*, *Blew Ointment*, *El Corno Emplumado*, *Imago*, *IS*, as well as the first sixteen issues of *Alphabet* (available for \$40.00).

William Hoffer began issuing catalogues, many of which included a substantial volume of Canadian small press literature, in 1970. These early catalogues were primarily bibliographic—documenting publication history and attaching prices to items. The genre evolved during the following decades to include more direct editorial intervention, not simply listing items for sale and evaluating writers, publications, and presses in economic terms, but attaching critical evaluations based on aesthetic, literary, and book historical considerations. The evolution from Martin Ahvenus and Nelson Ball in the early 1970s to Nicky Drumbolis and jwcurry in the 1980s and beyond, an evolution from limited to extensive acts of critical evaluation and intervention, will be discussed throughout the following chapters.

Such catalogues are also sites at which some of the compromises and contradictions of the small press become visible. In serving a pedagogical function, catalogues work to construct and educate an audience of readers capable, in Bourdieu's terms, of "knowing and recognizing" (37) these books and book-objects as works of art. If the small press has to construct a public to receive its publications, and if catalogues play a role in constructing that public, they also necessarily create a *market* when they create an *audience*; each reader is also a potential customer. Catalogues also insist that readers, scholars, and other cultural agents reckon with economic measures of value, breaking the illusion of the objective study of art. Following this line of thought, it is possible to read the work of these booksellers in a cynical manner, but that is not my contention. As I argued in my introduction, small press bookselling is a strikingly inefficient way to accumulate economic capital. While there are occasional economic rewards, they are few and far between.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> This labour is more appropriately read through Pierre Bourdieu's notion of restricted production and inverted hierarchization within cultural fields. Bourdieu's fields are constituted by two competing principles of

The care demonstrated in such catalogues is not to be found in distributive bookselling, but does find expression in many independent booksellers, especially those who specialize in rare books and small press publications. Among these, Nelson Ball and Jay MillAr are notable. As a bookseller, publisher, and poet, MillAr's work follows chronologically, intellectually, and aesthetically from Ball's. When discussing their bookselling businesses or the particular inflections of their contributive work, we are discussing stores that exist, in practical terms, primarily in words. Ball ran his business from a storefront in the early 1980s for a short time, but says that it "didn't work out" (Dickson 25).<sup>35</sup> His particular stock (small press and Canadian literature) was not broadly appealing to a mass consumer market, and so his stock was primarily available through catalogues. Similarly, Apollinaire's does not operate a storefront, instead listing its stock exclusively online (though it does, on occasion, bring stock to readings and book fairs). In each we observe bookselling as a practice that functions via correspondence (whether physical or digital), which is a fundamentally different type of bookselling than is involved in running a storefront.<sup>36</sup> This renders the two particularly relevant to a consideration of how bookseller

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hierarchization: the heteronomous principle and the autonomous principle. The heteronomous principle is "favourable to those who dominate the field economically and politically" (40). This principle is correlated with "bourgeois taste" (51) and derives power from "consecration bestowed by the dominant factions of the dominant class" (51). The autonomous principle functions in opposition to the heteronomous, defined by Bourdieu as "art for art's sake" (40), or a "set of producers who produce for other producers [...] art for artists" (51). As Bourdieu makes clear, every position taking in the field "receives its distinctive value from its negative relationship with the coexistent position-takings to which it is objectively related" (30). Positions are defined negatively. The bourgeois, already-consecrated heteronomous positions maintain their power by asserting the illegitimacy of new and/or autonomous positions; autonomous positions define themselves by an inverted relationship to economic success and traditional consecration. The longer one operates at this extreme edge of financial precarity, the more "prestige" one accrues under the autonomous principle of hierarchization.

<sup>35</sup> The storefront was announced in *List No. 84* (December 1981): "VISIT OUR STORE / WE ARE NOW OPEN TO THE PUBLIC WITH REGULAR HOURS / AND AN ENLARGED STOCK." According to the list, the enlarged stock included "literary first editions, literary history and criticism, general fiction, music, art, film, theatre, philosophy, history, science, political science, economics, Canadiana, etc." The storefront did not last: "I had an open shop in Toronto 1981-82. I was uncomfortable with strangers coming in and I paid Barbara to sit in the store. It didn't work out. I reverted to having visitors, mostly writers or collectors, come by appointment" (Dickson 25).

<sup>36</sup> Nicky Drumbolis further identifies the relationship between such catalogues and small press history by

catalogues function as contributive, pedagogical, and critical tools. Ball and MillAr deploy their catalogues in ways that facilitate productive encounters with small press books informed by literary and bibliographical history, shape attitudes towards reception, and influence how literary history is remembered and recreated, while also refracting their writing and publishing practices.

### **Weed/Flower Press and Nelson Ball, Bookseller: Evaluating and Shaping the Small Press Counterpublic**

Since the 1960's Nelson Ball has occupied multiple positions in the fields of literary production. As a poet, he published with Coach House, Garglia, his own Weed/Flower Press, and in dozens of little magazines. As an editor, he was responsible for the journals *Volume 63* (1963-1966), *Weed* (1966-1967), and *Hyphid* (1968).<sup>37</sup> As a publisher, Weed/Flower Press (1965-1973) published early and important work by bpNichol, David McFadden, bill bissett, and others, fostering a publishing program built upon presenting the young, experimental, and marginalized.<sup>38</sup> He established his bookselling operation (first William Nelson Books,

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drawing on their material modes of production, asserting that the “history of mimeo in this country would be incomplete without an account of these productions” (*Nelson Ball Cited*). Drumbolis argues “[t]his form of publication is generally disregarded because too transactual to be considered ‘culture’. Apart from their invaluable record, however, these lists must be acknowledged for the independent publications they are” (*Nelson Ball Cited*). Drumbolis succinctly makes the claim that these publications are a fundamental dimension of the small press in two ways: they document, record, and shape the history of the small press, but must also be counted on their own terms as small press publications.

<sup>37</sup> Concurrent with his work as a poet and small press cultural agent, Ball worked as a library technician at the University of Toronto library from 1967-1971 and learned the book trade working at Martin Ahvenus’s Village Book Store from 1970-1973.

<sup>38</sup> In the previous chapter I asserted that Coach House was the spiritual successor to Contact Press. Weed/Flower must also be seen as a press that followed from Contact in traceable ways. Souster explained to Ball that Ball’s work would have appeared in *New Wave Canada* if Souster had encountered it prior to publishing the anthology (Personal Interview). Ball and Barbara Caruso were also responsible for publishing the final 150 copies of *New Wave Canada*. The story, as documented in Bruce Whiteman’s “Raymond Souster’s *New Wave Canada: A Bibliographical Note*” and Nicky Drumbolis’s *Nelson Ball Cited*, as well as corroborated by Ball in my interview with him and in Barbara Caruso’s journals, is that a number of pages were printed in insufficient numbers for the anthology. Souster gave Ball 150 uncollated and incomplete sets of sheets for the book in 1968. Ball had the missing sheets printed. They were collated by Caruso and bound by Ball. They are

and later Nelson Ball, Bookseller) in 1972.<sup>39</sup> His booklists, 119 issued from 1972-1996, are a lifelong project dedicated to cataloguing the bibliographic details of Canada's literary (and small press) history.<sup>40</sup>

This varied work is part of a larger holistic impulse driving his activities; there are reciprocities in these practices that support one another, and that in turn are indicative of significant relationships between booksellers and the small press. Ball has himself identified that related interests motivated his writing, publishing, and bookselling: "There was a strong overlap among my activities as a writer, my small press publishing, and my bookselling practice. I used my catalogues to advocate for certain authors and small presses" (Dickson 25). Although each was related, the three rarely overlapped directly for long. Ball "ended [Weed/Flower Press] in 1974 because [he] preferred being a bookseller to becoming a full-fledged literary press" (Dickson 24). Around the same time, he stopped writing poetry. There is a large gap in his publication record between a number of broadsides produced in 1973 and 1974, and his gradual reemergence in 1989.<sup>41</sup> He found fulfillment in one or another of these practices at different moments, acknowledging that the "bibliographic research involved in

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acknowledged to be "in no way distinguishable from the first edition" (Whiteman 64). Ball called it "Ray's donation to Weed/Flower Press" (Personal Interview). The particular poets that Ball published also held affinities for Contact's tradition, with early and important work from emerging writers appearing from the press (Ball published Bill Bissett, David McFadden, and John Newlove in 1967).

<sup>39</sup> William Nelson Books operated from a number of different addresses in Toronto from May 1972 to February 1985 (756A Bathurst St, Apt. 2, 686 Richmond Street West, and 109 Niagara St. Building #13), and has operated from 31 Willow St. in Paris, Ontario since March 1985.

<sup>40</sup> He also issued 132 shorter supplemental lists in between his formal catalogues. See Appendix B for a complete bibliography of Ball's bookseller catalogues, and note that he moved his stock online in 2000 and currently sells through *Abebooks*. The closest he has come to publishing a formal bibliography is his private publication, in 2007, of *News Stand Library, A Series of Paperbacks Published by Export Publishing Enterprises Limited, Toronto, 1948-1951: A Checklist of the Collection*.

<sup>41</sup> His last publications before this extended silence were the books *Points of Attention* (Toronto: Weed/Flower Press, 1971) and *Round Stone* (Toronto: Weed/Flower Press, 1971), and the broadsides "With Issa" (Toronto: Village Bookstore Press, 1973), "Dry Spell" (Toronto: Seripress, 1973), "Our Arms are Featherless Wings" (Toronto: Seripress, 1973), and "The Shore" (Toronto: Seripress, 1974). He reemerged with a reprint of *Force Movements* (Toronto: Curvd H&Z, 1990) and the broadsides "Metamorphosis" (Toronto: 1 cent, 1989) and "Tracks" (Paris: Privately Printed, 1990).



bookselling satisfied my creative urge” (Dickson 24). Ball’s catalogues demonstrate the depth and breadth of his attention to the small press (as well as his care to document and make available other non-small press works of Canadian literature at a time when such books were scarce and undervalued), and bring into focus the pedagogical and critical activities that shape the small press counterpublic. A selection of his catalogues illustrates the variety of ways that such catalogues can function contributively and serve the small press community.<sup>42</sup>

His early catalogue efforts were modest, but their rate of appearance and volume of listings increased rapidly in concert with the widespread growth of small press publishing in Canada. His *List No. 1*, distributed in May 1972, contains only 70 entries.<sup>43</sup> Among items from Canada’s literary present and past, there is small press material from Coach House, blewointment, Weed/Flower, Ganglia, *grOnk*, and others, fiction (including a 1923 edition of Thomas Chandler Haliburton’s *Sam Slick* listed at \$12.50), and “Misc. Canadiana” (including a 1937 edition of *The Tree* by Grey Owl listed at \$4.50). The most expensive item is a 1962 manuscript from Red Lane inscribed to Al Purdy, listed at \$45.00. His catalogues grew quickly, however, owing in part to a large purchase of material from Martin Ahvenus shortly

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<sup>42</sup> At the level of material production, Ball’s booklists were produced on the same mimeograph machine that printed Weed/Flower Press books. Like books from Weed/Flower, his bookseller catalogues were modest in design, but scrupulously clean, organized, and careful in their visual and bibliographic codes. Moreover, when launching his bookselling business in 1972, his first booklists went out to the same mailing list that was receiving Weed/Flower Press mailouts (Personal Interview), underscoring the close relationship between these two enterprises. Ball also occasionally printed catalogues for other booksellers, including the Village Book Store, Toronto (*Catalogue of Contemporary Canadian Poetry*, 1970) and Jim Lowell’s Asphodel Book Shop, Cleveland (*Catalogue 26*, 1970), as well as assorted print jobs for Victor Coleman’s *IS*, the League of Canadian Poets, Ganglia Press, Seripress, and David Rosenberg’s Foreprint Editions, among others.

It should be noted that for both Ball’s catalogues and publications from Weed/Flower Press, artist Barbara Caruso was instrumental in the aesthetic and manual labour involved in their production. As she documents in her published journals, *A Painter’s Journey 1966-1973* (2005) and *A Painter’s Journey: Volume II 1974-1979* (2008), in addition to her work designing and printing covers, she often collated and gathered pages and aided in other material ways. I do not want to erase this work of Caruso’s. See Pauline Butling’s “Who is She? Inside/Outside Literary Communities” in *Writing in our Time* (2005) for a careful analysis of the ways that this type of labour, labour that is often gendered female and performed by women, can and has been erased from literary history. Caruso and Ball were married in Ottawa in 1965, and remained married until Caruso’s death in 2009.

<sup>43</sup> See Figure 13 in Appendix C.

after launching the business.<sup>44</sup> For example, *List No. 12* (November 1973) contained 474 items, while *List No. 21* and *List No. 22*, published simultaneously in August-September 1974, contained 1,316 items and 560 items. While writing this dissertation I examined 112 of Ball's 119 primary catalogues, as well as 125 of his 132 supplemental lists. In these catalogues, Ball printed 40,581 listings and 5,562 listings respectively.<sup>45</sup> From 1973-1980, he produced and distributed them at an almost monthly rate (75 catalogues and 41 supplemental lists in 84 months). This is a remarkable pace and a staggering volume of bibliographic information.<sup>46</sup>

Ball's largest effort was *List No. 66*, "English-Canadian Poetry: 1928-1978," published and distributed in four-parts from June 1978 to November 1979, contains 2,312 listings. *List No. 66* demonstrates the contributive value of catalogues as bibliographic documents that can serve as checklists for rapidly developing new fields (in this case the small press), as well as the ability of a bookseller deeply engaged as an active participant in a field to translate that engagement into contributive acts. Its emphasis falls primarily on younger and emerging poets.<sup>47</sup> The third installment, "A selection of desirable items", includes this note on the inside cover: "With the exception of E.J. Pratt, this list includes books by poets whose first books appeared after 1928."<sup>48</sup> *List No. 66* includes hundreds of poets, listing common and uncommon items, providing a wealth of bibliographic material as

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<sup>44</sup> "He sold me a lot of Canadian poetry at or near his cost to help me get started" (Dickson 24).

<sup>45</sup> In this case, a listing can be a single item or a larger lot of items to be sold together.

<sup>46</sup> Note that many listings come up repeatedly in different catalogues—I am not suggesting that Ball documented 46,143 distinct items. Rather, these numbers are intended to indicate the sustained rate and volume of labour performed in order to document and distribute this information. Even the material labour of repeating a listing was demanding—in an era before electronic word processors were widely available, Ball was mimeographing his catalogues, which demanded retyping and reprinting for each list regardless of whether a book had been available for sale previously.

<sup>47</sup> The catalogue was responding so directly to Ball's contemporaries that when Part III was published in April-May 1979, the scope of the collection shifted from 1928-1978 to 1928-1979.

<sup>48</sup> The Pratt item mentioned, listed at \$2000.00, is a copy of *Rachel: A Sea Story of Newfoundland in Verse*, the poet's first book. The catalogue explains: "Privately published by Alfred Good and first distributed at a dinner party in Toronto in December, 1917. It is believed there were between 50 and 200 copies printed."

well as information on contemporary publishing. While it is conventional for a bookseller catalogue to provide full bibliographic information for entries in order to aid customers in identifying editions, this information takes on an additional role in Ball's *List No. 66*—by listing titles from small presses with complete bibliographic data, Ball helped to distribute and make visible information about publishers that was often difficult to locate. With its emphasis on younger poets, including a wide swath of small presses among its contents, *List No. 66* functions as an updated checklist of contemporary English-language poetry in Canada. Ball and other booksellers like him were attuned to the emerging small press in Canada (and in Ball's case, had been an active participant in its 1960s ferment). As a result, Ball was able to catalogue and make available thousands of publications produced by Canada's small presses that existed outside traditional distribution outlets. Whether ephemeral by intention, or limited due to poor distribution infrastructure, these items were documented and listed at least in occasional bookseller catalogues. Booksellers like Ball collected, catalogued, and sold books that would not become widely available in university libraries and research collections for many years after their initial appearance (many of which are still not easily accessible for research today). For example, *List No. 66* includes a bpNichol item, *Vision in the U of T Stacks* (1966) that was published in a miniscule edition of 9 copies (\$47.50) beside other comparatively abundant bpNichol items, such as *The Langwedge* (1966) in an edition of 20 copies (\$32.50) and *The Adventures of Milt the Morph in Colour* (1972) in an edition of 25 copies (\$350.00).

Parts I and II are minimal in their editorial comments, but in Part III (April-May 1979) Ball finds his literary-historical and critical voice. For example, a listing for the anthology *Anvil* (1966) contains the note, “[i]ncluded are four poems by [Irving] Layton

under the pen-name ‘Hy Jinkes.’” Ball is at his most expansive and narrative when describing a copy of Raymond Souster’s *Place of Meeting: Poems 1958-1960* (1962), documenting the print history of the book and recording the story of artistic differences in its production:

The cover design, with the title repeated thrice in banner-like lines beginning on the rear cover and intersecting on the front, was not approved by the artist.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, the artist’s lithographs and the author’s signature, as called for in the colophon, do not appear in this issue which was not released by the publisher. However, the issue in wraps with the same cover design was not suppressed.

These notes are evidence of the bookseller catalogue as an outlet for print history, for bibliographic data, and for the recording of otherwise undocumented pieces of literary history. The identification of pen-names, particularly ones that were rarely used, and the recording of conflicts surrounding the production of particular items all contribute to the paratextual apparatuses that surround particular writers, presses, and works. Many pieces of information of this type are often only transmitted orally between writers, publishers, and booksellers. Catalogues can help to produce paper trails and otherwise document that which is lost and forgotten. In addition to providing active, ongoing addenda to large-scale, more formal bibliographies, an item like Ball’s *List No. 66* also provided his customers with a regular checklist of contemporary small press publishers and poets to pay attention to.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> The artist was Michael Snow.

<sup>50</sup> Other examples show further applications of this work. *List No. 113* (March 1993), “Modern Canadian Poetry: A Selection of Scarce and Interesting Items,” in addition to listing 506 items, also includes an index of the publishers represented, including 126 different presses (with locations included in each bibliographic entry), listing publications from 1925-1990. *List No. 78* (April 1980) listed 304 items of “Canadian Literary History and Criticism,” divided into Studies of Canadian Literature and Authors, Other Literary Scholarship by Canadian Authors, and Bibliography.

While the merit of a book catalogue seems conspicuously modest at times (to simply record the one-time existence of a particular book), the value of this gesture to an emerging small press community is immense.

Ball also distributed significant catalogues dedicated to individual writers and presses that facilitated their reading, collection, and study. *List No. 102* (April 1988), for example, is dedicated to Raymond Souster and contains 141 listings broken down into Books and Pamphlets, Broad­sides and Leaflets, Books Edited, Contact Press, Periodicals Edited, Manuscripts and Papers, Anthologies, and Related Items. As always, Ball's bibliographic data is careful and precise, even including two errata notes, acknowledging that he failed to write "Toronto: Contact Press (c. 1966)" in his listing for item 77, *New Wave Canada*, and that "POEMS" should read "Poems of W.W.E. Ross" in his entry for item 80, *Shapes & Sounds*. He includes a brief history of Contact Press, noting Peter Miller's role as editor replacing Irving Layton in 1958 (a role all too often ignored in histories of the press), and citing bibliographic and scholarly works from Bruce Whiteman, Michael Gnarowski, Frank Davey, and Nicky Drumbolis for further information. Most significantly, the list includes a \$23,000.00 entry for a set of six manuscripts, 650 letters received and 350 letters sent, and a scrapbook of clippings, reviews, and articles that was kept by Souster's mother. This item in particular demonstrates the potential for the bookseller to gather and make available works above and beyond the traditional book-objects of a given writer. Souster was one of the most important editors in twentieth-century Canadian poetry and a prolific letter writer who corresponded with many of the most important writers of his day. A lot such as Ball's is of tremendous research value, offering new, uncommon, and unorthodox material, as well as reframing existing material and histories. Such a catalogue makes possible productive

encounters with Souster's works, similar to Souster's own efforts to create news paths for contact between writers and readers, and is unquestionably part of the greater "intertextual environment of citation and implication" (97) that Warner cites as central to the construction of publics and counterpublics.

In 1993, Ball issued his supplemental *List No. 93-7*, another catalogue that deliberately and precisely worked to reframe existing and potential understandings of a specific and unique body of small press activity. It is two pages long, and includes only 14 listings.<sup>51</sup> The first and largest is a "CURVD H&Z Collection," priced at \$3,600.00. Curvd H&Z, jwcurry's publishing operation (and the subject of chapter four of this dissertation), is among the most varied, experimental, and difficult to categorize presses in the history of the small press in Canada. Ball's catalogue does a commendable job explaining the approximate terms and boundaries of the press and placing it in relation to its predecessors and contemporaries. Nearly the entire first page is taken up by an explanation of the various imprints collected under the name Curvd H&Z, followed by a brief but careful description of the history of the press and the scale of its work. I quote at length below to illustrate the scope of Ball's contributive gesture:

This collection includes all series issued by the press: 1Cent (early issues poemz a penny); Card (early issues poemcard and postpoetics); cloneclone; Hangnail (early issue broadside); Industrial Sabotage; Sticky Lights; Systems Retrieval; Toybox; th wrecking ballzark. Also present are the Curvd H&Z publications given a Curvd H&Z number but not part of any of the above series.

[...] The collection consists of more than 550 titles, an additional 56

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<sup>51</sup> See Figures 11 and 12 in Appendix C.

variants and a number of pieces of ephemera.

The collection is housed in protective envelopes in 15 binders, several filing boxes and a flat package. The collection is accompanied by a 192 page descriptive catalogue with indexes prepared by David UU. [...]

Curvd H&z is a literary small press begun in 1979 by poet jw curry who is its editor, publisher and printer. Curvd H&z provides a forum for experimental poetry and has become the foremost publisher in Canada of visual and concrete poetry. The format varies from very small to regular size broadsides and leaflets to pamphlets and books up to 35 pages in length. Most of the titles were printed in ink with moveable type rubber hand stamps. Other methods of production include photocopy, serigraph, holograph, typewriter and offset. [...]

Ball proceeds to outline edition sizes, collaborator presses, and writers published. This entry is followed by 13 additional listings of material from blewointment press, Ganglia, *grOnk*, *IS*, and Fleye Press. These publishers and the writers they published intersect with the history of Curvd H&z, initially as influences and later as peers. In two pages, Ball offered what remains today among the best descriptions of Curvd H&z, demonstrating clearly the contributive bookseller's ability to publish and distribute pedagogical, critical, and contextual material as part of a greater bookselling and small press praxis.

One writer in particular stands out in Ball's catalogues—bpNichol.<sup>52</sup> bpNichol can be seen as a metonymy for the small press in Canada; Frank Davey, writing in *Open Letter* (7:5, Summer 1989) makes a concise case for bpNichol's centrality, arguing that he enacted a

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<sup>52</sup> I refer to Nichol as "bpNichol" below as is most common. However, Nelson Ball, in his catalogues, often refers to him as "bp Nichol." I retain Ball's original spacing when quoting from Ball directly.

“continuing commitment to minority literary productions, small presses, young authors, regionally marginalized writers and women’s writing together with his mistrust of the authoritative, canonical, and hegemonic” (qtd. in Butling, “bpNichol” 64).<sup>53</sup> His appearances in Ball’s catalogues demand attention both for his sustained presence through all of Ball’s small press work and for how the presentation of his works in Ball’s catalogues clarifies the value of contributive bookselling to the small press rhizomatic network.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the separation between Ball’s publishing and bookselling is minimal, and bpNichol forms an important node at both sites. Asked about his specialties as a bookseller, Ball explains, “bpNichol was a friend and the poet who most interested me as a bookseller” (Dickson 26). He notes that bpNichol “sold me his entire inventory of Ganglia Press and *grOnk* publications around 1973 [and] Eleanor Nichol sold me more material in 1989 following bp’s death. Ganglia Press, *grOnk* publications, and other works by Nichol have been my sub-specialty” (Dickson 26). His relationship to bpNichol’s writing is exemplary of Ball’s publishing and bookselling ideals, showing clearly the common impulse driving his publishing, bibliographic, and bookselling works in relation to the small press.

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<sup>53</sup> It would be difficult, if not impossible, to concisely articulate the range of bpNichol’s small press contributions as a writer, editor, publisher, researcher, performer, mentor, organizer of events, and general high-energy node of support and perseverance. The reverence and love with which he was viewed by members of his community are perhaps most strikingly apparent in the Summer-Fall 1986 issue of *Open Letter* (Sixth Series, Nos. 5-6), “Read the Way He Writes: A Festschrift for bpNichol.” As editors Paul Dutton and Steven Smith note, “[t]he tribute of a festschrift is usually reserved for the scholar or artist whose career is drawing to a close, which manifestly does not apply in the case of bpNichol [...]. The editors who conceived this publication, however, consider bp’s unique and extensive oeuvre to warrant such a celebration at this time” (5). Across 270 pages of the double issue, bpNichol is celebrated by friends, contemporaries, and admirers for his varied small press works. Sadly, he died suddenly two years later in 1988, rendering the festschrift an unintentionally appropriate work as it did come at the end of bpNichol’s career.

<sup>54</sup> While I was revising this dissertation, Ball was awarded the 2016 bpNichol Chapbook Award for the collection *Small Waterways* (2015), a chapbook that I had the privilege of publishing through Apt. 9 Press. In his acceptance speech, Ball describes their close friendship:

This award has extra resonance for me because Barrie Nichol was a friend. He collaborated in publications with my late wife, the painter Barbara Caruso. I value my continuing friendship with his widow Eleanor Nichol.

Barrie and I were both small pressers in the 1960s and 70s— he with Ganglia Press and *grOnk* and me with Weed/Flower Press. We co-published books by David McFadden and Gerry Gilbert, and we published each other’s poems. (Acceptance Speech)



Ball published three projects by bpNichol through Weed/Flower Press, two of them among bpNichol's most significant: *The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid* (1970), one of the titles for which he was controversially awarded the Governor General's Award for Poetry, as well as the first North American edition of his early concrete experiments, *Konfessions of an Elizabethan Fan Dancer* (1973).<sup>55</sup> Originally published by Bob Cobbing's Writer's Forum Quartos in London, England in 1967, *Konfessions* was unavailable in Canada except in scattered little magazine publications, yet the work contained therein was the foundation of bpNichol's early reputation for formal experimentation and exploration of "borderblur."<sup>56</sup> bpNichol approached Ball to republish the book because he was "concerned that very little of his concrete poetry was available in Canada" (Ball, Introduction 9). Ball mimeographed an edition of the book for Weed/Flower Press in 1973, and later edited a comprehensive edition for Coach House Books in 2004. The Coach House edition is significant for its evidence of Ball's bibliographic impulses. Ball's brief but detailed introduction and his extensive bibliographic notes document the variations between the two earlier editions, and he collates a new comprehensive edition. Following the poems, Ball includes a list of interviews with bpNichol that shed light on his typewriter concrete poems, as well as a complete bibliography of bpNichol's periodical publications between 1964 and 1968, the years during which *Konfessions* was written, offering the most complete account of bpNichol's first forays into concrete experimentation.

Ball's 119 catalogues are bookended by close attention to bpNichol. *List No. 1* (May 1972) includes 70 entries. The two entries that occupy the majority of the space in the list are

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<sup>55</sup> The third title was *The Other Side of the Room: poems 1966-1969* (1971).

<sup>56</sup> In "some afterwords" in *the cosmic chef: an evening of concrete*, bpNichol defined borderblur as follows: "this whole book is best described by the term dom sylvester houedard coined BORDERBLUR everything presented here comes from that point where language &/or the image blur together into the inbetween & between objects to be understood as such" (78).

for Ganglia Press and *grOnk*. Ball identifies Ganglia as “bp Nichol’s” and lists twelve items from the press. *grOnk*, a magazine co-edited by bpNichol with David Aylward, lists 9 items. Ball’s final printed catalogue, *List No. 119*, produced in September 1996, is entirely dedicated to bpNichol’s efforts as a writer and publisher.<sup>57</sup> It includes 200 items broken up into a number of categories: Books, pamphlets, etc.; Comic books; Other contributions; Co-editor; Ephemera; About; Ganglia; Ganglia Concrete Series; Ganglia 5¢ Mini Mimeo Series; Ganglia 35¢ Mimeo Series; *grOnk*; *grOnk* Intermediate Series; *grOnk* Flash Series; *grOnk* Random Series and *grOnk* Zap Series. The categories, and the subtle distinctions between them, demonstrate Ball’s bibliographic rigour. He cites a further 11 “Bibliographic Works Consulted” in the construction of the list. Each item receives a full bibliographic entry, notes on edition size, construction, condition, and references to the aforementioned bibliographic works for cross-checking. He even includes a brief description of Ganglia Press, laying out a condensed history of the project. bpNichol also appears regularly through the other catalogues, both his individual writing and his editorial and publishing work.<sup>58</sup> It is clear from these lists that Ball returned, again and again over many years, to bpNichol’s work, relisting and re-evaluating bpNichol’s output as poet and editor, making the items and their bibliographic information available.<sup>59</sup> For a writer whose output is as varied and (often)

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<sup>57</sup> See Figures 13 and 14 in Appendix C.

<sup>58</sup> A brief but indicative selection from Ball’s catalogues sees bpNichol show up in a number of places in significant quantities: items 514-531 in *List No. 34* (December 1975), “Canadian Poetry Part I (Modern),” are by bpNichol; items 202-286 in *List No. 75* (August 1979), “Canadian Poetry,” are dedicated to Ganglia; items 419-543 in *List No. 91* (October 1984), “Canadian Literary Periodicals,” are dedicated to *grOnk* and Ganglia; items 190-310 in *List No. 108* (May 1990) “Canadian Literature,” are exclusively bpNichol-authored publications; items 257-302 in *List No. 111* (October 1991), “Canadian Literary Periodicals,” are dedicated to *grOnk* and Ganglia; items 355-368 in *List No. 113* (March 1993), “Modern Canadian Poetry: A Selection of Scarce and Interesting Items,” are dedicated to bpNichol’s writing; and items 12-40 in *List No. 117* (November 1994), “Canadian Literature,” are dedicated to bpNichol’s writing.

<sup>59</sup> These catalogues in fact chart bpNichol’s rise in stature from experimental outsider to a poet beloved by and influential for many and ultimately absorbed, at least in part, into the official verse cultures of Canada. The prices reflect this. The most expensive items in Ball’s final catalogue is an artists’ proof of *The Adventures of Milt the Morph in Colour*, a collaboration between bpNichol and artist and publisher Barbara Caruso, published

ephemeral in its material forms as bpNichol, this act of listing and re-listing works sustains the possibility of their recirculation as part of a the intertextual environment of the small press counterpublic. This is a vital contributive gesture.

Ball's catalogues reveal key components of his contributive approach to the small press and to the world more broadly, illustrating his conscientious attention-to-detail, his emphasis on sustained and repeated attention, and his care to communicate as clearly as possible. These same defining attitudes can be traced in his writing and publishing. Though widely respected by his peers, his poetry has received minimal critical attention. His books were occasionally reviewed (and generally favourably) but broader critical evaluation has been rare.<sup>60</sup> Yet despite this minimal attention, Ball's few serious critics do identify characteristics of his poetry that allow a more full understanding of the small press and contributive gestures of his bookselling practice. Reviewers and critics consistently note Ball's attempts to order the minutiae of the material world. Douglas Barbour, in 1970, wrote that "Ball is not interested in the large poetic gesture: he merely wants to record, with absolute honesty, what happens within and without" ("The Young Poets" 115). Eldon

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by Caruso's Seripress in an edition of 25 copies in 1972. At the time of publication, it sold for \$160.00. In its first appearance in one of Ball's catalogues (*List No. 10*, June 1973), it is listed "at published price." By *List No. 66* (April-May 1979), the price had risen to \$350.00. The artist's proof in *List No. 119* is priced at \$4000.00. The dramatic increase in price cannot be ascribed solely to the passage of time, but rather must be seen as reflecting the increased stature of bpNichol, Caruso, and the reputation of Seripress. The bookseller catalogue is one of the only sites at which this particular data (that is, financial data) is recorded and distributed. The bookseller catalogue over time insists that the relationship between the economic and the symbolic be reckoned with during cultural evaluation, breaking the illusion of the objective study of art.

<sup>60</sup> For example, bpNichol, writing in 1969, believed that Ball's *Water-Pipes & Moonlight* was "perhaps the most exquisitely beautiful book of the year" (qtd. in *With Issa*). Ball's minimalism did have its detractors though. Eugene McNamara panned Ball's *Force Movements* in a review in *Black Moss* in 1970: "How can this nonsense be dignified with such terms as 'language revolution'? Or 'concrete' or whatever? It isn't writing. It's typing. It's crap." Wearing such misunderstanding as a badge of honour, this passage was included as a blurb on the back of Ball's 1991 selected poems, *With Issa*. There was also an article published in 1998 in the *Journal of Lanzhou University* by Feng Jiawen and Gao Lanfang that I have only been able to read in a poor translation from Chinese via Google. The abstract reads: "60-70 years in Canada, there have been literary prosperity. As Canada's literary poetry on a wonderful, more color Fun Presentation, particularly eye-catching, Young Poets Poetry Nelson Bauer distinctive. His poems and write more about the nature of all things, yet clear theme breadth. The form of short and lack of meaning, the use of color and paint it just right. Refreshing to read."

Garnet, in 1974, argued, “Nelson Ball’s main concern is with the physical world & its description” (*Where?* 176). I would add to these more formal evaluations jwcurry’s insistence in 1991 that “[Ball’s] is a highly personal gesture, opening up a world’s worth of nuance with an absolute minimum of referents, Nelson quietly standing in the middle saying ‘see?’” (*Icent* 271). Common to these evaluations is the assertion that Ball’s poetic is built upon close observation of minute detail, and finds expression in the attempt to order and communicate those observations. These rare critical statements stand equally as succinct articulations of Ball’s contributive bookselling, and a brief explication of Ball’s poetry and small press publishing will underscore the connections.

The name of his press, Weed/Flower, reveals a crucial dimension of Ball’s small press attitudes. Jack David, in his valuable bibliography of Weed/Flower Press, points to the name of the press as indicative of Ball’s philosophy: “The name of the press characterizes Nelson Ball himself; weeds are distinguishable from flowers only by some human definition, by intervention of value judgements that say ‘flowers are good, weeds should be pulled out’” (34). In his publishing and his bookselling, Ball championed the experimental and the marginalized, bringing new and radical writers into print and seeking out lost and neglected books to add to his stock. Ball has been explicit about the attention he deliberately paid to the “weeds” and the “flowers” of Canadian literature. He explains the name as follows:

Well, weed was in the air, although I wasn’t a weed smoker. But it was sort of disreputable enough to be appealing. But, I understood at that point that there is no difference between a weed and a flower, botanically there’s no difference. It’s a social thing that’s imposed. And that was appealing to me. And my mother was a plant collector. (Personal Interview)

This statement illustrates the dual nature of Ball's position. First, there is the desire to attend to the marginalized and ignored "weeds" he saw around him, those in disrepute. He draws on botanical language here, fitting his practice naturally into the rhizomatic small press model. The small press and experimental writing are seen as neglected weeds that nonetheless grow naturally, that exist as part of the ecosystem. Second, Ball also sees Canadian literature as a "weed" relative to larger, established national literatures:

I had a very, very, very conscious mission as a bookseller. I believed that more attention should be paid to Canadian literature, to the good stuff and to the poor stuff as well. All of it. I thought that was very important [...] there was this really sad lack of recognition and I wanted to see it change. (Personal Interview)

This attention paid to the weeds and the flowers is expressed in his bookselling practices, his publishing, and in his poetry, and the three collectively articulate his approach to the world.

In Ball's poetry, we can discern a related understanding of the importance of returning to already-examined objects and ideas in order to locate potential new resonances. In "Formations I" (1967), Ball explores how the definitions of objects shift as conditions shift around them:

Caught between movements  
of air  
the tree  
is  
almost defined—form  
imposed as if there were no wind.

The wind

changes— a new

definition. (1-9)

Ball's poetry returns again and again to similar subject matter, even similar images, imploring his reader to re-cover the same ground with him.<sup>61</sup> On first encountering these recurrent themes and images in Ball's work, one could be forgiven for thinking that they represent a sort of stasis, whether in the world depicted or in Ball's own sense of the world. As in "Formations I," however, this attention (and repeated attention) depicts the small changes that occur over moments and years. They argue that attention must necessarily be sustained to identify how those changes impact the objects depicted. The tree being described is "almost defined" (5) by the wind, and defined differently when the wind changes. Context, Ball's poem tells us, is everything. This is a small insight, but also a generous one. Return to what you have already looked at—it deserves re-evaluation. A number of Ball's poems from these years, years immediately before he established his bookselling business, describe objects that have been neglected, disposed of, or are in various states of decay.<sup>62</sup> His speakers observe and document their state, and attempt to find beauty and value in them as things that simply are, regardless of whether they have practical use-value. These poems intervene, however modestly, by preserving and recording the objects, thus returning them, however briefly, from the neglected margin to at least one centre of attention. He insists, via the simple act of recording an object in a poem, that it deserves consideration. Ball's close

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<sup>61</sup> See "The Window" from *Room of Clocks* (1965), "The Table The Chair" and "The Clearing" from *Beaufort's Scale* (1967), "Spring (2)" and "The Chair" from *Sparrows* (1968), or even the later poem "You Must Look Hard To See What's There" from *Some Mornings* (2014).

<sup>62</sup> See "The Row-Boat" and "A Way of Seeing Things" from *Beaufort's Scale* (1967), or "Fragment on Poetics" from *With Issa: Poems 1964-1971* (1991) for representative examples.

attention to working these ideas out as a young man in his poems reverberates through his publishing and his bookselling practices later in life.

Frank Davey characterizes Ball's poetry as a practice in which "the smallest and most easily forgotten details can enshrine the deepest significance of the events in which they participate" (*From There to Here* 41), an observation that applies equally to Ball's bookselling and publishing. Across his writing, publishing, and bookselling, Ball worked to answer the question of what contexts literary and other kinds of value can become apparent in, and to communicate his observations to others. His poetry performs this role with its examination and re-examination of the natural world. His publishing recasts the evaluative force of the distinctions between weeds and flowers, offering the neglected and the marginalized attention and care. His bookselling offers the same to both past and contemporary publications, insisting that small press works and Canadian literature have economic and symbolic value. There is a cumulative force to Ball's labour that contributes meaningfully to the "concatenation of texts through time" (90), in Warner's terms, and that helped both to establish a visible small press counterpublic, and to periodically re-visit and re-evaluate its shifting-states.

### **Jay MillAr's BookThug and Apollinaire's Bookshoppe: Re-evaluating and Re-shaping the Small Press Counterpublic**

Nelson Ball's work was foundational in that he was a participant in the rise of the small press in Canada in the 1960s, and as a bookseller in the 1970s was at the front lines of evaluating the contributions of particular writers and presses and ascribing them value. Jay MillAr is a bookseller, publisher, and poet whose varied cultural activity inhabits the space

opened up the small press praxis of Souster and the contributive bookselling of Nelson Ball, but coming several decades later this work necessarily involves a more pointed and often explicitly critical re-evaluation of those traditions using contemporary frameworks.

He has published six trade collections of poetry and is the publisher of BookThug (a micro press founded in 2003 that developed into the small press it is today in 2006 when MillAr began publishing perfect bound books). He is also the founder and proprietor of Apollinaire's Bookshoppe, an online bookstore specializing in experimental literature and the small press. The symbiosis of these activities is expressed in MillAr's biographical notes, such as the following example from his most recent trade collection, *Timely Irreverence* (2013):

Jay MillAr is a Toronto poet, editor, publisher and virtual bookseller. [...] MillAr is the shadowy figure behind BookThug, an independent publishing house dedicated to exploratory work by well-known and emerging North American writers, as well as Apollinaire's Bookshoppe, a virtual bookstore that specializes in the books that no one wants to buy. Currently Jay teaches creative writing and poetics at George Brown College and Toronto New School of Writing. (93)

Note that BookThug supports the "well-known and emerging," a program that echoes Contact Press. Similarly, MillAr's teaching of "creative writing and poetics" expresses the attitude that writing, publishing, and bookselling are parts of a larger program of education aimed at creating both conditions within which to receive experimental literature, but also educating audiences to be able to receive such work productively. Finally, the tongue-in-cheek description of selling "the books that no one wants to buy" articulates the marginal



state of the small press and experimental writing in Canada, and expresses the uncomfortable relationship between the small press, contributive bookselling, and capitalism.

MillAr's self-consciousness about his own positions relative to literary and cultural history finds expression in careful attention to the details of that history, an irreverent sense of humour, and a critical deconstruction of tradition. Before discussing MillAr's bookselling, however, the ethos of BookThug needs to be established in order to clarify the work performed by Apollinaire's Bookshoppe. BookThug's genesis began in 1992 as Boondoggle Books, a self-publishing venture inspired by MillAr's encounters with small presses in library stacks.<sup>63</sup> MillAr's irreverence is visible even in that early name, one that he explains appealed to him because "boondoggle" means "to carry out useless and trivial acts with the appearance of doing something important" (mclennan, "BookThug"). Boondoggle became BookThug in 2003, and the press gradually developed into a more organized, structured, and prominent force in Canada's literary community.

The press, however, has never forgotten the tradition to which it originally wanted to belong. It gives its official mandate as "to enrich and advance the tradition of experimental literature" ("About BookThug"). In a 2008 interview published in *Broken Pencil*, MillAr explained his understanding of that tradition:

BookThug tries to understand the tradition out of which it came while also thinking ahead and thinking beyond: beyond genre, beyond language, beyond

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<sup>63</sup> As with the previous section on Nelson Ball that noted the generally under acknowledged labour of Barbara Caruso, I do not want to give the impression that BookThug is a one-man operation. One focus of this dissertation is the reciprocities between bookselling, publishing, and writing, with a particular emphasis on the small press, and thus Jay MillAr is my primary focus in the immediate pages. In the early years of the press, Jenny Sampirisi and Malcolm Sutton made contributions to the press, and more recently, BookThug has become the work of spousal team Hazel and Jay Millar. Hazel is currently managing editor and publicist of the press, and the two co-curate the HIJ Reading Series in their home. Hazel also sits on the Book and Periodical Council of Canada and is publicist for National Poetry Month on behalf of the League of Canadian Poets. These are important contributions to the larger ecosystem of Canadian Poetry, yet are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

borders. Try to image what it was like for Victor Coleman to work with Raymond Souster to produce *New Wave Canada* and then carry that aesthetic [...] forward to create The Coach House Press. [...] I also created BookThug because I wanted to communicate with others who are interested not only in possibilities in writing, but are also interested in a skewed sense of how to publish and distribute said writing; who are interested in carrying on a discussion, through publishing, of possibilities in writing. (Da Silva, “Thug Life”)

In addition to regular Spring and Fall lists of new poetry, fiction, and criticism, BookThug publishes reissues (including work by bpNichol, Steve McCaffery, Gertrude Stein, and H.D.) as well as new translations and international work. These attentions connect BookThug to its small press roots in presses like Contact and Coach House, presses that were explicitly sensitive to connecting Canadian writing to international communities, and that valued both groundbreaking and new experimental work as well as past works that made such experiments possible. BookThug evaluates manuscripts for “their ability to continue the ‘conversation’ about experimental literature. [...] every manuscript must display an awareness of the intellectual and artistic tradition which preceded it” (“About BookThug”), making explicit their desire for their writers to express a historically-grounded understanding of literary traditions. BookThug has published work from Raymond Souster, Nelson Ball, bill bissett, and Victor Coleman (connecting directly to Contact, Weed/Flower, blewointment, and Coach House), as well as books from contemporary writers like Phil Hall, Nicole Markotic, Meredith Quartermain, Erin Moure, and Lisa Robertson, among others. BookThug acknowledges and supports its predecessors by publishing new work and reissuing old work,

but also embraces the tradition of those predecessors by supporting and encouraging radical and experimental work from emerging and established writers.<sup>64</sup>

In keeping with BookThug's roots in an oppositional and alternative tradition of Canadian literature, both the press and MillAr's individual position as a cultural agent demonstrate an antagonistic attitude toward their contemporaries in the cultural field. For example, in 2004, BookThug published an anthology edited by MillAr and Jon Paul Fiorentino titled *Pissing Ice: An Anthology of 'New' Canadian Poets*. The title is a direct reference to *Breathing Fire: Canada's New Poets* edited by Lorna Crozier and Patrick Lane in 1995 (and the followup, *Breathing Fire 2: Canada's New Poets*, published in 2004). The two projects are diametrically opposed in their intentions, in their lists of contributors, and in their conceptions of what roles poetry can and should fill in the world.<sup>65</sup> As BookThug has grown in stature (in terms of the public recognition afforded it by those beyond the

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<sup>64</sup> Perhaps uncomfortably, BookThug has achieved a new defining national visibility following from the remarkable feat of having published three of the five finalists for the Governor General's Award for Poetry in 2011 (Michael Boughn, Kate Eichhorn, and eventual winner, Phil Hall). It should be noted that one of the judges was Steve McCaffery, a poet sympathetic to BookThug's poetic leanings and a poet who had been published by the press (the other judges were Joanne Arnett and Douglas Burnet Smith). The press is no longer marginal in the sense that it has achieved a clear national profile, but it nonetheless continues to publish work that would often not find national print outlets otherwise.

<sup>65</sup> BookThug championed a more marginal, experimental, and radical group of emerging Canadian poets than the more centrist selection located in the Crozier and Lane-edited volumes. *Pissing Ice* is a thin chapbook, only forty pages long (including all paratextual material), presenting small selections from twenty poets. *Breathing Fire* contains work by poets like Karen Solie, Stephanie Bolster, Carmine Starnino, and Michael Crummey; *Pissing Ice* publishes the likes of Derek Beaulieu, Alice Burdick, Gustave Morin, and Angela Rawlings. The divisions between these poets are fluid. The *Breathing Fire* poets tend to publish with "larger" or more established small presses (House of Anansi) and large presses (McClelland and Stewart), while the *Pissing Ice* poets lean towards "smaller" small trade presses (New Star, Mansfield, Talon) and micro presses. There is, of course, overlap and oscillation between these alignments as many of these poets publish in the same magazines and at times with the same presses. The split between them isolates the difficulty of defining the small press and the wide range of poetic practices within it. A concise, albeit reductive, mapping of their differences would place the *Breathing Fire* poets in a more traditional formalist vein, and the *Pissing Ice* poets in more conceptual, visual, and formally experimental veins.

Crozier, introducing the poets in *Breathing Fire*, writes: "They are a large, precocious, ardent group of skilled and passionate writers, and they have a faith in the power of poetry to rekindle, redeem and renew." ("Breathing Fire"); *Pissing Ice* takes-the-piss, so to speak, out of the very idea of presenting a comprehensive gathering of "New" Canadian poets (even going so far as to place "New" in quotation marks, underlining the skepticism with which the press approached the venture) and would appear to scoff at the idea of a seemingly pure "faith in the power of poetry."

immediate community of experimental poets gathered around the press), it has maintained this stubborn, contrarian attitude.

More recently (June 2016), BookThug issued a public statement outlining an expanded and more rigorous operating definition for their publishing focused on diversity and experimentation. A letter from publishers Jay and Hazel MillAr explains:

And yet, despite all of the innovative and wide-ranging books that we've published over the years, we've come to realize that we can do better. We stand by the belief that no BookThug book walks in the middle of any road, but even though we've worked with writers over the years who are "not straight" or who are "not white" or who are "not male," a definition of diversity that addresses only notions of style ultimately fails to take into account much of what the word truly means. ("Letter from BookThug")

They cite a concerted effort to read in the fields of "colonialism, patriarchy, racism, feminism, capitalism, and the environment" as instigating a new drive to curate a "diverse" publishing list that "goes far beyond simply evoking a variety of styles." This follows naturally from the original vision of BookThug, but is updated to reflect concerns that are part of the public small press discourse in 2016 in a way that they perhaps were not in 2003 (or in 1960s and 1970s) but are increasingly central to its internal debates.

Christine Kim, in her work on small feminist publishing houses, articulates an alternative view of the Canadian small press and literary fields in the 1970s that was "dominated by masculine and nationalist interests" ("The Politics of Print" iv). Works published by Press Gang and Women's Press, the focal points in Kim's study, demanded the inclusion of "racial, ethnic, and gendered difference into Canadian identity" (10). Kim argues

convincingly that these issues and the writers that tackled them “might otherwise be excluded from the field of cultural production” (11). Presses like Coach House and Anansi, despite adopting “an outlaw position, independent, [...] accountable to no one except (sometimes) their authors” (MacSkimming, qtd. in Kim 22), were also predominantly male-owned and male-operated, and their author lists were male-dominated. Feminist presses pushed back against the gendered structures of these operations, and that pushback has begun to resonate with greater urgency in the second decade of the twenty-first century with presses like BookThug. Picking up on this idea, and invoking Michael Warner’s language about publics, Erin Wunker and Travis V. Mason introduce *Public Poetics: Critical Issues in Canadian Poetry and Poetics* (2015) by asserting that Canada “is a country with an ongoing history of racism, colonialism, and regional and linguistic tensions. Not all communities are hailed by discourses in easily recognizable ways; not all communities are recognized as publics” (2).

The “Letter from BookThug” publicly declaring the intention to “do better” by such unrecognized publics reveals the contradictions that can arise in counterpublic spaces. BookThug’s publishing and the books for sale through Apollinaire’s can be viewed as counterpublic discourses that oppose academic and mainstream discourses surrounding literature, but can also be viewed as performing precisely the kinds of erasures they strive to oppose (something acknowledged by the MillArs). My focus is primarily on the oppositional dimensions of these activities, but it is worth bearing in mind that these same activities can be read in other contexts as acts of suppression or domination and that BookThug is now actively working to address this. The question of what publics are hailed by a given discourse, and how marginalized and less-visible publics behave with regards to the centre but also to other marginalized publics are key to this discussion. This is a recent

effort by BookThug and the long-term success of it and any related consequences are yet to be determined, but declaring it publicly at this stage is a significant gesture that can, in part, hold the press accountable to its own mandate.

In BookThug's efforts to look more critically at its own position of power in the literary field, we can observe the simultaneous positioning of the press as marginal and central, experimental and authoritative. Michael Warner's invocation of Nancy Fraser's ideas concerning public discourse is useful to think through the complex position of BookThug relative to authority and power:

In an influential 1992 article, Nancy Fraser observed that when public discourse is understood only as “a single, comprehensive, overarching public,” members of subordinated groups “have no arenas for deliberation among themselves about their needs, objectives, and strategies.” In fact, Fraser writes, “members of subordinated social groups—women, workers, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians—have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics.” She calls these “subaltern counterpublics,” by which she means “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.” (Warner 118)

In BookThug and in Apollinaire's one can observe publics and counterpublics. In BookThug's initial tradition (that of experimental, postmodern, 'avant-garde' poetry in Canada), the works BookThug has tended to publish and the past writers it looks to for

inspiration are clearly counter to centralized, mainstream works of literature.<sup>66</sup> Those same traditions, however, have historically failed to acknowledge the subaltern counterpublics that are marginalized within its own subaltern counterpublic. In other words, while BookThug's publishing program and traditions can be viewed correctly as counterpublics, there are also other counterpublics it excludes.<sup>67</sup> The precise groups that Fraser identifies, and that the MillArs and BookThug identify, have been poorly accounted for in dominant histories of the small press tradition in Canada, as well as in its contemporary expressions.

Apollinaire's Bookshoppe provides one outlet through which MillAr can perform the necessary criticism and re-evaluation. Apollinaire's, selling "the books that no one wants to buy," addresses a need in Canada's small press community: access to the books and other literary objects of its many traditions, particularly publications from the more 'micro' end of

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<sup>66</sup> I layer the terms "experimental," "postmodern," and "avant-garde" to indicate the difficulty of identifying and defining the varied, fragmented, and resistant traditions that BookThug draws inspiration from and participates in. Frank Davey argued in 1994 that there are "no major institutions affiliated with [postmodernism], no publishing houses constructed as publishers of postmodernism, and no journals of 'Canadian postmodernism'" ("Contesting 'Post(-)modernism'" 285). Robert David Stacey, introducing *Re:Reading the Postmodern: Canadian Literature and Criticism after Modernism* (2010), argues that to "write about postmodernism in Canada, even now, is to acknowledge that literary history is a field of competing interests and desires, just as it is to recognize that debates about the meaning and value of postmodernism must trace the rejection of totalization that postmodern theory, in all its various articulations, takes as its point of departure" (xiv-xv). Indeed, it is this "rejection of totalization," an expression of Lyotard's "incredulity towards master narratives" (*The Postmodern Condition* xxiv), that renders the postmodern (and its constellation of related terms) difficult to define precisely, and that informs BookThug's entry into the literary field and its ongoing critique and reevaluation of inherited literary traditions. The lines between modernism and postmodernism are blurred even at the earliest historical moments discussed in this dissertation—Raymond Souster was a modernist poet, but his editing and publishing work overlapped with the emergence of poets that are most commonly associated with postmodernism. For example, *New Wave Canada*, edited by Souster with help from influential Coach House editor Victor Coleman in 1966, was the first major appearance of bpNichol, Michael Ondaatje, Daphne Marlatt, and others.

Gregory Betts productively connects postmodernism to nineteenth-century decadence, noting that "[a]n art of rupture, historical Decadence, like postmodernism in general, opens texts forward and backward in time rather than working toward closures or teleologies of any kind" ("Postmodern Decadence" 155). This would seem to speak to Michael Warner's discussion of the "concatenation" of texts through time, and my discussion of the bookseller as one agent actively shaping the initial reception and subsequent reevaluations of books and book objects, opening them "forward and backward in time" by making possible not only their recirculation, but by placing them in productive contexts for readers.

<sup>67</sup> Related to the discussion of the difficulty of defining the postmodern in the previous footnote, Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy have noted that they deliberately chose not to use "postmodern" in *Writing in Our Time* (instead choosing "radical") because postmodern "tends to reproduce its white male bias of the 1970s" and "deflect[s] attention away from the urgencies of identity politics" ("Re:Reading the Postmodern" 334).

the spectrum.<sup>68</sup> Books produced in small editions become out-of-print and difficult to access shortly after appearing. Decades later, they are even more difficult to find. Online bookselling has facilitated access and discovery in necessary and important ways, and Apollinaire's exists in this space. It was originally a mobile bookstore, setting up at readings and book fairs in and around Toronto, before moving online in 2005. Apollinaire's, tongue-firmly-in-cheek, suggests that "no one" wants to buy their books, but nonetheless continues to sell them. Apollinaire's Bookshoppe is one expression of bookselling as an act of remembering that is analogous to small press work as remembering. Just as Souster's work collected and made available the work of his predecessors alongside emerging new writers (and also like Ball's bookselling and publishing practices), MillAr prioritizes the act of remembering with all of its attendant consequences.

The experience of 'shopping' at Apollinaire's online critically mediates small press history.<sup>69</sup> The name Apollinaire's is an immediate gesture towards a specific literary

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<sup>68</sup> Such bookstores have been longed for by a number of small press-affiliated Canadian writers. In March 2002, Stuart Ross called out for just such a store in his monthly "Hunkamooga" column in *Word: Toronto's Literary Calendar*. Under the title "The Only Bookstore That Matters," Ross documents an exercise of imagination, stumbling upon the fictive "Spineless Literature" on Harbord Street in Toronto. The name, a reference to the fact that chapbooks typically lack the traditional "spine" of a perfect-bound book, identifies the aesthetic and ideological leanings of the imaginary store—it is full of "shelves and racks of chapbooks" (25) that cannot be found anywhere else, with stock from the small and micro presses of Canada's past and present, zines and chapbooks, all miraculously visible, available, and collected in a single place. He continues, somewhat prophetically: "At a makeshift desk sits Jay MillAr; the place is volunteer-run, and this is his shift. Spineless Literature was his idea, and the hours are as erratic as the schedules of Jay's poet friends" (26). Ross declares: "Spineless Literature is the most important bookstore in Toronto. [...] This place is an education. Who cares about McClelland & Stewart's stinking spring poetry list? Here you can learn about your past [...] and embrace a new generation of folders-and-staplers" (27). Ross's exercise places the small press in opposition to large presses, insisting that the small press is the fertile space where experimentation and growth occur. The work dreamed of is "Spineless" in its material production, but also without a fixed network of grants, tours, or media. The small press as imagined in Spineless Literature is rhizomatic, eschewing the single-line represented by so-called "spined" literature. Ross's exercise identifies a yearning for a particular kind of bookselling in the small press community, a kind of bookstore and bookseller that is sympathetic to small press literature and treats it as the central focus of her or his bookselling practice instead of a curiosity that exists at the margins of more profitable publishing and trade. While "Spineless Literature" does not exist beyond Ross's imagination, the bookstores studied in this dissertation perform most, if not all, of the roles that Ross's ideal small press bookstore would.

<sup>69</sup> See Figure 15 in Appendix C.



tradition. Guillaume Apollinaire, French writer and critic, was deeply immersed in the early twentieth-century avant-garde art world; his own writings included early expressions of concrete and visual poetic sensibilities, and he named the Cubist and Surrealist movements.<sup>70</sup> Naming a bookstore after Apollinaire codes that store with the markers of a specific literary and aesthetic tradition, one that is alternative, experimental, and international. Beneath the welcome banner of the page, the customer is introduced to the store in terms that underscore the principles established by its name: “You have found the on-line home of Apollinaire’s Bookshoppe, specializing in 20th century literature. Emphasis is given to poetry, smallpress [sic], the experimental and the ephemeral. It’s true that the books on our shelves are not for just anyone — but we’d certainly like to encourage you to become someone today.”<sup>71</sup>

Michael Warner asserts that “[p]ublic speech must be taken two ways: as addressed to us and as addressed to strangers” (77). Public speech acts are always addressed, in part, to strangers that hold the potential to become members of a given public. Apollinaire’s invitation to “become someone today” is just such a speech act, acknowledging that its own stock and traditions are not immediately accessible or interesting to all, but that they are there to be explored by interested readers.

The “Featured Products” the potential customer finds when arriving at Apollinaire’s signal the new concerns BookThug is striving to include in its publishing program. The three books visible on the home page eschew the emphasis on twentieth-century literature cited in the banner description of the store, and are focused on indigenous culture and

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<sup>70</sup> “Apollinaire was obliged to work out the vocabulary to apply to the new art; indeed Apollinaire was to Picasso and the Cubists what Duret had been to Manet and the impressionists” (Shattuck 16).

<sup>71</sup> The older “snapshot” of the website held at the Internet Archive dates to September 11, 2012. The text has been unchanged since that date.

reconciliation.<sup>72</sup> The three books are by Leanne Simpson: the edited collection *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations* (2008), the non-fiction title *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence* (2011), and the short story collection *Islands of Decolonial Love* (2013).<sup>73</sup> This is a deliberate and emphatic choice on the part of Apollinaire's to make sure that these issues are visible in the small press and experimental literature communities with which it is already engaged, and to highlight their importance by placing them first on the site. Although each was published by a small trade press in Canada, these are not ephemeral works of experimental twentieth-century poetics. In concert with BookThug's active re-evaluation of these traditions, however, Apollinaire's is asserting that these issues should be considered vital by small press cultural agents (both those currently active and potential future collaborators).

In the absence of print catalogues, the consumer is presented with the whole stock of Apollinaire's at each visit.<sup>74</sup> This includes both stock that is available, as well as previously available books (Apollinaire's retains listings that have already sold). This functions much like a print catalogue, where the use-value of the document beyond facilitating a sale resides in the information it presents, and that information retains bibliographic and historical significance that persists beyond the transaction of a sale. As with Nelson Ball, Apollinaire's holds a restricted stock. Its only section markers are Art and Photography, Audio, Fiction, Magazines and Journals, Non-Fiction, and Poetry. Within these sections, the customer finds a selection of books that comprise a tradition that takes up a small (and often non-existent)

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<sup>72</sup> The store, in fact, carries a great deal of twenty-first-century literature.

<sup>73</sup> These were the listings in August 2016.

<sup>74</sup> Apollinaire's issues occasional emails that include "Weekly Wonders," as well as operates a Facebook page that lists stock from time to time, but these are irregular. As of my writing this (August 2016), the last weekly wonder was issued in March 2014, and the last post on the Facebook page was March 1, 2016.

percentage of the majority of bookstores in Canada. Apollinaire's also stocks both new and used books, something uncommon to find in a traditional brick-and-mortar bookstore. In the stock one can find the books of this tradition going back decades beside books being published today, both by small presses in trade editions and by chapbook presses in limited editions. Beside historical titles from Contact Press, Coach House, Weed/Flower, and blewointment, one finds contemporary trade presses like Anvil and Mansfield, as well as chapbook presses like the Surrealist Poets Gardening Association, Proper Tales Press, Beautiful Outlaw, and Ferno House.

As with BookThug's efforts to intervene in the construction of the present and future of small press literature, Apollinaire's intervenes in the construction of small press traditions, actively adopting a contributive position. The entries betray an anxiety about the dangers of producing and maintaining tradition out of pure nostalgia without critical distance. These catalogue entries situate available items within literary history, with an emphasis on experimental and contrarian voices, but the entries are often injected with humour and are explicitly critical of dominant traditions.<sup>75</sup> For example, an entry for the 1948 second edition of A.J.M. Smith's landmark and controversial *The Book of Canadian Poetry* focuses on the response that the first edition received from *First Statement*-editor John Sutherland rather than on Smith's own work: "a fine copy of the revised edition of Smith's landmark anthology, produced 2 years after the original edition to include certain contemporary poets Smith left out of the original, which John Sutherland rather bluntly pointed out in his response anthology *Other Canadians*." The entry for another influential yet increasingly criticized work, Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski's *The Making of Modern Poetry in*

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<sup>75</sup> An entry for George Bowering's 1967 collection *Baseball*, a book famously printed by Coach House in the shape of a pennant and listed at \$525.00, includes the somewhat-flippant note, "[i]n its original state it is impossible to find. And yet, interestingly, here it is."

*Canada*, takes a sharply negative stance towards the narrative the study presents: “Includes work that outlines the history of white male poetry in Canada starting around 1910 with A.J.M. Smith and F.R. Scott, the shift that began with John Sutherland’s *Other* [Canadians] to the emergence of the Contact Press, and finally to the beginnings of the New Wave in the 60s. Narry [sic] a female voice to be found in all this HIS-tory.” These entries and this stock are in keeping with the larger impulse that drives MillAr’s varied work. Apollinaire’s documents and evaluates the contributions of small press, experimental, and marginal literatures in Canada, but does so from an historically informed position. MillAr is clearly critical of dominant traditions, but also delineates how radical traditions operate necessarily in response to what is happening at the centre. This is the major contributive gesture of his bookselling practice; MillAr’s entries critically frame their subject in the service of creating a self-conscious small press counterpublic through the circulation and recirculation of texts. MillAr’s entry above charts some of the concatenations, in Warner’s terms, of Smith’s book, citing its original edition, public response, and subsequent revised edition, showing how the book was produced, received, and recreated. For Gnarowski and Dudek’s book, MillAr offers a new evaluation of the book, creating conditions of possibility for the production of further concatenations.

When discussing Nelson Ball, I positioned bpNichol as a representative centre of Ball’s work as a bookseller and publisher; bill bissett occupies a similar position for MillAr. MillAr’s deep knowledge of Canadian small press history permeates his cultural work in all of its forms, and bissett is a key influence that he grapples with. For example, MillAr’s 2005 collection, *False Maps for Other Creatures*, was published by Nightwood Editions under a newly revived imprint: blewointment. The paratextual apparatus of the collection provides a

wealth of information about the specific history of the imprint. On the rear cover, the publisher has included a paragraph outlining this history:

bill bissett's blewointment press/magazine was a vibrant and essential component of Canada's burgeoning literary scene in the 1960s and 70s [...]. bissett sold the press in 1982 and it was soon renamed Nightwood Editions. Nightwood is proud of its heritage, continuing to publish compelling work of innovative and exciting Canadian writing. *False Maps for Other Creatures* is the first title of a resurrected "blewointment" imprint.

In addition to this note, MillAr includes one-and-a-half pages of notes titled "Some Literary History" in his acknowledgements. He describes hearing bissett perform in London, Ontario in 1992, an experience that left MillAr "frightened and enthralled" (92). He subsequently sought out blewointment titles and other small press publications in the library. MillAr goes on to give more precise detail on the press, explaining the financial pressures that led to the sale and documenting the final books from the original press (Phil Hall, Jim Smith, Bruce Whiteman, and Steve McCaffery). MillAr continues: "Although the press blewointment no longer exists except in the library, the spirit it represents continues, and I am sure it has inspired others as it inspired me" (93). MillAr explains that his own publishing ventures are part of this lineage: "I have never forgotten my beginnings as a poet and as a publisher, nor will I ever forget the tradition I want to be a part of" (93). MillAr's is a contributive gesture, thoughtfully inhabiting literary history not only as a bookseller and publisher, but in the paratextual material that surrounds his own poetry.

Apollinaire's is an important outlet for bill bissett's works. A search for "bill bissett" in July 2016 turns up 87 results, including 47 individual bissett titles alongside contributions

to magazines, anthologies, and other items. MillAr's catalogue entries again contain a wealth of information. The listing for the original edition of *what fuckan theory* reads:

This is the uncommon first edition of bissett's only book of "non-fiction theory," issued around 1971. A co-publication with bpNichol's gronk press issued simultaneously with Nichol's *Captain Poetry Poems* -- this would be the last time the two poets worked together on a publishing venture, possibly because of the many errors in Nichol's book. This copy is a little rough, with the original hand-tipped label missing from the front cover (there is glue residue where it had been fixed) and the masking tape is broken and torn on the spine. The original RUSH stick remains on the front cover, and is often thought of as the title of this book (a more recent re-issue of the book in fact gives this as the title). A somewhat aged, but uncommon bissett item.

Here MillAr reveals social, print, and bibliographic history, noting personal relationships that can be traced in the book, bibliographic minutiae, and publishing history contemporary to the book. An entry for bissett's *Medicine My Mouth's On Fire* (1974) includes the note, "[t]his book was also printed at The Coach House Press, showing that even if Coleman didn't feel that bissett's work was good enough to be published there, it was at least good enough to be printed there." MillAr, once again in his irreverent tone, deploys the catalogue entry as a form of intervention in existing literary history and an opportunity to create and disperse pedagogical commentary. He identifies a conspicuous publishing gap in bissett's bibliography—he never published a solo collection with Coach House, despite publishing with virtually every other small press active in the 1960s and 1970s that shared an affinity with his poetics.

In 2012, BookThug published a reprint of bissett's influential but hard-to-find book *RUSH: what fuckan theory; a study uv language* (newly edited by derek beaulieu and Gregory Betts). Originally published in collaboration by bpNichol's *grOnk* and bissett's *blewointment* in 1972, *RUSH* is an articulation of bissett's poetics and anti-authoritarian theory of making art. In its reprinted form, it also expresses the contradictions and difficulties inherent in reprinting and necessarily reframing such texts for a contemporary readership. BookThug's embrace of a text like *RUSH* indicates a conscious effort to position its publishing program in a tradition that contains bissett. *RUSH*, for its own part, is aggressively resistant to the formal study of literature. Editors beaulieu and Betts characterize *RUSH* as "a deflating parody of pretentious, evaluating authority [and] an embodiment of those same values" ("Afterword" 114). In the wake of the original publication of *RUSH*, bissett wrote to bpNichol to outline his concerns. Betts and beaulieu quote from this letter in their new edition:

it dusint seem ok anymor to try to characterize anothr writrs work or his life as if xplanashuns can help they mostly condishun a readrs responus rathr than allow his or her growth n own xplorashun [...] let th pomes speak fr themselvs ok [...] we msut b careful uv what presumptuous roles as autoritees or anything like that we unwittingly innocently let slide ovr us sum uv it might stick on us. (115)

To some degree, reprinting a text like *RUSH*, framing it carefully next to another of bissett's rare statements on poetics, "a study uv langwedg what can yew study" (1971) (as well as including the first editorial from bissett's *blewointment* magazine, an interview with bissett by the editors, an editorial afterword by Betts and beaulieu, a brief note on the print history

of the original manuscript and book, as well as careful bibliographical notes throughout), contrasts the original intention of the book as well as the original material forms of production and distribution championed by bissett. There are unresolved tensions in the BookThug edition of *RUSH* between its content, its original form, and its new framing, however thoughtful, critical, and self-aware. *RUSH* reflects bissett's own discomfort with authority, and his particular investments in being resistant in all his practices. BookThug's embrace of that is important. Its republication is a signpost by the press of its chosen traditions and its desired future directions, as well as the unresolved contradictions between becoming an increasingly authoritative presence in a field that prides itself on its anti-authoritarian position. BookThug's adoption of the responsibility to redress some of the acts of domination and suppression that reside in the history of the small press in Canada is one way that the press is striving to make use of its current profile.

MillAr's discomfort with elements of the traditions he is not only a part of, but champions and consolidates, can also be traced in his poetry. He is often flippant regarding history, culture, and other poets, but that playfulness is rooted in historical knowledge. In the title poem of *Timely Irreverence* (2013), for example, he writes that he is "wait[ing] patiently for the hippies / to die" (8-9), anticipating that when it happens, "a great weight will be lifted from our shoulders, and / we will, at last, be free" (10-12). He is wry in this poem, but he is also acutely aware of the weight of previous literary generations on the shoulders of the present and future (indeed, he devotes a great deal of his energy as a publisher and bookseller to these "hippies"). He also, however, considers seriously the consequences of disregarding history:

Consider words—if words    forgotten



the moment a concept is understood  
 should we not seek those  
 who remember words? (“Astonishing Chunk” 38-41)

Those “who remember” are the same “hippies” the poet is waiting on to die, but they also (still) need to be sought out. What Drumbolis calls “tireless re-examination” remains necessary, despite a word, or an idea, or a concept having been previously understood. The gains made by understanding new concepts (such as recognizing the exclusions inherent to avant-garde writing communities) are slow and cumulative; they are created over time by subsequent generations. By seeking out one’s literary predecessors, by working to make such material and knowledge available to other community members, and by evaluating that knowledge critically, progress can be nurtured and sustained; the borders established by “hippies” (that were themselves expansions in their own historical moments) can be productively understood and challenged by a small press practice that strives to function contributively in all realms.

An interested reader can find in MillAr’s bookselling, publishing, and poetry the tools necessary to explore, learn about, and grow from Canada’s small press literary history. MillAr’s irreverence holds none of these traditions as sacred or beyond criticism, but rather seeks to place them in an informed context for readers, writers, and other cultural agents to encounter. Although his work has always included a re-evaluation of the past, it adopted a new tone and orientation in 2016 that extended his existing small press ethic. His collected activity is simultaneously an act of constructing an education for himself, as well as offering that same education to the curious. In this manner, it is a further reverberation of Souster’s drive to make contact, both for his own sake and for the sake of the greater community. The

MillArs are actively pursuing an education in fields they had previously underexplored, and they are performing this in a public way, acknowledging both the historical mistakes of the traditions BookThug exists within as well as BookThug's own more contemporary mistakes. Bookselling is an important publicly-oriented outlet for this re-evaluation.

## **Conclusion**

Drumbolis's call for contributive as opposed to distributive bookselling identifies a distinguishing feature of the small press in all of its expressions—locating and creating a context within which the value of a piece of writing can become apparent. The small press publisher and the bookseller alike are invested in educating a pool of spectators capable of recognizing their books as works of art with symbolic value; to publish or sell books distributively does not address the issue. In order for a book to have symbolic value, it must first be presented in a context that is sensitive to the conditions of its production, and second be received by an audience capable of understanding those contexts. Nelson Ball and Jay MillAr perform exemplary work that strives to understand the larger context within which the small press operates, and in turn create conditions within which an interested audience can learn. Their work is alienating and generative in the same way that Souster's Contact work was: its codes of production, distribution, and reception are familiar to those already familiar with the small press but disorienting to those encountering such practices for the first time. Cumulatively, their work as writers, publishers, and booksellers (and thus as functional literary historians and bibliographers) facilitates the productive reception of past and present small press works in ways that transform readers and spectators into collaborators and producers.

From Nelson Ball to Jay MillAr we can trace the construction of an alternative tradition of writing and publishing followed by a more critical reconstruction of the same tradition. Ball's catalogues document the emergence and construction of new experimental poetics traditions in Canada, while MillAr's listings perform similar work with a greater degree of re-evaluation of those constructions of the 1970s. Ball's catalogues, immersed in the early postmodern ferment of the Canadian small press, questioned tradition from two perspectives: he challenged the assumption that works of Canadian literature were of lesser value, and he actively championed marginal and experimental writers. MillAr's work as a bookseller and a publisher is an active intervention in a contemporary field working to question the dangers of producing and maintaining an exclusively reverent attitude towards the past. In response to current and ever-increasingly public discussion of the various erasures endemic to so-called 'avant-garde' artistic communities, BookThug and Apollinaire's are working to change conditions of diversity and to acknowledge the consequences of working in traditions that have historically been primarily male and primarily white.

The contributive bookseller works to actively interrupt centralizing forces of consecration, whether those that marginalize and exclude non-traditional forms of expression, or those that seek to canonize and absorb writers who previously occupied the boundaries of official verse cultures. Ball and MillAr express their creative, distributive, and preservational impulses through forms available in the small press. To view Ball's early bookseller catalogues, printed on the same mimeograph machine as his Weed/Flower Press Books, or the paratextual apparatus surrounding MillAr's own published poetry, as somehow separate from the small press concerns animating their other works as writers, publishers, and

booksellers, is to misunderstand the interrelationships between positions on the communications circuit within the small press world. The small press offers a holistic approach to writing, bookmaking, bookselling, and reading that, in one ideal form, is aware of and deferential to its own past *and* critically engaged with the very traditions it has to remember and carry forward.

## Chapter Three

### “Community not commodity”: Bookselling and the Small Press Gift Economy

“Without a record of small press activity, one imagines a future where this type of production ceases to exist because it has no economic viability; it isn’t predicated upon mass consumption; it doesn’t depend upon unit sales or media awareness through book tours and publicity memos for its circulation. It does, however, require a dedication unrewarded in a capitalist economy [...]”

—derek beaulieu and Jason Christie, “Six Notes Towards a Poetics of the Small Press in Canada” (8)

“I consider Nicky to be probably the most remarkable bookseller Canada has produced. Drumbolis is a true visionary but is considered a fool by many of his contemporaries who can only understand profit.”

—David Mason, *The Pope’s Bookbinder* (70)

A necessary component of the small press as an oppositional form of publishing is its resistance to capitalist commodity exchange in its aesthetic content, its forms of publication, and its modes of distribution. derek beaulieu and Jason Christie, quoted above, note that small press activity “require[s] a dedication unrewarded in a capitalist economy” (8), while a more formal definition of small press work, such as David McKnight’s in *History of the Book in Canada* (2007), defines the small press as the “non-commercial production of books and periodicals with a literary orientation, issued in limited runs for specialized readerships” (310). Some questions follow naturally from these inquiries into the restricted financial prospects of small press publishing, and by extension, the bookseller invested in the small press: What does it mean to be a bookseller, or to run a bookstore, when the books one sells are expressly “non-commercial,” or are books that “no one wants to buy” (MillAr, *Timely*

*Irreverance* 93)? How is a practice that at first seems clearly capitalist in nature (selling objects through a store) altered by its investment in an explicitly non-commercial type of object? How is bookselling realigned in the process, and how is the small press served by such booksellers?

Given its aesthetic and community goals, and given its typically non-commercial nature, the small press favours a gift economic mode of exchange between participants. Gift economies (that is, the exchange of goods and valuables in non-commercial modes) tend to be the “[economies] of small groups, of extended families, small villages, close-knit communities, brotherhoods, and, of course, of tribes” (xvi), according to Lewis Hyde in *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (1983). Hyde argues that the “cardinal difference between gift and commodity exchange [is] that a gift establishes a feeling-bond between two people, while the sale of a commodity leaves no necessary connection” (56). Gifts, for Hyde, are “associated with community and with being obliged to others” (66-67). In the previous two chapters, I defined the small press and the contributive bookseller by looking closely at how they conceive of the relationship between specific points in the communications circuit. Following Souster, *contact* is the key goal of the small press, and the communities between whom contact is forged are precisely the “small groups” and “close-knit communities” of gift exchange. The material and affective strategies by which books and book-objects are created, circulated, and recirculated are unmistakably gift economic in nature; discussing these strategies without considering the role of the bookseller leads to a failure in our understanding of the modes of production, distribution, and reception that govern the small press.

In this chapter, I propose that certain booksellers support small press production and

distribution in ways that undermine profit-driven commodity exchange. Insofar as the bookseller is inescapably an agent of capitalism, she or he also generates a number of productive excesses—resources that are redeployed within the gift economy (such as stock, physical space, knowledge, and emotional support). Identifying the bookseller as a participant in the gift economy is a vital component of the larger project of this dissertation to identify and evaluate acts by the bookseller that perform the cultural labour of producing affective communities. Specifically, this chapter focuses on Nicky Drumbolis’s collected labour through Letters Bookshop (as a bookseller, publisher, editor, curator, bibliographer, archivist, and reader) as exemplary of how the contributive bookseller can make meaningful contributions to the small press gift economy.

### **The Small Press Gift Economy**

Pauline Butling’s “bpNichol and the Gift Economy: The Play of a Value and the Value of Play” (2005) provides one explanation of the Canadian small press gift economy. Butling’s emphasis falls on “excess”:

Taking bpNichol as an exemplary figure, I show how a gift economy—an economy characterized by surplus, excess, and continuous dispersal—is enacted in Nichol’s “excessive” editing, publishing, performing, and various other activities that helped generate and sustain sites for his own and others’ artistic risk-taking and social interventions. (62)

In Butling’s terms, we can see the holistic relationship between the gift economy and the small press. bpNichol’s gift impulse finds expression in a wide range of activities, not simply the distribution of published objects. The “activities that helped generate and sustain sites for

his own and others' artistic risk-taking and social interventions" is the entry-point for considering booksellers as participants in the gift economy. The physical bookstore and the cultural labour of the bookseller form one site that makes possible such "risk taking and social intervention."

The gift economy generates such sites by relying on excess in its forms of production and distribution, and by actively adopting a stance that resists art-as-commodity. Butling's definition continues,

In material terms, a gift economy is one that produces surplus or excess goods rather than (or in addition to) tidily packaged, marketable commodities.

Typically many of the products are given away [...]. "Expenditures" are made without the expectation of return, investment is made in the processes as much as the product, and giving rather than accumulating goods signifies wealth.

The individual takes pride in his/her contributions to the community as much as (or more so than) his/her material successes. (62)

The small press and contributive bookselling practices share common oppositional and centrifugal tendencies. The small press, as formulated in this dissertation, resists "tidily packaged, marketable commodities," and this poses a problem for the bookseller interested in supporting such publishing. The logic of the small press is anti-capitalist in its material forms of production and distribution, and the bookseller sympathetic to the small press must therefore work to disrupt capitalist exchange in the forms available to her or him so as to avoid misappropriating the fundamental spirit of the small press. This bookseller must avoid co-opting gift exchange so as not to transform it into a form of capitalist commodity



exchange.<sup>76</sup>

Clint Burnham is one of the few critics to directly connect bookselling to the more radical tendencies of the small press. When considering the small press community in Toronto in his chapbook-essay *Allegories of Publishing* (1991), Burnham posits the small press (and self-publishing) as “a historically significant way in which writers have evaded the demands of market capitalism” (10). The small press “seeks to destroy the division of labour entailed in commodity-book publishing” (11) via a single person assuming the role of publisher, editor, design, printer, and distributor, “whether selling through the mail [...] or on the streets [...] or [...] by running a bookstore in [one’s] own house” (11). Burnham cites these alternate modes of distribution as ways that the small press has subverted the authority of capitalist commodity trade as part of a larger project to resist the need for books to be “easily manufactured on a large scale and shipped” (12), and that they be “both internally and externally recognizable and consumable” (12). The small press subverts ease of production, distribution, and reception by making books by hand in unconventional formats and with unconventional contents. This creates a situation for the small press bookseller wherein the book-objects produced by the small press do not fit easily into the presupposed marketplace

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<sup>76</sup> There is a kind of accumulation practiced by these booksellers that at first seems to run counter to the spirit of gift exchange, but I contend that this accumulation should be properly understood as a contribution to the small press. For example, Martin Ahvenus (of The Village Book Store in Toronto, 1961-1991) was one of a handful of booksellers in the 1960s to purchase a wide range of small press items. These books were purchased despite the difficulties of selling them to collect any return on investments. Rather, the act of purchasing facilitated further production by helping to finance publishing that was largely distributed freely within the gift economy. Their purchase was a kind of gift-as-donation to a press. Nelson Ball recalls that Ahvenus “would purchase current small press books and magazines, often taking more copies than he could hope to sell” (McLeod, “Notes on Martin Ahvenus” 18). This kind of excessive purchasing is out-of-step with risk-averse capitalist practices oriented towards profit. One result was the development of a large collection of contemporary Canadian poetry that accumulated instead of selling, but this accumulation was not performed by Ahvenus as a long-term future investment. Rather, to use Butling’s terms, the investments of a bookseller like Ahvenus in the small press were in “the processes as much as the product”; Ahvenus mobilized the tools available to him as a bookseller to foster and support the conditions of the small press, not to generate financial profit. In an additional gift gesture, Ahvenus also allowed bpNichol to use the Village Book Store as a mailing address for Ganglia Press in the 1960s because Nichol’s address was constantly changing as part of his commitments to Therapeutics (McLeod, “Notes on Martin Ahvenus” 18).

of the bookstore. One approach to solving this problem sees the contributive bookseller turn to the gift economy to locate appropriate modes of exchange.

Lewis Hyde, following his insistence above that a gift “establishes a feeling-bond between two people” (56), argues that “gift exchange at the level of the group offers equilibrium and coherence, a kind of anarchist stability” (74-75). The exchange of gifts offers not only personal connection, but also the potential for larger group coherence. The behavior of the contributive bookseller can offer personal feeling-bonds, group equilibrium, and structural coherence to the small press. Ailsa Craig, in her 2007 article “Sustainability, Reciprocity, and the Shared Good(s) of Poetry,” examines contemporary poetry communities in New York City and Toronto while theorizing gift economics and the particular inflections of poetry in the greater cultural field. Craig is not interested in how the arts are sustained externally by the capitalist market, by government funding, or by other forms dependent on financial solutions, but instead focuses on how communities of artists “sustain themselves” (258). Via Bourdieu, Craig emphasizes the reversed internal logic of poetry within the field of cultural production, wherein “art that is produced ‘for art’s sake’ is valued above work produced for economic gain” (258). Craig puts forward a model in which the “value of gifts is, therefore, not only contained in the specific utility of what is offered, but also lies in the fact that the actors are involved in the ongoing relations of gift economies” (260). In other words, actions within the small press community have value derived not only from their material forms, but from the fact that those actions were taken at all. The gift, within the small press, is an ongoing gesture that demonstrates one’s commitment to the small press and to one’s peers both immediately and across time. Such work also demonstrates, in Benjamin’s terms, “the attitude with which it is to be followed” (233), or in Silliman’s, “the

*attitude towards reception* it demands of the reader” (31). Gifts can facilitate future gifts, can potentially transform readers into collaborators, and can create productive new conditions within which to receive small press publications.

Craig proposes three forms that gifts take within contemporary poetry communities: “(1) material texts (books, manuscripts, chapbooks, etc.), (2) affective resources (commiseration, sociability, etc.), and (3) effective resources of opportunity (invitations to read, opportunities to publish, etc.)” (261). Craig’s focus is on poets and the relations between poets of different statuses within the field (i.e. emerging and established), and she goes on to discuss the power relations that distinguish these three types of gift. Craig asserts that gifts perform work within this community by establishing material, affective, and effective relations between members, and that these relations are defined by the impulse to “give all that you can” (266); that is, the person giving a gift must give the most valuable thing that she or he has. An unestablished poet sends material gifts (i.e. their poems) up to an established poet, while an established poet sends friendship and sociability down to an unestablished poet. These gifts sustain the community across generations.

This model echoes Lewis Hyde’s insistence that gifts, because of their “bonding power” in contrast to the “detached nature of commodity exchange,” are “associated with community and with being obliged to others, while commodities are associated with alienation and freedom” (66-7). Craig, given her exclusive focus on poetry communities, goes further than Hyde, and acknowledges the limited audiences and thus the limited financial stakes of exchange within the poetry community: “Commitment among poets is therefore connected to the fact that anything gained in the field of poetry is predominantly only of worth within the poetry world. [...] Irrational commitment to something most often

yields only benefits internal to the field” (266). Commitment to poetry is, according to Craig, *irrational*, given the overwhelming likelihood of anonymity, lack of recognition, and financial precarity. Such conditions create space for the free exchange of gifts.

This irrationality can also make possible different modes of valuing art and productivity. Hans Abbing, in his 2002 study *Why Are Artists Poor? The Exceptional Economy of the Arts*, argues,

[u]nlike the [commodity] market, money does not rule the gift sphere where there is no transparent profit motive. *Giving* naturally represents a virtue in this sphere. Giving promotes other virtues like *sharing, generosity, selflessness, social justice, personal contact, and respect for non-monetary values*. (42)

Abbing emphasizes sharing (“In sharing however, the object is used collectively. People share culture” [Abbing 43]) and non-monetary values. The contributive bookseller that actively invests in the gift economy reframes the way that the bookseller relates to the book. That is, the book ceases to be a commodity exclusively, and instead opens up the possibilities of sharing, interpersonal connections, and feeling-bonds. Nicky Drumbolis’s *Letters Bookshop* is an exemplar of both contributive bookselling and the gift economic forms that bookselling can take, and demonstrates how the bookseller can participate actively in the gift economy. His work also allows for a consideration of the value of such actions to the small press community. Booksellers, via their allegiance to the small press, adopt traits of the small press gift economy, despite the seeming incompatibility of those traits with the running of a store. These traits and actions not only take on a different inflection when adopted by the bookseller, they deepen the small press gift economy by introducing new resources and

forms of gift exchange via the particular excesses generated by the contributive bookseller. Bookselling is not anathema to the small press gift economy; selling small press books in primarily capitalist forms is anathema to the small press. Gift economic modes of contributive bookselling are well suited to the expression and distribution of small press ideas.

### **Nicky Drumbolis’s Letters Bookshop: “depot, hostel, & forum”**

Nicky Drumbolis’s Letters Bookshop operated in Toronto from 1982 to 2011 (and continues to operate currently from Thunder Bay).<sup>77</sup> Drumbolis actively takes on a range of cultural roles beyond simply selling books; at various points, Letters has operated as a publisher, a gallery, and a lending library. The name of the store, Letters, is suggestive of the roles that gifts and feeling-bonds played in Drumbolis’s labour. The name Letters invokes the alphabet and language, but it also invokes correspondence; it is epistolary. Indeed, Drumbolis calls the recipients of his publications “correspondents” (Afterword, *Letters Ecspress*). This is a renewed articulation of Souster’s emphasis on *making contact*, and it foregrounds human relations. The majority of Drumbolis’s labour can be most effectively understood when framed as a series of gifts (material, affective, and effective) to writers, to the small press, to literary history, and to future readers and writers. Any available resources, and often unavailable ones, have been given freely to the small press community in a variety of forms.

His entry into bookselling was suitably marginal and oppositional. He co-founded the Thunder Bay Co-op Bookstore in Port Arthur in 1969 in order to provide university students with an alternative to the campus bookstore as well as to make available counter-cultural

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<sup>77</sup> In Toronto, the store operated from 452 Queen Street West from 1982-1989, and from 77 Florence Street, Studio 104 from 1989-2011.

texts that were difficult to acquire. In 1973, he took a job working at Bookazine in Toronto, a pornography shop run by the mafia. According to David Mason,

Every month Nicky (he told me years later) would travel to New York to pick up a truckload of pornography and bring it up to Toronto to supply these stores. These stores were all the same, usually having a small front room stocked with a few ordinary new publications or soft-core porn magazines, and a larger back room where the very lucrative hard-core porn was displayed. When I walked up Yonge Street I would notice that the front windows often displayed the avant-garde work of the time: the Beats, lots of pamphlets, poetry published by Ferlinghetti's City Lights in San Francisco, and similar publications from the New York underground. (*The Pope's Bookbinder* 69)

Mason correctly notes that "much of the poetry and prose displayed in these shops [was] by writers now considered among the giants of Modern American literature [...] who were then considered scum, perverts, *communist* perverts in fact" (69). The men running the store gave Drumbolis free reign over what was displayed in the front windows and front room of the shop. Drumbolis recalls:

The point is that they had a lot of resources &, basically, the front of the bookstore in those places at that time, in the late '60s & early '70s, was the ostensible front so that the porno stuff could be sold with just a modest sort of uproar from the public. We decided, when we got our grimy little paws on the place, that we'd throw out all the TIME magazines & the mass market fiction & whatnot & try & sell small press & little magazine stuff. (Truhlar)

On his regular runs into the United States to pick up pornography, he also collected and

brought back experimental small press publications. The small press was thus immediately aligned with the margins of society for Drumbolis; its energy was always centrifugal and unpalatable to the mass-market centre.

Drumbolis is largely absent from the formal critical record. This is the result of a number of forces. As David Mason notes, many of Drumbolis's bookselling peers view him as a "fool" (*The Pope's Bookbinder* 70) because they "can only understand profit" (70) in capitalist terms. Booksellers are also generally absent from scholarship and formal study of fields of cultural production in Canada (and elsewhere), as I have already argued. Finally, the poets and writers that benefit from Drumbolis's gift economic labour tend to express their gratitude and their understanding of his work through informal outlets. Nonetheless, both his absences from and presences on the critical record are meaningful. His neglect in formal scholarship speaks to the broader disregard of booksellers and to the particular disregard of a bookseller so deeply engaged in the small press. Other small press writers and publishers revere him, however, and his labour is noted, valued, and celebrated in informal, yet still public, ways. This distinction derives from his deep engagement with the gift economy as the primary mode of his small press work and bookselling practice. These gift economic actions and gestures render his labour invisible to formal studies but intensely visible to ground-level practitioners of the small press community.

He does not appear in the index of Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy's *Writing in Our Time: Canada's Radical Poetries in English (1957-2003)*, nor does his Letters imprint. He is occasionally quoted on the subject of small press publishing, as in Gregory Betts's article "CURVD H&z and Avant-Garde/Small Press Publishing in Canada." He is, however, regularly listed by scholars on the acknowledgements pages of their books and articles, as

well as in the acknowledgement pages of books of poetry. These acknowledgements includes works on subjects as disparate as scholarly bibliography (B.J. Kirkpatrick's *A Bibliography of Katherine Mansfield* [1989] or Aaron Krumhansl's *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Primary Publications of Charles Bukowski* [1999]), Canadian literature (such as Gregory Betts's *Avant-Garde Canadian Literature: The Early Manifestations* [2013]), technology and print history (such as Darren Wershler-Henry's *The Iron Whim: A Fragmented History of Typewriting* [2005]), books of poetry (such as bpNichol's *An H in the Heart* [1994] or Raymond Souster's *Old Bank Notes* [1993]), in programs for events (such as Scream in High Park [1995] or the Toronto Small Press Book Fair [1994]), and in the catalogues of booksellers (including those by Nelson Ball and by Jim Lowell's Asphodel Bookshop). Less formally, he is the subject of blog posts by poet rob mcLennan, and he appears briefly in Stuart Ross's collection of essays *Further Confessions of a Small Press Racketeer*. Otherwise, there is limited traditional documentation or analysis of his work.

Drumbolis's critical writing demonstrates how he perceives his own labour and its motivations, and places him within a larger context of similar work in Canada. Some of his self-published critical work is a direct response to his marginalization among not only scholars and publishers of Canadian literature, but also among booksellers. *Millennial Report*, an 81-page essay Drumbolis published through Letters in 1999 detailing his own contributions to Canadian literature, small press, and bookselling, was a direct response to a perceived slight by fellow bookseller Steven Temple. In issue 56 of *Canadian Notes and Queries*, Temple was interviewed about the state of selling and collecting works of English Canadian literature. When asked "[h]ow many used and antiquarian dealers are there in Canada who now specialize in selling English-Canadian literature," Temple acknowledges



Nelson Ball, Janet Inksetter, and William Hoffer. Drumbolis published *Millennial Report* in response, subtitled it “Open Letter to Steve,” beginning his remarks by asserting that the “issue has nothing to do with catalogues, it’s about being repeatedly dismissed as a credible dealer. [...] given the number of years, not to mention expense, I’ve devoted to this specialty, I find the omission incomprehensible” (3). Seventeen years after opening Letters Bookshop, and more than thirty years after his entry into the bookselling trade, Drumbolis responded directly to an attitude that had long marginalized his efforts based on external perceptions of being a collector not a seller (i.e., one who purchases to acquire and hold, rather than to acquire and recirculate through the book trade), and an attendant ‘unprofessionalism’ associated with his range of contributions to the gift economy.

That is not to say, however, that his work is not appreciated in certain spheres. In 2011, he was the subject of one of the “essay-poems” in Phil Hall’s Governor General’s Award-Winning collection *Killdeer*. In “77 Florence” (the onetime address of Letters Bookshop), Hall describes Drumbolis as a “[p]edestrian polymath who gives away everything he writes & self-publishes – everything he publishes lovingly by others” (51). Hall characterizes Drumbolis’s warehouse as “The Dark Lost Library of the Small Press & its tributaries.” Hall is a perceptive and sensitive observer of Drumbolis’s motivations. The scale of Drumbolis’s collecting and preserving is accurately summed up: “Drumbolis’s preservation instinct means – to catch the glowing ashes - & save them – so the world-as-book can be – if not rebuilt – at least remembered – intensely” (54); at Letters, the “history of the typed world is being squirreled away - & fought for” (55). Hall’s characterization is salient to the discussion of the gift economy in this chapter. Hall sees the relationships between Drumbolis’s reading, publishing, and bookselling, and also charts the various

attacks, insults, and struggles (both external and self-imposed) in the face of which Drumbolis has persisted:

The fires kept alive by Drumbolis – during these bleak and gimmick-bookish times – are rare & miraculous – considering

Poverty – a gift economy – obscurity – pseudonymity – the demise of his storefront

Crankiness – no to government funding - & now – health problems (56)

Drumbolis’s endeavours have always been performed at a remove from financial security—in fact, his choices have put him in extreme financial precarity for decades. Yet, he persists out of a belief in the value of the labour done by earlier generations of small press workers and in a belief in the obligation of subsequent generations to seek out this material, to preserve it, and to strive to understand it in all of its complexity.

Drumbolis’s theory of contributive bookselling is vital to understanding his conception of the gift economy. His model for responsible bookselling is a demanding one; it requires the vast expenditures of energy and resources with no possibility of recouping them in a way at all financially commensurate. It is an obligation, an act of reverence, to be performed in service to earlier members of one’s own tradition. The contributive bookseller “adds dimension to the cultural exchange, compounds the distributive approach with passionate concern for the state of the art, participates as a user, maker, transistor” (“this fiveyear list”). It is not simply that bookselling naturally produces excesses that can be given to the small press gift economy (such as retail space), but that the contributive bookseller

must actively pursue not only the production of excess, but also seek out new opportunities to engage with the greater community “as user, maker, transistor.”

Drumbolis does not explicitly cast his ideal small press community as a gift economy, but the ethic behind his theory of the small press is a close counterpart and can be understood in those terms. He advocates for both reducing the influence of capital exchange in the production, distribution, and reception of literature, as well as shifting the responsibility of addressing the lingering capital demands to the producer, not the receiver. In his treatise, *Ravings of a Backlane Historian: reflections on smallpress*, Drumbolis makes his case:

One of the most significant smallie distinctions is the pleasure of paying for the privilege of sharing your hard work with others, smallpress publishers regularly given to mailing off their books to those as passionate as they are for amateur (read, *independent*) effects [...] the smallie alternative exemplifying forthright initiative for retiring the capital from the equation & absorbing the costs of contact with a select constituency of reciprocating initiates, trading on their vision of a participatory dynamic directing creative expression where it has the greatest currency. (17)

The small press, for Drumbolis, must strive to “[retire] capital,” and instead model a system of exchange based on reciprocity and personal investment. In the “participatory dynamic” and the “select constituency of reciprocating initiates” operating outside of “capital,” it is easy to identify a gift economic mode of thought and exchange. Its emphasis is on “[c]ommunity not commodity” (9). The “participatory dynamic” Drumbolis longs for is characterized by “how much more resonant community is when its constituents put their shoulder behind [their] interest” (19). Drumbolis’s version of small press exchange is not

marked by the same excess production as bpNichol's, for example, but rather is more selective. Energies are directed towards "a select constituency of reciprocating initiates." The realm of the initiated, however, is not closed, it simply requires the reciprocation of personal investment; you need something to share and trade if you are to take part in the gift economy.

In *ASTART*, a 2005 chapbook-length essay issued through Letters on the practices of manuscript evaluation in bookselling, Drumbolis argues that the small press creates an "*artificial economy*" (30):

Because the market for the Independent Press effect, as becomes evident, is largely other like-minded poets and publishers; none of whom enjoy the means needed to absorb the cost of such an activity. So the Independent Press publisher prices his productions in a range which they can afford, disregarding the fact that the cost of production is disproportionate to the retail price. (3)

The independent or small press activists "fund an underground economy bartering necessities as creatively as possible" (31). The necessities here are works of art and literature, produced within a framework that understands its own financial concerns to be at odds with the larger cultural field dominated by capitalist principles. "The point," for Drumbolis, is that "books are valued for their cultural significance before the market imperative of demand enters the picture" (22-23). The total utility of a work of art is measured within the gift economy by its ability to sustain an ongoing conversation about the present, past, and future of a given field. Drumbolis's cumulative labour is performed with a sensitive understanding of the precarities that accompany such work but also of the necessity for someone to perform it. It is work that is rewarded by its own enactment, the "pleasure of paying for the privilege," and it is work that most often finds expression in gift forms.

Despite his investments in the gift economy, Drumbolis was not fundamentally opposed to recognizing and ascribing relatively high dollar values to certain books, writers, and presses. In his own words, he wanted to “[advance] dignified ‘values’ for significant volumes” (*Millennial Report* 41). He did this primarily by purchasing books at higher prices than his colleagues in the used book trade felt were reasonable:

The impression, however, that I was (& likely would always remain) a collector – “evident” to colleagues partly from the proportion of things I acquired through the trade which appeared to be priced as high as any rational dealer might dare price them – was confirmed as dealers began to visit my place, by the “insane” prices they found, primarily on small press CanLit. However, I didn’t establish, so much as *pay* these prices! True, my pricing was comprehensibly more aggressive than theirs, but none of them specialized in esoteric & smallpress literature, & I was determined to maintain a stock of the scarcest & most significant titles within this specialty at any cost, to raise the collective consciousness to a level of respect I thought it deserved. (*Millennial Report* 30).

When viewed within the context of his ideas about contributive bookselling and the small press, and from within his devotion to locating, documenting, and preserving the combined cultural effects of Canadian small press, he had no choice but to purchase such items when they became available at whatever price they were available. Beyond the resulting reputation, however, purchasing such items at such prices has numerous positive effects: the item enters the Letters collection of stock, bringing it within the sphere of Drumbolis’s contributions to the gift economy (i.e. it can now be displayed in the gallery, or go out on loan, or be

described in one of his catalogues); it is preserved from loss or destruction; it is also given a certain “dignity,” to use Drumbolis’s terms, via the perceived respect shown through economic valuation. Drumbolis demonstrated the seriousness of small press literature, and his own seriousness concerning it, by paying high prices. He set precedent, and instead of allowing a book to languish in a different shop, likely never to sell, it became relatively accessible on the shelves of Letters. A given book may carry a prohibitively high price, but that same book was also accessible to members of the small press community through Drumbolis’s gift-economic practices.

In *Ravings*, Drumbolis asserts that language “is all about the past” (3) and implores “the careful re-examination of every cite before disturbing dreamlevels with the earnest scratch of interpretation. Every syllable is a request for origin, the essence of all reflection a search for where we’ve been, a sounding up of self from the catacombs of memory” (2-3). The self is located in reverberations of memory that need to be deliberately sought out and subsequently shared. The poet, the publisher, and the bookseller are uniquely obligated to seek out and share transmissions from the past. As Drumbolis writes, “[i]nsight brings with it a responsibility to spread the word at every opportunity, the poet by definition a teacher obliged to move everyone within reach to the broadest amplitudes of literary resonance, not sit pat on that knowledge like fatcat capitalists cultivating private estates of credibility” (16). Writers (and other small press workers) have the “privilege of conveying the tradition momentarily through history” (16). The important thing, for Drumbolis, is not one’s work in isolation, but rather how one’s work seeks to understand and communicate findings about the past, as well as how it can ideally induce still more consumers to become producers.

Drumbolis’s vision of the small press is explicitly linked to experimental literature.

The small press, according to Drumbolis, “evolved & remains quintessentially an encampment of opposition to the control of ethos by an erudite elite” (8). Butling also connects the gift economy to deconstructive poetics and experimental artistic practices comprised of both “print [...] and oral events” (“bpNichol” 61): “From bill bissett’s phonetic spellings, visual poems, and shamanistic chants; bpNichol’s playful deconstructions of letters, sounds, words, forms, histories, ideas, and ideologies; the Toronto Research Group’s parodies of literary forms; to the Four Horsemen and other sound poetry groups’ wacky performances” (61). In small press deconstructive poetics, “the primary intention of dispersal is not to achieve status, nor is there a question of economic leveling, since there is no expectation of profit” (Butling, “bpNichol” 63). The hallmark of this work is an irreverent attitude toward established, dominant modes of expression, transmission, and consecration. The gift economy strikes a similar pose in its resistance to the dominance of financial concerns in capitalist trade. The gift economy is linked to postmodern poetics in the history of Canadian literature; it necessarily includes a flight from semantic meaning and traditional print forms. Sound, performance, and non-traditional publishing are part of the excessive distribution that defines the gift economy. This opening of barriers between different forms of expression, communication, and distribution can be extended to include the bookseller as a participant in the gift economy. In Drumbolis’s practices, we can see a cultural agent deeply invested in an anti-capitalist practice in his writing, his publishing, his bookselling, and the range of other types of labour he adopts by way of his small press allegiance.

Drumbolis’s writings fit this model of refusing to privilege capitalist concerns. In addition to his detailed bookseller catalogues and literary studies, he self-publishes studies of

the alphabet, lunation, Shakespeare, and other topics.<sup>78</sup> They detail intricate modes of thinking, and his decision to pursue, publish, and distribute them reinforces the anti-capitalist bent of so much of his work. In other words, these are not works produced to sell in significant quantities. His poetry adopts a similar attitude. His “seeming signature piece” (jwcurry, “let literature language”) is the chapbook *Let Literature Language* published by Letters in 1986.<sup>79</sup> jwcurry calls it a “majestically profane” poem; it is certainly combative and aggressive. It begins,

dumb fucks  
dry fucks  
surly fucks stunned fucks  
who gives a fuck (1-4)

It reads as a polemic against a particular type of attitude to literature and art, one that holds the singular work of art and the singular artist as sacred. He complains about the “fuckn assholes” ( 13) who “go for all / the fancy turns” (14-15) and implores them to “get it fat fucks / yr no sacred fuckn cows / after all” (18-20). He calls his opponents “fuckn animals” (28) and “slobs” (30). It is a direct and gleefully undiplomatic articulation of ideas that he has put forward elsewhere. In *Ravings*, Drumbolis implores readers and writers to “leave language live” (37), a clear echo of “let literature language”; he suggests that literature is a

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<sup>78</sup> For example, *God’s Wand: The Origin of the Alphabet* (2002) is a 408 page book published by Letters, of which only 51 pages are the main body of the study. The remaining 350 pages are comprised of a 30-page “Bibliographical Prelude to the Script,” a 20-page Bibliography, 235 pages of Appendices, and a 50-page index. I cite these numbers to illustrate the attention to detail that attended all of Drumbolis’s acts of cultural labour. *God’s Wand* is a text that Drumbolis claims was “compiled hastily for the record under duress” (11), yet it is steeped in a near-overwhelming volume of detail, asides, appendices, genealogies, and other support material for the relatively small main text. *God’s Wand* and other books by Drumbolis, like *Myth as Math: Calendrical Significance in the Mosaic Census of the Sons of Israel* (2007), are obsessively researched, intensely individual documents.

<sup>79</sup> *Let Literature Language* was republished in three separate editions by Curvd H&z: the first in 1987, the second in a French translation by Carole Limoges in 1998, and the third, again in English, in 2001. It was also republished by BookThug in 2000 in an edition of 26 copies.



verb-form of language, that literature is an action, not a static state. It is not something that is accomplished, but rather something that is sustained through articulation and re-articulation. In *Ravings* he ‘raves’ against those “who approach the craft as a sacred facility, bent on acquiring graduating degrees of technical proficiency, without ever having entertained the alternative notion of reinventing poetry (returning to origin)” (37). In his poetry, in his catalogues, in his studies, in his publishing, and in his bookselling, there is the same command to readers and writers—seek out and strive to understand the origins of your traditions, and work to freely transmit that knowledge to anyone and everyone.

### **Material Gifts**

The lines between material, affective, and effective gifts often blur. I categorize different types of labour following Craig’s definitions, but do this with awareness that their borders are permeable.<sup>80</sup> Ailsa Craig defines material gifts as printed books (or chapbooks, pamphlets, journals, broadsides, postcards, and ephemera) that are given freely between writers. Material gifts, for Craig, “mediate and give witness” (262) to appreciation and support between writers. Publication and distribution are “legitimizing channels” (262), and the gift of a book from one writer to another finds its value not in the “aesthetic” (263), but rather from the fact that “material gifts can open the door to further relations and relationships” (263). The stock of Letters, the catalogues published by Letters, as well as the poetry produced by Letters as a publishing operation stand as precisely such material gifts, “mediating and giving witness” to other small press writers and publishers and making possible “further relations and relationships.”

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<sup>80</sup> Catalogues from Letters, for example, are material gifts given their material forms, but the ideas and information contained within them offer both affective and effective gifts to the community.

The experience of shopping at Letters (while still in Toronto) was one of encountering an almost impassably messy retail space. Phil Hall describes the “warehouse – studio – un-fronted bookstore – warren – office – church” of Letters’s later home in Toronto (77 Florence Street, Studio 104) as follows:

As we enter – starting right at the door – carefully graduated piles of books – sway – standing free on either side of a deep paper labyrinth that must be carefully gone along – sideways

Further in – boxes of books – 3-deep – loom – on all sides – to the high ceiling

There are whole disciplines of research & categories that can’t be got at right now (53)

Mark Medley, describing Letters, remembers the “small, crowded store in Parkdale, in Toronto’s west end, where the aisles were so tight in places you could barely squeeze by, with boxes upon boxes wedged three and four rows deep” (F2).<sup>81</sup> Drumbolis himself characterized the Florence location as “a depot for smallpress salvage and collections development” (*Loose Canon*); “depot” and “salvage” suggest a messy workspace full of used parts idiosyncratically arranged. The messiness of both Toronto locations was a necessity and a resistant act.<sup>82</sup> The Toronto stores were not large enough to neatly house all of his material;

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<sup>81</sup> It should be noted that the new location in Thunder Bay is large enough to, at last, allow Drumbolis to carefully organize and display most of his collection and stock. The irony is that while the books are relatively accessible now within the store, the store itself is inaccessible to the majority of interested parties given its new location some 1400km from Toronto.

<sup>82</sup> The move to Thunder Bay was precipitated by financial concerns; Toronto was simply too expensive to house and run a bookstore with this kind of material, and particularly to continue storing the sheer volume of material

however, Drumbolis also made a deliberate choice to keep it all, to invest in locating it, storing it, and to refuse to turn it over as quickly as possible. His approach to processing and selling books is labour and time intensive; it resists the impulse to move stock quickly or to only stock that which will sell. This is a deliberate decision to operate in a way that runs counter to the logic of capitalism, and one natural result of these acts and attitudes is the gradual construction of a store that has too many books for its space. Within the gift economy, however, this is a benefit; the large (and largely static) stock was made available to community members.

The overflowing stock of Letters (books and other print objects that in a traditional bookstore would exist more purely as commodities to be bought, sold, returned, and otherwise traded through capitalist modes of exchange) was often deployed in anti-capitalist gift economic modes. A book being for sale was a secondary concern for Letters, despite the necessity of selling stock to pay the rent. In fact, many customers and admirers have documented the difficulty of *actually purchasing* books from Drumbolis. David Mason cites a recent example of Anne Dondertman, Librarian at the Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library, taking three years to convince Drumbolis to sell a large stock of Canadian literature (or in Mason's terms, "wheedle Nicky's Canadian literature out of him" ["David Mason's Response"]). Mark Medley, in his January 2016 profile of Drumbolis in *The Globe and Mail*, cites his own experience as well as anecdotes from David Mason and Nick Mount of trying to buy books only to be "rebuffed" (F3) and instead "given one for free" (F3). Drumbolis explains to Medley that he is "simply a custodian of a shared resource. [...] I don't see all of this as 'mine or 'yours.' I see this as 'ours.' [...] I have temporary custody of the book" (F3).

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Drumbolis had amassed. The move required two large trucks ("one of them an 18-wheeler" [Medley F2]) owing to the multiple storage lockers full of books that Drumbolis had filled.

“Custody” is distinct from ownership or the possession of a commodity to be traded. It is a relationship to the object rendered through responsibility, not economics.

Beyond his resistance to actually selling books, Drumbolis also operated the Letters Lending Library from his storefront in Toronto. The library developed in part from the identification of a common struggle at bookstores (theft), and in part to aid those who browsed the store but were not able to be customers for financial reasons. He cites a complaint from poet Milton Acorn: “When is there going to be a country that’s progressive enough to realize that poets need their food? Don’t placate me with this other bullshit but give us our books” (Truhlar). Drumbolis recalls Acorn “stand[ing] in Coles bookstore and read[ing] new books he couldn’t afford that libraries didn’t have” (Kastner). Drumbolis connects this experience to a “sacred trust” (Truhlar) he feels for poets and writers that are too poor to afford the things they needed, including books. He also recounts a story of confronting book thieves in Letters:

[...] i went over to one of them & clapped my hand on his shoulder and said “So look: i know you guys are all interested in sort of more esoteric stuff &, you know, i understand that it’s not easy to come up with disposable income to lay down on this sort of stuff & i just want you guys to know that if there’s anything in the store that i feel is lendable to you that you’re interested in reading, please don’t hesitate to ask, man; i wouldn’t mind, the book’s gonna sit here anyway—who’s gonna buy the damned thing?—take it out & bring it back when you’re finished.” (Truhlar)

Drumbolis claims that there are, “at any given time 2 or 3 hundred books out on loan but seldom do they come back [...]. I see it as a kind of village service” (Truhlar). Elsewhere, he

describes his lending practices continuing more than a decade later “with no less enthusiasm than when I began, eager to make the insights they advance available wherever the slightest interest presents itself” (*Millennial Report* 58-59). It makes little financial or logical sense for a business to lend out hundreds of items from its stock, many of them never to return, but it makes cultural sense within the gift economy and the realm of contributive bookselling. It is, as Drumbolis says, a “village service,” one that costs him directly but that he believes to be vital to producing and sustaining the cultural continuum that he wants to be a contributing member of.

The accumulation of material that, as Drumbolis himself speculates, “who’s gonna buy,” is one excess resource of Letters. These small press publications are ill-suited to trade in typical capitalist modes (they do sell on occasion, and occasionally for high prices, but these are the exceptions rather than common), however, they are equipped to perform cultural labour. Drumbolis operates Letters, if not entirely outside of, then at least at the extreme margins of the logic of capitalism. His resistance to selling books, his insistence on giving them away, and the generosity of the lending library model a kind of small press behavior invested in the feeling-bonds of the gift economy as opposed to the alienation of capitalist trade. He demonstrates an attitude towards reception for readers, writers, and publishers premised on sharing common resources. It is this free circulation and recirculation of book objects, the “food” of poets, that helps to sustain the equilibrium and coherence of the small press gift economy, in Lewis Hyde’s terms.

Letters catalogues must also be counted as material gifts. The catalogues issued by Drumbolis bear little resemblance to the catalogues discussed in the previous chapter. Catalogues from Letters are unparalleled in their scope and ambition, as well as in their close

scrutiny of the Canadian small press. They more closely resemble critical monographs than publications intended to facilitate financial transactions. And these too were given away freely. Drumbolis's labour in these catalogues "add[s] value to books" (Woodhuysen 125) more vigorously than the bibliographic and catalogue work of his peers. Woodhuysen's brief description of the potential value of catalogues (value is added to books by "describing their appearance, history, and contents, by placing them in context with books of a similar or related kind" [125]) does not adequately describe the depth of Drumbolis's efforts.

Take, for example, his List 91, *A Modern Air: Tweny 20: back lane notes on small press in canada with an emphasis on independence & self-production*. Issued in 1991, *A Modern Air* is a richly annotated list of Coach House and Coach House-related items, tracing its history and the broader history of the post-Second World War small press in Canada via the direct relationship between Contact Press and Coach House. Its subtitle clearly indicates its intention: a "Coach House Sampler Demonstrating the Difficulty of Collecting the Most Significant Small Press in Canadian History, an Open Letter to Librarians and Booksellers." *A Modern Air* was a direct response to *Tweny/20* (1985), the twentieth-anniversary Coach House retrospective bibliography, a document that Drumbolis describes as follows: "Although a useful account of most of the regular publications that form the nucleus of press production, it leaves a great part of the story untold." Following the bibliography of Coach House in his own catalogue, Drumbolis includes an appendix bibliography of Contact Press as well as an extended essay detailing the history of Contact, Souster's contributions to the press specifically, and a narrative of how *New Wave Canada* came to be published, all in the service of establishing his argument that these details "clearly [illustrate a] partly conscious turning over reins from Contact to Coach House Press." Drumbolis's careful overlaying of

the co-incident publishing and event-organizing of Souster and Victor Coleman is compelling and factually grounded, producing a convincing argument for the direct lineage between the two. His argument that Coach House is the “direct (and purest) successor” to Contact has been made elsewhere, but not in nearly as much bibliographic detail. Such a catalogue performs the same work as the catalogues discussed earlier in this dissertation, but it achieves a singular depth and intensity of argument, expanding existing frameworks for understanding the significance Coach House, one of the most important sites for “risk-taking and social intervention” in Canadian small press history.

One year later, in 1992, Library and Archives Canada acquired from Drumbolis the “Nicky Drumbolis Collection of Coach House Press Imprints,” a collection of 2,380 items gathered and intended as a supplement to the “nucleus of [Coach House] press production,” including, according to the Library and Archives fonds description,

pamphlets, leaflets, broadsides, private issues, postcards, playing cards, Christmas cards, promotional material, press ephemera, manuscript material, recordings, books distributed by Coach House Press, publications with Coach House contributions, vanity publications and publications by presses associated with Coach House Press. (“COACH HOUSE PRESS LMS-0129”)

That Drumbolis was able to gather more than two thousand items that stand outside of what would commonly be understood as a ‘complete’ bibliography of the press indicates the breadth and depth of his ability to search out and find such items (and his motivation to do so), as well as the sheer volume of material that can easily be lost and disregarded when discussing small presses.<sup>83</sup> Coach House is a particularly relevant press for this discussion

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<sup>83</sup> Drumbolis also worked at Coach House as a binder (1989-1991) and a typographer (1994-1996), deepening his access to ephemera from the press.

given its commitment to exploring and exploiting as many different forms of production and distribution as it could find.<sup>84</sup> The range of types of ephemeral publication Drumbolis gathered, and that were later collected at Library and Archives Canada, illustrates the excessive modes and forms of publishing embraced by Coach House. One gift of Drumbolis's catalogues is the accumulation and subsequent distribution of the bibliographic data of such material.

*A Modern Air* was not an exception in its detail and care, but rather representative of Drumbolis's regular catalogue efforts. In *Loose Canon*, a personal publishing history, Drumbolis includes 47 items under the heading "Creative Studies" and 76 under "Checklists." The majority of these are booklists issued by Letters. Distributed in 1992, *Nelson Ball Cited: A Bibliophilography from Stock* extended the same care to Ball's writing and publishing that had been given to Coach House, documenting individual publications, magazine and anthology contributions, reviews of his work, translations, editorial responsibilities, as well as detailed indexes and illustrations of the above material. There is also his 1991 production, *The Gerry Gilbert Gift Catalogue*, or his 1984 Raymond Souster catalogue that included an essay arguing for Souster's central importance despite subsequent dismissal by traditional scholars and archivists, or his Contact Press Checklist included in *A Modern Air*. He published checklists of Margaret Atwood, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, Samuel Beckett, David McFadden, Sheila Watson, William Hawkins, Robert Rosewarne, Fred Wah, Phyllis Webb, Gwendolyn MacEwen, and others. His catalogues make clear that he was committed to fulfilling his claim that he "wouldn't sell something

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<sup>84</sup> Coach House was also an early adopter and innovator of digital technologies. See John Maxwell's recent article "Coach House Press in the 'Early Digital' Period: A Celebration" in *The Devil's Artisan* 77 (Fall/Winter 2015) for a discussion of Coach House's adoption of and experimentation with digital publishing tools. See also Frank Davey's review of the same issue of the journal for further context ("Coach House Press: The Early Technologies").



before [he] took the time to describe the thing & somehow extrapolate the information [contained therein]" (Truhlar). Moreover, these items were designed, printed, and bound by Drumbolis himself, further illustrating the relationship between his bookselling practices and his small press beliefs. *A Modern Air* details this labour: "letters, fugitive heir to the smallpress estate of maillist distribution, issues as communiqués opening cultural exchange; typewriter set (brother executron 70) & personally photocopied and handbound by the publisher (with occasional rubber-stamp embellishment) for free." His catalogues are "communiqués," echoing the epistolary nature of so many of Letters's works. Such distribution practices sustain existing relationships and facilitate new relationships, establishing the feeling-bonds so central to the gift economy.

His catalogues were distributed *as gifts* to writers, readers, customers, and other interested parties. They were immediate, contemporary gifts in these terms, but also function as gifts across time; they are gift-acts to their subjects, bearing witness to and legitimating the work of past practitioners of the small press as well as its contemporary workers. They are also gifts to future readers and writers and publishers, making detailed information (information otherwise uncollected) available to those coming along later, seeking out both books and their bibliographic data, facts and details and narratives and anecdotes. These catalogues offer bibliographically rigorous print records of material that often was not collected or documented, and were given away freely, and as such, stand as material gifts within the small press gift economy.

### **Affective Gifts**

Craig defines affective gifts as "commiseration" and "sociability" (261); these are

emotional gifts that can “help others through times of personal doubt” (263). The need for such affective gifts, according to Craig, derives from “the realization that no matter what one does as a poet, it is likely to never be enough to garner widespread renown in one’s lifetime. These gifts affirm a sense of belonging and can shore up a poet’s shaken sense of identity” (263-264). The primary affective role that Letters took on derives from its existence as a physical, brick-and-mortar shop. Unlike the bookstores discussed in the previous chapter that existed primarily via correspondence, Letters was a storefront and as such took on a different community role.

The physical bookstore is a meeting place for writers and readers; it is a space in which those interested in a particular tradition (in this case, the small press) can gather together with likeminded individuals. Craig is correct in her assertion that external validation (that is, public recognition) is rare for poets, and perhaps more so for poets of the small press; a physical store can provide a point of focus for such poets to find each other and to find the sociability that is vital to sustaining a literary community. Fellow bookseller Martin Ahvenus ably described the pull of the bookstores for certain types of communities. In an undated typescript of a speech to the Ottawa Antiquarian Book Fair, he explains:

It’s books that have been the key. I probably would not have met any of the people who impressed me greatly nor would I have met the famous and also the down and out for the used bookshop is a magnet for all people—no one is intimidated by a used bookshop so people from every conceivable segment of society find themselves welcome within.

This is perhaps the most significant contribution of bookselling to the gift economy—the gift of social space in which to convene, a safe space for “the famous and also the down and out.”

The “down and out” stands equally as a good description of much of the small press community, a community generally lacking in financial resources and thus deeply appreciative of gift gestures from those in possession of excess resources.

Letters was a gathering place for poets. Space, by which I mean literal space, is one excess produced while operating a bookstore. Within capitalism, it is illogical to allow writers to gather for hours in one’s store without making purchases, let alone allowing them to leave with the stock of your store and perhaps never return with it. Yet, the space is present and available whether it is used for gatherings or not. One could eject patrons that do not make purchases, thus restricting the exploitation of excess resources. One could refuse to allow books to be borrowed so as to ensure the safety and integrity of the primary commodity resources of the store. Drumbolis, however, not only welcomed writers into the space under these terms, he encouraged it. His championing of Raymond Souster’s work and influence is instructive here. Souster’s Contact labour influenced small presses in the late 1960s and early 1970s when Drumbolis entered the book trade. Recall one of the primary motivations behind the Contact Poetry Readings—to prove to both poet and audience that each exists, and to create spaces within which poets could meet other poets. Letters fostered improved conditions for writers and small press publishers, in part, by making available the physical space that it occupied to serve this end.

Moreover, much of Drumbolis’s work was oriented toward seeking out, understanding, documenting, and making available the works of the overlooked and the ignored in Canada’s literary history. He felt that the lack of recognition and readership for certain poets and presses was a problem that could be addressed, at least in part, by simply acknowledging it publicly using the resources at his disposal. His catalogues offered a kind

of affective gift in these terms. A detailed catalogue dedicated to a particular writer or press, asserts that that writer or that press has at least one close reader, one person seeking out and trying to understand that body of cultural output. It is a kind of gift that does not offer financial recompense to the poet or press, and it does not result in fame, but it does offer commiseration and sociability. Drumbolis's time and labour producing and distributing a catalogue signal an alternative mode of registering the value of books, writers, and presses; it is gift economic in so far as it is given freely, offers the commiseration necessary to create the sense of belonging that reaffirms the poetry community, and it creates feeling-bonds between people.

Affective gifts, however, are primarily intangible. Yes, the physical store is the primary site at which Letters produced and distributed affective gifts, but those gifts do not generally take a physical form; they can be traced, though, via their reception by small press community members. Elsewhere in the Phil Hall essay-poem quoted above, "77 Florence," Hall writes that Drumbolis "[solves] stasis by saying the names – the nouns – Adaming" (52). In particular, Hall identifies Drumbolis's work to name "of course – The Unheard-Ofs" (52), offering the gift of being named, of being placed in a lineage. This is the labour of his catalogues and his store shelves. Although these have physical manifestations, their affective results exist within each writer that benefited.

Drumbolis's work facilitating sociability and naming "The Unheard-Ofs" is acknowledged and appreciated by his peers, illustrating that his contributions to the gift economy have not gone unnoticed despite their absence from formal records. In 1997, documented by Stuart Ross in the pages of *Mondo Hunkamooga: A Journal of Small Press Stuff*, the "Art Bar Poetry Series rounded up about 100 writers [...] to honour local

bookseller, critic, guerilla poet and publisher Nicky Drumbolis with a surprise tribute” (“mondo editorialis” 2). The event included the publication of an “instant anthology—*A Letter to His Ecellency Nicky Drumbolis from Assorted Members of the Community*—with works by over 50 writers including Stan Rogal, Raymond Souster, Martha Hillhouse, Nick Power, Judy MacDonald, Marshall Hyrciuk, and Nelson Ball” (2).<sup>85</sup> Ball’s contribution, an acrostic poem using Drumbolis’s name, identifies Drumbolis as “Celebrant of the unjustly neglected / Keeper of poets and poetry” and “Legitimizer and lemming / Important friend.” Poet Martha Hillhouse describes meeting Drumbolis for the first time in terms that show clearly the feeling-bond established between them as well as Hillhouse’s sudden recognition that she had found a space for the sociability she needed: “talking with you confused me in that it felt very good. sort of poetry stoned.” The unattributed introductory piece for the collection is written as a decree:

And in return for his splendid hospitality, the Bardic Association decreed, unanimously, a vote of thanks to the Kind. And they praised him in poems as “Guairé the Generous,” by which name he was ever after known in history, for the words of the poet are immortal.

The common thread between the majority of the pieces is the identification of Drumbolis as a friend to poets, to poetry, and to the small press, and as a person that made friendship possible between others. He is “Generous” and “Kind” and known for his “splendid hospitality.” The gathering was also a fundraiser to help support Drumbolis and his various Letters enterprises. It raised “[o]ver \$1,000,” and Ross notes the difficulty of doing so “from

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<sup>85</sup> Ironically, or perhaps appropriately given the general disregard of this more extreme end of small press publishing by formal institutions, the copy of *A Letter to His Ecellency* that I examined at the Thomas Fisher Library at the University of Toronto incorrectly identified Nicky as “Ricky Drumbolis” on its storage folder—even the formal institution taking responsibility for preserving and documenting this labour has further obscured Drumbolis’s name and presence.

a community that itself often has trouble meeting the rent bill” (2). The gesture was a small repayment of decades of personal and financial contributions to a community, but was enormous in its significance. It was a gift-economic gesture in keeping with Drumbolis’s own labour and, as Ross makes clear, financially significant from a community that rarely had financial resources to spare. It was an answer to the years of affective gifts Drumbolis had offered to the community.

### **Effective Gifts**

Effective gifts, for Craig, are “resources of opportunity” (261), that is, “offers of publication; opportunities to publish; introductions to editors and established poets” (265), among other forms. These types of gifts are important because they help to legitimate a poet by making her or his work visible to a reading public and to other poets. Craig argues that these resources are “disarticulated” (265), by which she means that control of such resources do not reside at the centre of the cultural field, but are rather spread between poets (and interested parties) with different degrees of consecration: “the most successful poets are not the most powerful nor do they control the centrally legitimating effective resources of the field” (265). Craig opens the door here to consider cultural agents further in the margins of the cultural field, and I argue for inclusion of the contributive, small press bookseller among their ranks.

Letters, in addition to being a retail outlet, functioned as a publisher, as a gallery, and as host to a reading series. Each of these roles allowed Drumbolis to offer effective gifts to poets he admired; they were invited to read in the store; their works as publishers and writers were displayed in the store not only as stock but also as gallery shows; and their work was

itself published and distributed by Drumbolis. Moreover, books that were in the store as stock were likewise deployed as effective gifts: by being given shelf space in the store, they were made visible and present in the community in the same way that readings and publications make poets and their works visible and present.

The gallery component of Letters developed as part of Drumbolis's theory of contributive bookselling. In concert with his claim that he "wouldn't sell something before [he] took the time to describe the thing & somehow extrapolate the information [communicated by its existence as a book-object]" (Truhlar), the gallery expresses his assertion that a book "only has meaning or value as a function of juxtaposition or next-to-something" (Truhlar). The store became a gallery for the presentation of that information to an interested public, with books placed in contexts with other books (and print objects) as in a gallery. Drumbolis explains,

The idea of the gallery in the bookstore is a dear thing to me; that aspect of the bookstore is something very important. It's become even more important & i wonder where, in a cosmopolitan centre like this with, supposedly, ten million people within a radius of a hundred miles, people can go. Where? To see cultural artifacts. (Truhlar)

The responsible bookstore must facilitate both the viewing and the understanding of text- and print-based cultural artifacts. Drumbolis illustrates how the Letters gallery functioned with the example of Gwendolyn MacEwen:

you see a book like Gwendolyn MacEwen's first book & you go "Hmm, who bought the beer?" but as soon as you see it within the context of A) her oeuvre, or B) say modernist literature from the '50s through the '70s, or with

hand-produced books or first books by authors who went on to make some mark, a different sense comes to you, there's a different meaning & the point is, it's like anything; value is a function of contextualization [...] (Truhlar)

The gallery section of Letters took pains to place books within interesting contexts that would illuminate those books for interested readers. This also facilitated viewing such larger contexts regardless of one's ability to actually purchase a given item.

The tradition and contemporary milieu of a given poet or book were on public display in the store within a larger context than most had access to individually, whether because of financial restrictions, because one was not present when books were published, or because one simply was not yet part of the "select constituency of reciprocating initiates" (Truhlar).

He goes on,

it's my job to find the setting for that gem & make it apparent to people & people come right into the store, look through the gallery section, right now there's a display of ten years of work by John Curry & the Curvd H&z press stuff, this is the first display of all his stuff ever and it's just mind-blowing it's so beautiful and people who are intimate with his stuff, their breath catches when they see it next to all the other stuff [...] (Truhlar)

Drumbolis strives to "give [potential interested readers] the opportunity to see it, recognize the phenomenon of this item within this context" (Truhlar). Taking part of his cue from Souster's Contact model, all of Drumbolis's work was necessarily international in its attention: "this is what the '50's generation was all about—Souster, Layton were saying—we're Canadians incedently [sic]. What they insisted on was good poetry—wherever it comes from. Cause you're sharing in a congress that is a separate community—doesn't have



boundaries” (Owen, “A Talk With Nicky” 7). Poets and presses on display covered a wide range of temporal and aesthetic ground. Among those displayed were Antonin Artaud, Samuel Beckett, Charles Bukowski, Victor Coleman, Judith Copithorne, Henry Miller, Kenneth Patchen, Elizabeth Smart, Phyllis Webb, and dozens of others, while the presses and magazines included *grOnk*, *City Lights*, *Olympia*, *Periwinkle*, *Seripress*, and others.<sup>86</sup> This labour is clearly contributive in Drumbolis’s own terms, but it also falls within the purview of the gift economy. Yes, the store is a financial enterprise, but it expends all available excess resources in the service of paying homage to past traditions, and to making the past and present available to all interested readers, regardless of financial concerns. The gallery was an effective gift that made writers, presses, and works visible within the community (similar to how the lending library made those same works accessible as material gifts to be shared).

The reading series at the store ran from 1983 to 1988, and hosted sixty-three poets and three filmmakers (*Millennial Report* 50). Like the majority of services provided by Letters, the readings were free, “provisioned with free beer, & occasionally accompanied by publications produced for the event” (*Millennial Report* 50). Readers were not paid directly, but were given store credit to Letters (effectively being paid in books), as well as received all proceeds from sales of their books during the events. Among the participating poets and filmmakers one finds Atom Egoyan, Daniel Jones, bpNichol, Raymond Souster, Phyllis

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<sup>86</sup> In *Millennial Report*, Drumbolis includes a more complete list of exhibited writers (Milton Acorn, Antonin Artaud, Margaret Atwood, Samuel Beckett, Earle Birney, George Bowering, Scott Bowering, David Bromige, Charles Bukowski, William S. Burroughs, Thomas A. Clark, Leonard Cohen, Victor Coleman, Judith Copithorne, Gregory Corso, jwcurry, Russell Edson, Harlan Ellison, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Gerry Gilbert, Sadakichi Hartmann, Jack Kerouac, Red Lane, Pat Lane, Irving Layton, Gershon Legman, d.a.levy, Christopher Logue, Malcolm Lowry, Robert Lowry, Steve McCaffery, Gwendolyn MacEwen, David McFadden, Eugene McNamara, Henry Miller, John Newlove, bpNichol, Alden Nowlan, Frank O’Hara, Gil Orlovitz, Kenneth Patchen, Ezra Pound, Al Purdy, Ed Sanders, Elizabeth Smart, Terry Southern, Raymond Souster, Theodore Sturgeon, Dylan Thomas, Kurt Vonnegut, William Wantling, Phyllis Webb, Ludwig Zeller) and presses (House of Anansi, *City Lights* Pocket Poets, Coach House, Contact, Curvd H&z, Dreadnaught, Export Publishing, First Statement Press, imprimerie dromadaire, Island, *grOnk*, Loujon, Migrant, New Canadian Library, Oasis, *Olympia*, Padeloup, *Periwinkle*, Regency Books, *Seripress* and *Weed/Flower*) (42).

Webb, and others. As Drumbolis recalls, it was “one of the least formal public series in the history of our literature”:

Readings were all strenuously advertised [...] all free, & all provisioned with free beer. At the shop, people stood around or sat on boxes of overstock (except in the case of Souster’s reading, where I brought in chairs), sucking suds & paying the word its due, with proceeds from the sale of books by the readers, going to them. As with many LETTERS publications during the shop’s tenure on Queen, a store-credit (usually \$100) was extended to the writers for their participation in the series. (Afterword, *Letters Ecspress*)

The store-as-reading-venue extends a number of other gift forms that Letters took. The stock is used as payment for the readers in the form of credit; books double as seating and as visual context (the gallery would have been operating while readings were on, and the books on the shelves were likewise on display); and providing space, beer, and entertainment makes possible the sociability and commiseration vital to sustaining a gift economic community.

Letters also operated as a publishing house, most visibly with its twobitter series. The twobitter books were small books in small editions, produced by hand by Drumbolis and predominately distributed for free, “aimed at an economic reconsideration of publishing in Canada” (*Loose Canon*). Drumbolis felt affronted by a cultural ecosystem in which “every employee at m&s takes home a regular paycheque, eats regular, probly drives a car, maybe owns a house, while a poet like milton acorn ended up with less than a thousand dollars for his 1983 selected” (“this fiveyear list”). He was “determined to print well-designed booklets of serious poetry by committed writers in editions of about 100 copies for 25¢ a throw (ideally, most mailed free)” (“this fiveyear list”). The twobitter series published works by

Nelson Ball, David McFadden, bpNichol, Victor Coleman, John Riddell, Charles Bukowski, and dozens of others, producing a total of 63 titles between 1985 and 1996 (in addition to hundreds of other items not included in the series published by Drumbolis through Letters). The scale and scope of publishing done at Letters vastly exceeds the bounds of this dissertation. For my immediate purposes, note that this publishing was performed outside of formal structures of funding (i.e. was funded entirely by Drumbolis), and the works published were distributed for free. Drumbolis has emphasized that Letters-as-publisher was an experiment in “making artifact something more than mere commodity” and that the “prevailing focus of this ‘press’ was essentially to activate community *by example*” (Afterword, *Letters Ecspress*). He found the idea of “profiting materially” from these publications “unacceptable,” which drove him to “distribute the editions free” (Afterword, *Letters Ecspress*). The desire to offer a functional *example* is gift-economic and contributive; as per Benjamin, it “demonstrates the attitude with which it is to be followed” and makes possible the creation of new producers and collaborators. It shows what can be done, how, and why, and puts forward a functional model.

In 1991, Drumbolis ran a Letters table at the Toronto Small Press Book Fair. His arrangement and presentation of the table were extensions of the approach he took to all of his work with Letters. He describes his table as “tight with stuff,”

a flash of maybe 50 unmentionables cramped to attention with standup note to one side explain my ethic of publication precluding commerce:

NONE

of these books

is for sale

Few ever were. They were produced like conversation for specific conspirators of a litry subset, participants making & using art daily (each breath) with whom responsible concourse is possible. [...] celebrate the activity of making by delimiting the cultural ethos of contribution: they have no significance for a passive “market.” (*Zomboidgibber*).

As with his other activities, contribution is the key component of participation. He has no interest in a “passive market,” a term he associates with traditional capitalism, and instead wants activity, contribution, and labour in excess of traditional notions of value. His Letters publications are explicitly *not for sale*. He documents the confusion and skepticism of fair-goers when confronted by his sign, but also the relief of finding new people, however few, with whom to share “responsible concourse.” These publications are clearly material gifts, but they are also affective and effective gifts; being published by Letters, or displayed in the Letters gallery, or made visible on the Letters shelves, or even shared out in the lending library, emphasizes non-monetary modes of ascribing value to works of art. The value in these acts is derived from their being shared, from the investment of the individual in their execution, and from the ongoing reception and further circulation of gifts by the greater community. These are gifts that eschew financial concerns in ways that are in keeping with the gift economy, and each of them is, in its own particular way, intertwined with its origin in Letters Bookshop. These books are “not for sale,” yet the bookstore is the site at which these gifts are generated, distributed, and received.

It is also worth noting that Drumbolis was acting at a small press book fair. Such fairs show the necessity of the gift economy to sustaining the small press community. Although they are aimed at selling books to interested readers, they are only able to operate via a

collective mobilization of resources. The organizing committees are volunteer-run, contributing time and energy; costs of space are shared out on a sliding scale between those hosting tables; and of course, the economic “success” of the event for a given publisher is balanced against trades and exchanges made with other publishers as part of the regular gift-economic system. Community members have to contribute labour and resources above-and-beyond what is already committed to the production of their writing and books in order to facilitate these events.<sup>87</sup>

Stuart Ross and Nicholas Power organized the first Toronto Small Press Book Fair on May 2, 1987 at Innis College as part of National Book Week. It was a landmark event in Canada for its efforts to create accessible public venues for the distribution of small and micro press publications (it was preceded by Meet the Presses in 1985, a monthly booksale and reading on a smaller scale).<sup>88</sup> In the catalogue for the first fair, Power and Ross explain the struggles of the small press that were the inspiration for the event:

With little or no money, and rare access to the grant system, small press publishers have few resources when it comes to distribution. And there aren't many bookstores that are willing to fill their shelves with a bunch of odd publications by unknown authors published by presses with weird names.

(n.p.)

Meet the Presses was launched to solve some of these problems in a way that could “reflect the human being behind the literary press” (Power “Publishers Speak Out”).<sup>89</sup> The Toronto

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<sup>87</sup> Such book fairs intersect with the primary concerns of this dissertation, but are deserving of a dedicated study of their own.

<sup>88</sup> Meet the Presses ran for one year at the Scadding Court Community Centre in Toronto, with publishers paying \$5-\$10 per tables to cover costs, and in turn receiving space as well as an opportunity to have one of their writers read for five minutes during the event.

<sup>89</sup> The list of organizers during the following two decades includes Clint Burnham, Daniel Jones, Victor Coleman, Alice Burdick, Katy Chan, Maggie Helwig, Maria Erskine, Beth Follett, Nicky Drumbolis, and

Small Press Book Fair does not operate any longer, but in its wake one finds a number of zine fairs and other independent art markets across the country. Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Vancouver, and Winnipeg all have regular events in the spirit of the original book fair, and Meet the Presses renewed its activities in 2009 to run the annual “Indie Literary Market” in Toronto and to administer the bpNichol Chapbook Award.<sup>90</sup>

Drumbolis displays a consistent pattern of thought and a mode of operating that resists all things commercial and easily digestible. His work combats the dominant forces of a market economy in its content, its production, its modes of distribution, and its attitudes toward readership and sales. Cumulatively, he puts forward a demanding but generous conception of small press community engagement, modeling and making possible gift economic acts.

## Conclusion

The small press gift economy is characterized by excessive production and distribution. This excess is oriented towards facilitating the production of more work, and to transforming readers and spectators into collaborators and producers. Gift economic acts

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Kristiana Clemens. Anne Dondertman, in her article on the history of the book fair published as part of McMaster University’s *Historical Perspectives on Canadian Publishing* project, includes Kevin Connolly, Glenn Gustafson, Marshall Hryciuk, Lindsay Zier-Vogel, Halli Vellgas, Myna Walling, Veronice Garza Flores, and Colin Carberry among the list of organizers. Dondertman also cites more than 400 presses displaying books at Toronto Small Press Book Fairs up to the end of 2000. Dondertman’s information is drawn from a collection of book fair catalogues, and she astutely recognizes the wealth of bibliographical and paratextual material contained therein:

The published catalogues of the TSPBF, which list all the presses exhibiting at each fair, and give names of proprietors, founding dates, location, submissions policies, and other information along with a list of titles, are therefore one of the best sources of information documenting the existence and activities of this vibrant and dynamic publishing scene.

The catalogues, as published records of each installment of the book fair, function as an ongoing bibliography of the Canadian small press as it developed around these events. They are limited to those in Toronto, or those able to make the trip, but they are nonetheless vital records of presses that often do not keep such records.

<sup>90</sup> The award comes with a \$4000.00 prize for the author and \$500.00 for the publisher. It is given annually to a poetry chapbook between 10 and 48 pages deemed to be the best of the previous year by a rotating panel of judges.

sustain existing relationships between cultural agents, and foster the creation of new relationships with new producers. The small press relies on the gift economy because it helps to express the aesthetic and ideological goals of small press literature, and because the small press is itself fundamentally at odds with capitalist trade. The small press is not the small press in the absence of the gift economy; my contention that a bookseller like Drumbolis can be simultaneously a bookseller and a participant in the gift economy runs up against this difficulty. An allegiance to the small press, however, already places Drumbolis outside of the capitalist centre of the field of cultural production, and the forms that his bookselling take are closer ideologically and culturally to the gift economy than to capitalist bookselling. A personal and professional investment in the small press is necessarily an investment in producing books that “no one wants to buy”; it is “non-commercial”; it is “unrewarded in the capitalist economy.” The gift economy finds new expression in a bookseller like Drumbolis who is able to mobilize the distinct resources of Letters Bookshop to support the small press.

Drumbolis’s form of contributive bookselling is manifest in material ways that go beyond the labour of his correspondence-based bookseller peers. Letters exchanges, and makes possible the exchange, of material, affective, and effective gifts, and these conditions of possibility are rooted in Letters as a bookstore occupying a physical space. Drumbolis’s gifts perform the precise labour detailed by theorists of the gift economy. In Pauline Butling’s words, gift economic labour “help[s] generate and sustain sites for [...] artistic risk-taking and social interventions” (62); Lewis Hyde argues that gifts are distinguished by the “feeling-bond” (56) they can establish; Hans Abbing proposes that gifts promote “other virtues like *sharing, generosity, selflessness, social justice, personal contact, and respect for non-monetary values.* (42). Drumbolis does all of this. Beyond acting ostensibly as

*bookseller*, virtually none of Drumbolis's labour makes logical sense within a capitalist market. This is why he was more inclined to describe Letters as a "depot, hostel, & forum" ("this fiveyear list"). Letters is a site of welcoming and shelter for the small press, for literature, for writers, and for readers particularly interested in these. Its dominant modes of operation are gift economic, not capitalist. Identifying Drumbolis's labour in this way helps to render visible the cultural labour of booksellers. In order to fully understand the small press gift economy, we must understand the contributions of booksellers like Drumbolis. Likewise, if we are to fully understand the cultural labour of contributive bookselling, we must examine bookselling acts using the critical language of the cultural field it is invested in.



## Chapter Four

### **“it should be gathered together somewhere”: The Small Press Bookseller as Minor Archivist and Curator**

“There is also the matter of how the copies of a book which have survived until today reached their present resting place. [...] Here we find ourselves involved in the history not only of the second-hand and antiquarian book trade, but also in the history of building libraries, of private collecting and of the concept of ‘classics’, the selection and revival of works that have survived (that is, have a continuing usefulness and vitality) from a remote past.”

—Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker, “A New Model for the Study of the Book” (25)

“i will help in whatever way i can beyond having made the stuff in the 1<sup>st</sup> place, retrieved and stored it in the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup>, worked & catalogued it & gone to great lengths to ascertain that it be noticed & responded to.”

—jwcurry, “Letters from & to jw curry” (22)<sup>91</sup>

The small press, despite the countless ways that it has been supported and encouraged by larger structures of power, remains in most definitions an act of resistance to central authority. The small press is an expression of the belief that only marginal forms of publishing and distribution can adequately express, or are perhaps even willing to express, experimental literary forms and centrifugal experiences. The present chapter extends this line of thought to consider the relationship between the contributive small press bookseller and the central archives traditionally viewed as responsible for the collection, documentation, and preservation of books and print-objects in order to further my consideration of the ways that

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<sup>91</sup> jwcurry, like Nicky Drumbolis, deploys language in idiosyncratic ways, refusing to follow conventions of capitalization, spelling, syntax, and other terms that dictate formal written communication. As I have throughout this dissertation, I preserve these original choices in order to further illustrate the ways that jwcurry eschews dominant traditions. These choices are made as part of an alternative tradition coming out of Canada’s earlier radical small press publishers like bpNichol and bill bissett.

bookselling practices invested in the cultural and aesthetic goals of the small press operate in keeping with those goals. Sometimes at the impetus of small press agents, sometimes by archival exclusion, and sometimes due to aesthetic and ideological incompatibilities between the small press and central archives, the cultural effects of the small press are often absent from the record of Canadian literature housed in institutional collections. It is therefore incumbent on the writers, publishers, readers, and booksellers of small press literature to find ways to document and preserve this work outside of official modes.

This chapter focuses on the cultural labour of jwcurry, a bookseller (Room 3o2 Books, 1986-), poet, publisher, performer, bibliographer, and archivist who describes himself as a “general cultural factotum” (“Marilyn Irwin Reads”).<sup>92</sup> His bookselling, his archival and bibliographical work (in particular his decades-in-progress bibliography of bpNichol, *A Beepliographic Cyclopoedia*), his public orchestration and performance of sound poetry under the name Messagio Galore, and his publishing (1cent and Curvd H&z) collectively critique traditional modes of the production, distribution, reception, documentation, and preservation of small press items.<sup>93</sup> The critical framework of this chapter is derived from Linda Morra’s theory of the “minor” archive, that is, a “private cache deliberately withheld from formal institutions, by which to critique the existing national arrangements of archives” (*Unarrested Archives* 6). I place Morra’s model in relation to archival theories from Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida in order to trace the sources of power and authority in institutional archives and to make clear the particular act of resistance performed by

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<sup>92</sup> While I refer to him as “jwcurry” throughout this chapter (following his own practices), I use “curry, jw” in the Works Cited for the sake of alphabetical clarity.

<sup>93</sup> Curvd H&z has been written variously as Curvd H&z, CURVD H&z, and CURVD H&Z in different publications during its life. Below, I primarily use “Curvd H&z,” however other arrangements are used when I am quoting someone else’s words. Similarly, Room 3o2 Books has been written variously as ROOM 3o2 BOOKS, ROOM 3o2 Books, and Room 3o2 Books. I primarily use Room 3o2 Books unless quoting someone else.

constructing minor archives. I also draw on Diana Taylor's theory of repertoire and embodied performance to understand the ways that jwcurry's performance series, *Messaggio Galore*, functions as an analogue to the minor archive. Such performances, because they present embodied memory, resist the institutional authority of central archives and written records. Questions of conservation, value (cultural, economic, aesthetic), and access are at stake in this discussion. To paraphrase a question posed by Nicky Drumbolis cited numerous times in this dissertation, in what context does the value of a small press publication become apparent? Is such an item (a book, a manuscript, ephemera) better served in a national institution, a private collection, or a store? How can a system of collection, documentation, and preservation thoughtfully reflect its contents and the original conditions of production, distribution, and reception that give those contents their identity?

I argue that jwcurry's *Room 3o2 Books* offers a viable and productive alternative to entrusting small press cultural effects to centralized institutions. While the accessibility and financial resources of minor archives are limited, the type of access they grant is qualitatively different. I put forward such minor collections not as wholesale replacements, but rather as necessary counterweights to institutional holdings, facilitating the recollection of a more complete small press history. The minor archive does not strive to gain access to the centre; it works to uncover what is possible outside of the dominant positions in the cultural field. *Room 3o2 Books* and jwcurry's many projects create a series of "minor" cultural expressions, not in terms of their aesthetic significance or ambition, but in Morra's terms, as critical examinations of how, why, and to what end works are collected and preserved. This work underscores and extends the alternative understanding of literary acts developed by small press practitioners over decades, from Raymond Souster's emphasis on making

contact, to Nelson Ball's drive to redirect attention to forgotten bibliographic and sensory details, to Nicky Drumbolis's insistence on contributive bookselling practices, to their common desire to make possible productive encounters between readers and works. Room 302 Books and Messagio Galore present the small press contents of their archives in manners that display sensitive understandings of the publishing, performing, and bookselling traditions with which they are consciously engaged.

### **The Minor Archive**

Archives are sites of power that control and restrict the possible meanings of their contents. The authorities that govern archives exercise control over what objects are preserved, made available, and thus what stories can and cannot be told about those objects. The archive, as theorized by Michel Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), is "the law of what can be said" (128) based on the "enunciative possibilities and impossibilities that it lays down" (128). The archive is a site of collection and exclusion, making possible certain expressions, histories, and subjectivities while excluding others as a result of its power to preserve and control access to the material traces of cultural life. For Jacques Derrida, in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1996), the archive is "the place from which *order* is given" (1) and is marked by both the legal right to collect and preserve documents as well as "the power to interpret the archives" (2). Archives (and archivists) hold the power of "consignation" for Derrida; that is, the archives hold the power to "coordinate a single corpus, in a system of synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration" (3): "In an archive, there should not be any absolute dissociation, any heterogeneity or *secret* which could separate (*secernere*), or partition, in an absolute manner"

(3). The processes by which archives exercise authority over their contents exclude and render many cultural traces marginal in order to achieve such absolute unity; the authority of the archive makes possible certain meanings and constricts others.

Archival theorists have identified the ramifications of these processes. Gyanendra Pandey, in his introduction to *Unarchived Histories: The “mad” and the “trifling” in the Colonial and Postcolonial World* (2014), expands on Derrida’s notion of “consignation” (the principle of “gathering together” [*Archive Fever* 3]), and the character of that which cannot be consigned: “Wherever secrets and heterogeneity exist [...] [there] is a ‘menace’ or challenge to the theory of the archive; to the archive as ‘commencement’ (origin) and ‘commandment’ (authority)” (3). By exercising the power to select and classify the contents of the archive, the archivist “[negates] (making inaudible and illegible) much that comes to be classified as ‘non-sense,’ gibberish, madness” (3), and this irreconcilable “gibberish” is “dispatched [...] to a domain outside agential, rational history” (3-4). Objects deemed to be “non-sense” challenge the unity of the archive, threaten its authority, and are thus suppressed, removed, or excluded.

This inevitably raises questions of national context and identity. As Carolyn Steedman writes, “in [the archive’s] quiet folders and bundles is the neatest demonstration of how state power has operated, through ledgers and lists and indictments, and through what is missing from them” (*Dust* 68). Andrew Flinn, in his article “Other Ways of Thinking, Other Ways of Being. Documenting the Margins and the Transitory: What to Preserve, How to Collect” (2008), notes that “[e]xclusions from the national story often reflect broader disenfranchisements in society” (112) and speculates about what responsibility archivists have to represent “those from the periphery and the margins and those with alternative and

unorthodox views” (110). Flinn asks how archivists “might seek to collect the records created by the many groups and individuals who live and organize (sometimes deliberately) on the margins of society and its institutions” (111). The small press deliberately occupies the margins of the field of Canadian literature, and its works, particularly those from the micro and experimental ends of the spectrum, often appear to be “gibberish” or “madness” relative to works that are more legible within existing structures of knowledge. As such, the small press is often absent from unified records of literary history.

Linda Morra’s theory of the “minor” archive clarifies the complex relations between marginal literary practitioners and practices and centralized institutions of collection and preservation in Canada. Morra’s *Unarrested Archives: Case Studies in Twentieth-Century Canadian Women’s Authorship* (2014) offers a series of individual studies directed towards interrogating “literary records housed in and beyond official institutions” (3).<sup>94</sup> She locates a range of options in her case studies, options that recognize that an archive is “not the sum of all texts, but rather the literal establishments that hold material traces of an author’s contributions, the mediating spaces that showcase who was able to articulate publicly and what was articulable in a given period” (4). The minor archive that Morra theorizes in relation to M. NourbeSe Philip is a “private cache deliberately withheld from formal institutions, by which to critique the existing national arrangements of archives” (6). Quoting Foucault, Morra asks if an “archive defines ‘at the outset the system of its enunciability’” (4), how might archives be conceived differently? What sorts of alternative values, critical positions, and “enunciabilities” might be enabled by constructing and recognizing minor archives?

Morra’s book examines archives that were excluded or deliberately withheld from

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<sup>94</sup> Morra’s subjects are Pauline Johnson, Emily Carr, Sheila Watson, Jane Rule, and M. NourbeSe Philip.

formal archives, illustrating both how certain types of material cannot be accommodated by formal archival practices as well as how certain cultural agents choose not to engage with them. The small press work I examine fits both of these categories—it is often poorly accommodated or misunderstood by formal practices, but is also often withheld as a deliberate strategy. As Morra argues, “approaching traditional archives as the sole repositories of cultural material in fact privileges certain epistemologies” (6). M. NourbeSe Philip withheld her papers, according to Morra, “as a strategy to counter institutions that wielded control over and disciplined national subjects” (9), acting in response to a radio broadcast by Michael Coren that cast her disparagingly as a racialized black other within Canadian society.<sup>95</sup> During a protracted legal battle between Philip and Coren, Philip “preserved a substantial cache of papers related to events in what might be called a private archive, which to date she has deliberately withheld from deposit in an official institution” (148-9). Withholding is a strategy that disrupts the authority of these central institutions and declares that the withheld materials must be organized, understood, and accessed *differently*.

The minor archive put forward by Morra is sensitive to how reading and reception practices are shaped by the structures of the archive. Reading what one finds in an archive “does not simply [mean] reading the documents housed within an institution or collection; it

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<sup>95</sup> Coren’s remarks, as recorded in a typescript held in Philip’s minor archive, include the following:

[Philip] has received through taxpayers’ money the Toronto Arts Award. That means she’s contributed a great deal to the Toronto arts scene. *This is a woman* who came here in 1968 and has done nothing but defecate upon this country and this city and the Canadian culture since she came here. *This is a woman* who tried to get Show Boat banned because it was racist. *This is the woman* who accused June Callwood, the social activist of racism.

*This is a woman* who boycotted, protested, demonstrated vehemently outside the ROM, the Royal Ontario Museum, when they had their exhibition, this showing about colonial Africa. So harsh was Marlene NourbeSe Philip and *her people* that the director of that exhibit, in fact, even left the country because the woman in question had graffiti spread on her walls and she was threatened. I’m not saying NourbeSe Philip directly did that, but she was part of the demonstration. (qtd. in Morra 162-163; emphasis is Morra’s)

In Morra’s reading, Coren here invokes “disciplinary discourse” to punish Philip, whom he positions as an outsider to Toronto and to Canada, and as a “‘woman’ rather than a writer” (162); Canadian identity is a monolithic, unified whole to which Philip is an ungrateful intruder.

involves a set of reading practices that are beyond the documents, that involve consideration of their context—the very location and naming of the archives” (151). Morra is careful to cite the source of her minor archive in the theory of “minor transnationalism” from Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih. Lionnet and Shih argue that minor transnationalism performs more work than simply offering critique of an abstract centre; such critique in isolation effectively “enhances an archive’s central status by reifying its place ‘as the main object of study’” (151). Minor transnationalism, and thus the minor archive, provides a “space of exchange and participation where processes of hybridization occur ... without necessary mediation by the centre” (qtd. in Morra 151). A minor archive shifts the terms of access (how one encounters materials), thus facilitating the production of alternative forms of knowledge creation and articulation. For Philip, this meant withholding documents from central archives in order to “[express] control over how she would come to be interpreted by researchers, academics, and others” (Morra 12).

For Foucault the archive defines and controls what can and cannot be said via exclusion. For Derrida the archive strives to achieve “the unity of an ideal configuration” (3). Unlike the institutional repository, however, the minor archive is uninterested in achieving unity or accessing central authority. The minor archive is a deliberate withholding. The minor archive is a response, at least initially, to the central archive by way of recognizing an original exclusion, or by recognizing the ways that bodies, communities, and particular cultural outputs are misunderstood and misrepresented by central repositories. If unity is the goal of the archive, and national subjects are disciplined and controlled by the structures of knowledge and citizenship enabled by the archive, minor archives offer a way to critique the centre and put forward alternative ways of constructing cultural memory, national identities,



and communities. The items held in minor archives are not relegated to minor archives simply by being disregarded or discarded by central archives; the minor archivist no longer strives to gain access to the centre. Drawing on Lionnet and Shih, Morra argues that “rather than simply waiting to be recognized as a ‘citizen,’ the minor subject adopts a ‘horizontal approach’” (152). Recognizing one’s exclusion from the centre prompts the search for alternative modes by which to exist productively at the margins. The minor archive “[calls] attention to a former exclusion” (154) but is also “an expression of agency and self-recognition” (154); it is both an intentional act of non-participation in a centralizing process, and an embracing of having been disregarded in the first place.

### **Collecting and Preserving Experimental Small Press Literature**

The small press, as an alternative form of publishing in Canada, is often at odds with official modes of publishing, distribution, and preservation. Collections of small press publications at official institutions are incomplete for a variety of reasons. Titles are often published and distributed in such a way that they never come into contact with official processes of collection. This can be accidental or deliberate. Libraries and archives operate under bureaucratic and budgetary limitations that restrict their ability to seek out, purchase, and preserve items from the more extreme poles of publishing in Canada. The small press, for its part, has come to view such institutions warily, and in certain agents this finds expression in outright resistance to submitting to legal deposit. The perceived exclusion of small press publishers from these repositories has bred a segment of the small press community that is no longer interested in gaining access to the centres of Canadian cultural preservation.

Opinions about Library and Archives Canada and of other government agencies are split among small press community members. Many publishers request ISBNs and subsequently deposit the required number of copies, while many do not. There exist invaluable research collections of small press effects within centralized institutions, and writers, publishers, academics, and students put these collections to use; there is also, however, much material not accounted for in these collections. This is similar to the way that many small press publishers view government funding via the Canada Council for the Arts, as well as provincial and municipal funding bodies.<sup>96</sup> There are, of course, symbiotic relationships between experimental production and centralized support (including direct grants to artists, reading programs, and prizes), but looking closely at alternative modes of writing, publishing, and distribution, as well cataloguing, preserving, and archiving can reveal some of the gaps and exclusions to be found within centralized collections and systems of support.

Nicky Drumbolis, upon realizing that Library and Archives Canada did not have complete collections of many of Canada's most significant small presses, set out to establish what he termed "control" (*Millennial Report* 41) collections of presses like Coach House, House of Anansi, Oberon, and others in order to track bibliographic anomalies between editions, to keep first editions clear, and to provide bibliographic data that was as complete and accurate as possible. When the National Library of Canada was founded in 1953, its mandated responsibilities included "compiling a bibliography of books published in Canada

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<sup>96</sup> While many eschew government support as anathema to the small press enterprise, many view such support as vital to sustaining literary publishing in Canada. As Pauline Butling notes,

this alternative network has also been sustained by the centripetal, homogenizing narratives of the nation. [...] Federal subsidies have certainly played a role in sustaining poetics networks. Obviously the prizes, public reading programs, writers-in-residence programs, and grants to publishers, magazines, and individuals have provided invaluable financial support for both communities and individuals. (*Writing in Our Time* 41)

and preserving the published heritage of the nation” (Starr, “The Preservation Collection” 73). In 1988, the National Library established the Preservation Collection of Canadiana with the goal to “preserve one copy of all original material published in the country” (Starr 73). These mandates are not easily fulfilled, however, especially where they concern ephemeral publications. One of Drumbolis’s moments of clarity came when he realized that Contact Press was not fully accounted for in the holdings of the National Library:

Given that compulsory deposit was instituted [...] the very year that Contact Press began, it suggested that many other smallpress collections might likely also be either absent or poorly represented in their holdings—making the exercise in compiling them, that much more imperative. (*Millennial Report* 49)

Contact Press is among the most historically visible of Canadian small presses; an incomplete collection of Contact suggests that many less-visible presses are even less likely to have been preserved. In part, this reflects the difficulties of collecting publications that are produced in small editions and distributed outside of traditional channels. It is also in keeping with the resistance inherent to small press activities. Some titles are not collected by institutions because of a failure on the part of the institution or of the structures that traditionally bring titles to the attention of institutions, but some are actively withheld from those same institutions.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Some small and micro presses do not submit titles, and some design their print runs to circumvent the demands of legal deposit. Thee Hellbox Press, run by Hugh Barclay in Kingston since 1981, has been public in its criticisms of the current system of collection and preservation. On the colophon of Phil Hall’s *X* (2013), for example, the reader finds the following note:

The Canadian government has slashed funding to Library and Archives Canada to such an extent that it no longer has the ability to function. Archival material is being refused. I have waited six months to receive a simple acknowledging receipt for legal deposit books. I understand that one is required to wait six months to see an archivist. The wait times must be

Finding and accessing substantial research collections of experimental Canadian literature and publishing can thus be difficult. As Gregory Betts notes in a post at *Editing Modernism in Canada* (“The bpnichol.ca Project: An Archive for Ephemera”), “the very limited access to primary materials” is a central problem for scholars of such literature. Betts explains, “[t]hese items are often made in miniscule print-runs that quickly disappear into eccentrically organized private collections and only rarely get archived and made publicly available.” In this chapter, I contend that such “eccentrically organized private collections” are in fact appropriate venues in which to encounter publications that were produced in equally eccentric and private ways. For example, Caroline Bayard, while researching for her landmark study *The New Poetics in Canada and Quebec: From Concretism to Post-modernism* (1989), was obliged to conduct research at the Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry in Miami, Florida. The Sackners have been collecting concrete and visual work since 1975, and currently hold approximately 250,000 items (Sackner, *The art of typewriting* 17).<sup>98</sup> The collection, housed in their private home, is international in scope and contains substantial Canadian material. Sackner recalls that Bayard came “because she wanted to photocopy material of Canadian poets that you really couldn’t find in Canada, but [the Sackners] had” (Ross, “The Collector”).<sup>99</sup> The Sackner archive was so central to

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frustrating to researchers, academics and graduate students. This is our heritage that is being lost.

Legal deposit requires 2 copies be submitted when print runs are 100 copies or more. This is an onerous requirement for small presses that produce such small runs—2 copies represents 2% of a 100 copy print run, and this makes a significant difference both in terms of potentially recouping some percentage of production costs and reaching potential interested readers. Moreover, Library and Archives often discards these second copies (it is all too common to find such works in discard bins at Library and Archive book sales). For *X*, Barclay published 106 copies: “1 copy marked LD1 for legal deposit, 6 copies are marked HC1-HC6 to indicate hors commerce, the remainder are numbered from 1-99.” Barclay structured his system of numbering to circumvent the requirement to submit two copies. It is a modest protest, but one that nonetheless indicates frustration with the conditions governing such institutions and their treatment of small presses.

<sup>98</sup> Ruth Sackner passed away at age 79 in October 2015.

<sup>99</sup> In September 2016, 400 works from the collection were relocated to the Perez Art Museum Miami as a “combined gift and purchase” (Charles, “The word”).

Bayard's research that it receives Bayard's first acknowledgement:

I would like to express my gratitude to the various individuals and institutions who have made this book possible, especially to Marvin Sackner for generously granting me unlimited access to his marvelous collection of concrete and post-modern artefacts. Without such direct, visual, hands-on contact with concrete and deconstructed items, I would have known them only abstractly and have missed an irreplaceable experience. (ix)

The Sackner archive, and Bayard's explicit recognition of its research value, shows the value of encountering such material on terms different than typical archival conditions. Morra argues that the terms through which one encounters an archive (its location, its name, its physical characteristics, its other holdings) shape what understandings are possible to derive from it. The Sackner archive allowed Bayard to see material that was inaccessible in Canada in a larger context next to Canadian and international work that shared aesthetic lineages.

The Sackner Archive, in addition to presenting a functional exemplar of how a private collection can provide significant aesthetic and historical context for its holdings, demonstrates the intersection of personal interest and archival preservation that is an animating source for such collections. jwcurry organized and hosted a talk by Marvin Sackner through Room 3o2 Books in Toronto on October 20, 1990 at the Birganart Gallery. A flier for the event includes a brief quotation from Sackner: "Nobody was collecting the complete history of visual poetry [...] so we did" ("a talk by MARVIN SACKNER"). Speaking to Steven Heller, Sackner explained, "The prices were within our means [...]. We gradually came to realize that it was possible to build *the* collection of concrete and visual poetry" ("Collecting Art"). What began as a project of personal interest—the pursuit and

acquisition of a particular type of writing—developed into a meaningful research collection as a result of years of focused effort. The collection was started with no plan for its eventual scope and no understanding of the aesthetic terms and boundaries of the material being collected. As Sackner recalls,

The birth of our collection as an “Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry” took place on a spring morning in 1979 [four years after they had begun collecting] at Jaap Reitman’s bookstore in New York. As book lovers often do, I climbed a ladder to reach the highest, dustiest shelf in the shop. I pulled out a book edited by Emmett Williams, *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (1967). Its contents prompted a “Eureka moment” since concrete poetry was a term unknown to us, although many of our books and artworks related to it. I blurted out to Ruth from the top of the ladder, “Our collection has a name!”  
*(The art of typewriting 15)*

The christening of the collection as “An Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry” redefined the existing holdings and opened up new avenues of collection. The name, central to defining the possible enunciations and types of knowledge contained in an archive, was vital.<sup>100</sup>

The private collection as archive holds the benefit of a close focus on one particular field, something impossible in a larger institutional structure. Attentions are sustained or divided by personal choice in such a setup, as opposed to mandated by official policy or budgetary constraints or any number of other hierarchical impositions within major libraries and archives. Rene Morales, a Miami-based museum curator who collaborated with the

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<sup>100</sup> The growth of the archive was also intimately connected to the Sackners’ personal lives. Their collection was facilitated by royalty payments for Marvin’s patent on a “safer pulmonary catheter” (*The art of typewriting* 13), and the international scope of the collection was also, in part, made possible by Marvin’s work as a doctor; the two travelled widely for medical conferences related to Marvin’s work, facilitating contact with writers and artists across North and South American, Europe, and correspondence with artists in Asia.

Sackners on a 2014 exhibition of some of the collection, describes the “appeal” of the Sackner archive as its “leveling of traditional hierarchies, [and] suspension of biases and reflexive value judgments” (Heller, “Collecting Art”). The collection grew and was organized organically, with amateur zeal and little formal training in art history or in library and archival practices. Their cataloguing followed available technology, initially on hand-written index cards, followed by typewriter listings, leading to an online annotated database including thousands of images and tens of thousands of fully-catalogued records.<sup>101</sup> The Sackners have been free to adjust the terms governing their archive at will, pursuing a single interest with greater focus than would be possible in a public institution. The Sackner archive shows the value of private collecting and archiving to marginal, experimental, and ephemeral forms of artistic production: it makes possible research and study that would otherwise be impossible; it preserves, documents, and catalogues work that was often not documented or made available in this way; it facilitates encounters with such material in larger international and aesthetic contexts; and it supports the production of future work by purchasing directly from artists and publishers. It is exemplary of the range of ways that a private collection dedicated to experimental art can contribute to a given field, and its model is perhaps needed more than ever in the twenty-first century.

In the last decade, Canadian academics, librarians, archivists, and scholars have been increasingly frustrated by the current state of archival and library funding, as well as data collection and preservation by the federal government. From the termination of the long-form census (since re-instituted), to the closure and destruction of numerous scientific libraries, to the significant and sustained cuts to Library and Archives Canada, there are crises concerning

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<sup>101</sup> “The collection is curated exclusively by the Sackners, who are also the catalogers and registrars. ‘I do most of the cataloging and almost all the image scanning (about 17,000 images are in our database),’ Marvin says” (Heller).

the future preservation of history, research, and data.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, funding cuts not only restrict the ability for the institution to function, but also damage physical infrastructure. Mary Jane Starr, discussing the establishment of the Preservation Collection of Canadiana, notes that in 2004, the main building in Ottawa on Wellington Street had suffered “dozens of leaks and other incidents in the past decade, and it is remarkable that the Preservation Collection has not sustained major damage” (76). The imperative of alternate sites of collection and preservation is heightened under such conditions, and there is value to be derived from looking at sites like Room 3o2 Books; there is value in recognizing that they exist and that records of cultural production are being preserved outside of the centre. Their existence stands as an indictment of the conditions governing centralized government collection, and as a safety net of preservation.<sup>103</sup>

**jwcurry’s Room 3o2 Books: “what’s what besides our officially recognized literature”**

jwcurry’s small press practice is a coherent whole. Through it, he has explored Canadian and international concrete, visual, and sound poetry in greater depth than most, if not all, of his contemporaries. His work is marked by a near-obsessive attention to detail, and the still-accumulating sum of his work is driven by his interest in taking apart and rebuilding inherited modes of production, preservation, and performance. This is consistent across his writing, his publishing, and his performing, and informs his bookselling and archiving practices. His practices are holistic, each supporting each in developing a sustained critique

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<sup>102</sup> See “Vanishing Canada: Why We’re All Losers in Ottawa’s War on Data” by Anne Kingston for a detailed examination of the anticipated long-term effects of such cuts. See Charles Mandel’s “Inside the Harper Government’s Trashing of a Research Library” for a portrait of how such resources have been dismantled.

<sup>103</sup> It should be noted that during the composition of this dissertation, the Conservative government led by Stephen Harper lost the 2015 election. The incoming Liberal government led by Justin Trudeau almost immediately reinstated the long-form census, and scientists, researchers, and librarians across the country expressed relief that they were once again being permitted to speak publicly about their work. It remains to be seen how the current government will address the problems faced by Library and Archives Canada.



of traditional practices for the production and preservation of knowledge and culture. Room 3o2 Books, and jwcurry's related projects, create a series of minor cultural expressions that function in opposition to so-called major modes of literary culture.

His output as a publisher and a writer is large, varied, and ongoing, and thus well beyond the bounds of this chapter.<sup>104</sup> His publishing takes many forms and many names, including imprints Curvd H&z, 1cent, Spider Plots in Rat Holes, and Utopic Furnace Press, magazines *Industrial Sabotage*, *news notes*, and *Spudburn*, as well as various series in various forms including Th Wrecking Ballzark, Sticky Lights, and Systems Retrieval, as well as a postcard series and dozens of other odd and occasional imprints and guest-editorships.<sup>105</sup> This production began in 1978 and continues uninterrupted through the second decade of the twenty-first century. Through these magazines and imprints he has published the likes of bpNichol, John Riddell, Peggy Lefler, Nelson Ball, David UU, Maria Erskine, Beth Jankola, Steve McCaffery, Marilyn Irwin, and hundreds of others. These publications take myriad forms and are produced in myriad ways: by typewriter, mimeograph, rubber stamp, spray paint, screen printing, and handwriting, as only a few examples. He prints on a range of papers, from bus transfers, to found paper, to envelopes, to advertisements, to art papers, to paper plates, to newsprint, to literal concrete. They are produced as chapbooks, pamphlets, broadsides, postcards, and art-objects. He also often scavenges paper from recycling bins and trash cans, deploying the discarded remnants of capitalism in service to experimental poetry. This excess, produced and abandoned, is converted into something decidedly *non-useful* in capitalist terms. In jwcurry's own words, "it's all junk. i turn junk into other things"

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<sup>104</sup> Room 3o2 issued a four-part list dedicated to jwcurry's output. *Lists 1oA-1oD* (1996) catalogue 1,254 items, some of which individually were sets of more than one hundred items.

<sup>105</sup> The lines between publishing imprints and magazines are more fluid in jwcurry's work than among most literary magazines and publishing houses. This is in keeping with jwcurry's examination of the boundaries of particular modes of production and distribution. Note also that this list is incomplete.

(Kubsch). The project is bi-directional: he strives to locate a print form that is suited to the content, but also to locate content that is suited to the materials at hand.

As a writer and as a publisher, jwcurry closely examines the terms that traditionally govern the distribution of works of art. This is most clearly visible in his 1cent series of publications, a project initiated in 1979. 1cent is an ongoing set of primarily, though not exclusively, miniature publications. Gregory Betts describes 1cent as “a precise critique of the dominant small press publishing models in Canada” (“CURVD H&z”). jwcurry issued a bibliography of the series in May 1999, *CA01687*, itself issued as entry 333 in the series. It provides extensive documentation, including an exhaustively detailed list of publications, an index of artists and their works published in the series, an index of publishers that collaborated with 1cent, and an “index of hardly-incidental identifications” of individuals referenced in the series. It is printed in a miniscule font size and still fills 28 pages. He describes the series in the index simply as “issues of a thing with a 1¢ cover price,” explaining that it evolved from “a single-poem-per-leaflet series” into “a variously-formatted series of various content.” In Betts’s interpretation, the series resists attempting to “create a product that generates a market that can then be capitalized upon and expanded, [and instead] works by limiting access and satirizing attempts to calculate the market value of literature.” Producing and distributing items for a penny each undermines traditional approaches in which investments of time and labour are translated into higher economic prices. 1cent states in its name that there is something paradoxical about setting prices for pieces of art that are without use value, so simply produce art and distribute it to those invested in the community.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> The Federal government unintentionally extended this critique when it ceased the production and circulation of pennies in 2012, rendering 1cent items only purchasable using a retired form of currency.

*Headz & H&z*, edited by jwcurry and Michael Dean and published in 1985 by Underwhich Editions, succinctly and clearly illustrates the incompatibilities of jwcurry's work with formal practices of collection and documentation. A retrospective of Curvd H&z, it is a box filled with 68 items from the early years of the project (March 1979 to April 1982). jwcurry describes it as follows: "printed, photocopy, rubberstamp, offset, silkscreen, typescript & holograph. 9 x 11 ½ x 1 ½, 68 leaves, leaflets, envelopes & variously-bound pamphlets in box w/ detached lid & cover label" (qtd. in mclennan, "YOU NEED TO PURCHASE BOOKS"). In a brief preface to the collection, jwcurry asserts: "whatever statements i cd possibly make about the CURVD H&Z series or about purpose or some such verb are contained w/in the facts surrounding the physical objects' publication w/in that sequence" (jwcurry). It is the physical characteristics of the objects and their relation to one another that give lcent publications their unique character and render them difficult to accommodate via traditional modes of collection and preservation.

The Amicus entry for *Headz & H&z* illustrates the incompatibility of such a publication with official modes of documentation. It gives the title of the box incorrectly as "Head & H & Z" as well as "Head and H and Z" ("Amicus No. 16838598"). It also classifies the collection as a monograph, a term that cannot accommodate the box itself or the range of forms present within it. According to jwcurry's annotation of the box at his *Flickr* account, there are also an "unknown # of copies with 2-3/8 x 5/8 glossy white label printed black rubbertstamp with 'isbn 0-88658-040-4' inside front box cover." The publication is registered with an ISBN, but is inconsistently marked with it, further complicating its relationship to official documentation. *Headz & H&z* is visible to central institutions, but it is not fully legible; it is difficult to classify and is implicitly resistant to formal libraries and

archives. It exists within the National catalogue as a typo—it is present, but not precisely meaningful within the terms of the archive. In this way, jwcurry’s work as a publisher supports his work as a performer, bibliographer, archivist, and general cultural factotum. These works rupture the unified configuration of the archive, the official verse culture of Canada, and the neatly classifiable trade publications that render experimental writers visible to larger audiences.

His bookselling practice is similarly focused on writers that exist at the experimental margins of poetry in Canada and elsewhere. Room 3o2 Books officially opened to the public in May 1986 at 720a Queen Street East in Toronto.<sup>107</sup> jwcurry announced the opening in a series of posters: “room 3o2 books is pleased as hell to announce the grand opening of The Room to the general reading public” (“room 3o2”). This poster establishes the operation as centrifugal: “if you’re wondering what’s what besides our officially recognized literature, come down armed to the teeth with questions & cash & we’ll try to answer ‘em & make change.”<sup>108</sup> His call to “make change” is a pun on the name of his publishing imprint, 1cent, but is also a sincere call to look at that which occurs outside the bounds of “officially recognized literature.” jwcurry, across all his works, pushes up against established conventions and systems of value judgement, exploring what modes of expression, meaning, and knowledge are possible when one operates outside the officially consecrated centres of culture.

The holdings of Room 3o2 are extensive and contain many writers, publishers, and

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<sup>107</sup> Despite the clear date of opening the store to the “reading public” in 1986, signs of what would become Room 3o2 are traceable to 1984. jwcurry issued book catalogues as early as 1984, with a 4-page list of Ganglia Press distributed late that year, followed by lists in 1985 of Coma Goats Press, Dancing Mandible Press, Gorgonzola Press, Utopic Furnace Press, and *Score* magazine. These lists were followed by *H&Z& Bookroom List #1*, the first officially numbered list to be issued, in late 1985. The first list bearing the name Room 3o2 Books was issued in September 1986 (“list #2: *Peggy lefler qaani lore: an exhibit 13/14 september 1986*”).

<sup>108</sup> The opening of the store, following Drumbolis’s model of operating Letters as a gallery, also featured a display of “the complete Mark Laba collection” (“room 3o2”).

forms of small press expression not often encountered in traditional bookstores or on library shelves. Following Nicky Drumbolis's description of Letters, Room 3o2 can be viewed as "a depot for smallpress salvage and collections development" (*Loose Canon*). The store can be visited by appointment, but its primary expression is through book catalogues (in print and online) and at small press book fairs. The catalogues issued from Room 3o2 are as distinctively and carefully produced as any of his publishing efforts.<sup>109</sup> They must correctly be seen as both small press publications and points of access to the minor archive of the store.<sup>110</sup> They follow the tradition of the bookseller catalogue as critical and pedagogical tool that increases the value of books by "by describing their appearance, history, and contents, [and] by placing them in context" (Woudhuysen 125). jwcurry's catalogues, in their focus on the extreme margins of Canadian and international experimental poetry, create value via their specialized focus on materials that "have enjoyed little or inadequate bibliographical attention" (Taylor 78).<sup>111</sup>

His *List 13: as random as it'll get* is a good illustration of jwcurry's idiosyncratic catalogue practices and the organic relationship between his collection, store, archive, and personal life, as well as of the ways that the bookseller catalogue can provide avenues of access to works that are often excluded, withheld, or otherwise absent from institutional holdings. Published and distributed in January 2012, *List 13* includes a brief preface:

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<sup>109</sup> *List 8* (February 1993), for example, lists only 8 items, each printed by rubberstamp; appropriately, *List 8* was itself printed by rubber-stamp (in an edition of 26 copies).

<sup>110</sup> It should also be noted that jwcurry recently began publishing electronic lists. *Room 3o2 Books E-List #1* was issued in July 2015, distributed via email. The mailout included a link to a gallery on *Flickr* containing images of the items for sale, effectively co-opting *Flickr* to function as a proxy-store. October 2016 saw the distribution of a fourth E-List, *4<sup>th</sup> galumph: a further selection of scarcely desirable items*, following *E-List #2: 1st supplement: "in print"* in April 2016 and *E-List #3: 3<sup>rd</sup> galumph: further supplement* in June 2016.

<sup>111</sup> Room 3o2 has issued lists focused on Peggy Lefler, Mark Laba, Richard Truhlar, Nelson Ball, Nicholas Power's Gesture Press, David UU, Stuart Ross, bpNichol, and jwcurry himself. His catalogues facilitate encounters with available material, annotate it, and, in jwcurry's own words, "[demonstrate] to people [the] effect they've had" (Kubsch).

for this list only, any deliberated selection process has been abandoned [...]. what you'll find here is material that, for one reason or many, simply hadn't been shelved (or reshelved) & "needed to be dealt with"; a pretense of an attempt to restore some order around here that was ably derailed by circumstances not long after getting started.

The intimate connection between his store and his personal life is most succinctly illustrated by the store occupying jwcurry's living space; the growth of his collection, the *Beepliographic Cyclopoedia*, and Room 3o2 Books followed the routes of his day-to-day life. His personal life "ably derail[s]" his efforts to maintain order at different times, but even this seems to be of a piece with the type of material that Room 3o2 specializes in.<sup>112</sup> The small and micro press world is an inherently messy one that fits poorly into the strictly regulated order of uniform shelves in libraries, archives, and traditional bookstores; its publications can be too small or too large for standard shelves, take forms other than the codex, and often do not present any bibliographic information on their spines or covers (and on occasion, not inside either). *List 13* uses the form of the catalogue as a means to enforce some measure of order on a seemingly unordered world. It is a window through which to view a cross-section of the items gathered, preserved, and made available by jwcurry, and it responds organically to the lack of order that develops from the intermingling of the personal and the professional.

*List 13* contains works from presses and magazines including Imp Press, Paper Kite

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<sup>112</sup> In late 2013 jwcurry's longtime Ottawa apartment and store (880 Somerset Street West) was sold by his landlords, resulting in the sudden dislocation of the store. In the absence of formal storage, the holdings of Room 3o2 were distributed to basements and storage rooms of friends and fellow small press community members. The effect of this was the "temporary dissemination" (mclennan, "jwcurry's archive") of Room 3o2 in a way that metaphorically reflected the community-oriented nature of his labour in the first place (a new residence for jwcurry and the store was established in 2014 at #3o2 28 Ladouceur Avenue).

Press, Krowbarpress, Fleye Press, above/ground press, Martin Garth Press, and dozens of others across 216 listings. Following the examples of the booksellers discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, jwcurry editorializes freely. Describing the first chapbook by poet Marilyn Irwin (*for when you pick daisies* [2010, \$25.00]), for example, he concludes by asserting that the collection is “far better than it has any right to be.” Of an above/ground press reissue of bpNichol’s *THE TRUE EVENTUAL STORY OF BILLY THE KID* (2005, \$75.00), jwcurry is at his most critical:

it is here accompanied by Carl Peters’ circumambient babblings as afterword, having been published “as (partly) a classroom handout by carl peters at Simon Fraser University.” errors corrected in Craft Dinner have been restored (& at least one new one added) & Barbara Caruso’s original cover graphic has been replaced by a line drawing by Rob McLennan; all in all, a typically shoddy production that diminishes that which it purports to promote.

The catalogue can be used, in part, as a means of reviewing and documenting the production and reproduction of material of which jwcurry is among the most knowledgeable collectors. His attention to detail, noting that previously corrected errors have been restored and new errors introduced, make this a valuable source of information for future scholars and bibliographers of bpNichol’s work.<sup>113</sup>

He concludes his preface to *List 13* by encouraging readers of the catalogue to “call [...] at anytime to be sure i’m in and come on by [...] for coffee, conversation & a look at this (& other) stock.” Restating his assertion nearly two decades earlier that anyone interested

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<sup>113</sup> Note also that his critical dismissal of the production does not preclude an acknowledgement of the relative market value of it. Published originally as a classroom handout as well as distributed to above/ground subscribers, jwcurry places a \$75.00 price on the chapbook. This copy was “unassembled, a set of 5 flat presssheets.”

is welcome to “come over here and use the place as a library to sit down and read” (Kubsch), jwcurry maintains his position that though books may not sell, they nonetheless should be seen, read, and discussed. This supports the larger goal of creating and educating an audience of sufficient curiosity and knowledge to engage with these works, echoing Benjamin’s assertion that a literary work should “demonstrate the attitude with which it is to be followed” (“The Author as Producer” 233). If these works are resistant to centralizing forces of production, distribution, and preservation, they need to be made available in ways that likewise resist such forces. Many of the holdings at Room 3o2 Books are so rare as to be unlikely to be encountered by the great majority of Canada’s poetry reading and buying community. Welcoming interested readers to see and handle this material creates a greater pool of spectators capable of “knowing and recognizing” these works. It is also in keeping with the goals of the minor archive.

The perceived urgency of contributive bookselling labour devoted to making available and preserving small and micro press works must also confront a pervasive attitude in experimental poetics and publishing that celebrates anti-utilitarian values. Nicky Drumbolis, a formative influence on jwcurry’s practices, argues that writers, publishers, and booksellers possess “the privilege of conveying the tradition momentarily through history” (*Ravings* 16) and must work to “demonstrate [their] service to posterity” (16); Drumbolis’s formulation demonstrates a belief in the importance of this work that animates cultural agents like him. His line of thought echoes Walter Benjamin’s musings in his essay “Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Book Collecting” (1931) in which he asserts that “[t]o renew the old world—that is the collector’s deepest desire” (61). Book collecting, for Benjamin, is “a relationship to objects which does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value—that is,



their usefulness—but studies and loves them as the scene, the stage, of their fate” (60).<sup>114</sup>

When a private collection transgresses the boundaries between personal and public roles, the rejection of that which is “functional” and “utilitarian” takes on a different emphasis.

jwcurry’s service to posterity is animated, at least in part, by a shared belief in Benjamin’s assertion that “though public collections may be less objectionable socially and more useful academically than private collections, the objects get their due only in the latter” (67). Hannah Arendt argues that for Benjamin, the passion of the collector is “akin to that of the revolutionary” (“Introduction” 42); the collector, according to Benjamin, “dreams his way [...] into a remote or bygone world [...] in which things are liberated from the drudgery of usefulness” (qtd. in Arendt 42). Striving for freedom from the “drudgery of usefulness” has a particular resonance for concrete poets. Above, I quoted jwcurry explaining that he “turns junk into other things” when transforming salvaged materials into art works that are explicitly not-useful in capitalist terms. Discussing the use of particular modes of production by concrete poets, derek beaulieu argues that

[b]usiness machines and tools—the printer, photocopier, shredder, scanner, three-hole punch, Letraset (dry-transfer)—move beyond the role of device in concrete poetry through a poetics of waste and refuse—into a role closer to that of author/reader. [...] concrete poetry is a means of political and economic critique upon both reading and writing practices and the capitalist means of exchange. (“an afterward after words” 83)

These poets and publishers redeploy that which has been discarded, both scraps of paper and

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<sup>114</sup> In the same spirit in which Drumbolis called for booksellers to contextualize the materials that pass through their hands, Benjamin writes that “for a true collector the whole background of an item adds up to a magic encyclopedia whose quintessence is the fate of his object” (60), including “[t]he period, the region, the craftsmanship, the former ownership” (60).

machines that have been replaced by newer technology. When these same cultural agents adopt the roles of archivist and bibliographer, they salvage works of art that have been discarded or disregarded by institutions and other consecrating powers in the cultural field. The private collection can thus offer something to its holdings that is not available in a public institution. The need to gather, document, preserve, and make available such information (bibliographic, social, aesthetic) finds an ideal domain in a cultural agent that is simultaneously a reader, writer, publisher, collector, bookseller, bibliographer, and archivist. The collector as minor archivist challenges the authority of institutional holdings as well as the capitalist drive to define the value of things by their utility as commodities.

jwcurry has a long and complex relationship with libraries and archives. His focus, concerns, and frustrations were informed by his immediate experiences selling material to archives, his youthful encounters with experimental literature in libraries, and his perception that others in the community were not safeguarding the survival of such works. Detailing his early self-education, he explains that “although i went to libraries to look for the works of bpNichol (& the rest of the crew of concretists that he published (McCaffery, UU, Aylward, Riddell...)) they proved truly useless in terms of the non-‘book’ materials” (“Letters from & to jw curry” 16). He describes his search for such material, eventually discovering that many publishers could still be contacted directly and learning that “it turned out to be the booksellers that had the goods that the libraries wouldn’t buy” (17). This was a lesson in where to look for such material, the long-term need to seek out and preserve it, and the possible role of booksellers in these acts. It also informs the non-systematic manner in which his interests in collecting, archiving, and bookselling developed. According to rob mclennan, jwcurry “began picking up duplicate copies of some of the books that he had read. [...] it

made sense to him to continue picking up copies to build a repository of items that he saw few others collecting or selling” (mclennan, “Not Quite Two Cents Worth” 18). jwcurry adjusts mclennan’s account:

my initial reason for acquiring duplicates was due to having a coupla books literally fall apart in my hands (mainly bad glue for perfectbinding). when i’d see copies of things that were self-destructing, i’d replace them. i started buying in 2s where i could afford to in order to accommodate that plausible eventuality but, with more careful handling, that eventuality never really arrived & i found myself with duplicates of what’d become “rare books.” added to what i was producing that few bookstores would carry, i found myself with a bookstore. (Email to the author)

The necessity of invested parties to collect and thereby ensure the preservation of the objects being produced within an artistic community is vital, and jwcurry’s adoption of this responsibility is connected to his recognition that he could not find the items he wanted in the institutions ostensibly responsible for their preservation.

His “withholding” of materials, in Morra’s terms, developed gradually. It followed, in part, from a series of negative encounters with archives in his capacity as a bookseller, as well as from a growing realization that while the types of work that he was interested in did fit into the mandates of these institutions, such works were not often carefully or comprehensively collected by those institutions. He does not completely refuse to sell stock to libraries or archives; indeed, he writes that he would “gladly sell to them but they consistently ignore my catalogues” (Email to the author). He is skeptical of the motivations of such institutions and he withdraws from dealing with them when their motivations appear

incompatible with his own. There is evidence of his frustration with the administration-heavy practices of institutions as early as December 1988 when he distributed a letter addressed “TO ALL INSTITUTIONAL STANDING ORDER CUSTOMERS” explaining that his dealings with these libraries and archives had become untenable: “Because we have been experiencing considerable consistent difficulties in our dealings with institutions, we are cancelling all standing order services. Standing orders will be replaced by conventional, pre-paid, institutional subscriptions.” He does not refuse to sell publications, but does insist that they must be paid in advance while acknowledging it is being done “at risk of losing any or all of you.” He deliberately chooses to operate in a manner that most likely will result in fewer sales, but that is nonetheless seen as the only way forward to preserve the spirit of his practices.<sup>115</sup>

Conditions did not improve significantly in the following decade. In June 2002, the magazine *Murderous Signs* published correspondence from 1998 and 1999 between jwcurry and Carl Spadoni of McMaster University Library. The correspondence is an almost one-sided exchange in which jwcurry airs his concerns about the motivation for McMaster’s ongoing collection of his publishing output. *Murderous Signs* editor Grant Wilkins frames the letters by noting that “McMaster University was one of the few academic institutions in the country that had shown any interest in the concrete & visual forms, and the only one to have taken any notice of *Curvd H&z*” (15).<sup>116</sup> Wilkins notes, however, that “[t]heir attention

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<sup>115</sup> This is similar to Nicky Drumbolis operating Letters as a lending library. Taking his cue from Drumbolis, jwcurry has kept an open policy on sharing the materials and knowledge: “if people want to come over and read it that’s fine. people are welcome to come over here and use the place as a library” (Kubsch).

<sup>116</sup> McMaster University completed seven accruals from jwcurry between 1983 and 1999 totaling 62.5cm of textual records. Moreover, items from this collection were included in a 2013 exhibition at McMaster, “A Visual Feast: Archives and Books from Canadian Small and Private Presses and Fine Printing,” and were also written about by Gregory Betts as part of McMaster’s *Historical Perspectives on Canadian Publishing* initiative. McMaster ceased collecting *Curvd H&z* and 1cent publications in 1999. The fonds description on the McMaster library website states “no further accruals are expected.”

gave the distinct impression of being unsystematic, unfocused and half-hearted in nature [...] so in late 1998 and 1999 Curry wrote to Carl Spadoni [...] to clarify for himself what McMaster was trying to do and what they were interested in” (15). jwcurry’s letters are more than an interrogation of McMaster; they chart his own process of thinking through his motivations as a writer, reader, and publisher who is also engaged in collection and preservation. jwcurry questions where the output of small press publishers should be collected (“i do think that if this material is going to be being produced in this country [& it obviously is], then it should be gathered together somewhere in its country of origin” [16]) and he does not reject the idea of a centralized institution performing this work.<sup>117</sup> In fact, he is explicit in his second letter: “if i didn’t think scholarship/archives/risks important/necessary, i wouldn’t be trying so hard to insist on it” (24). Towards the end of the first letter, he presents an understanding of his own multiple roles in the field of cultural production. Insisting, “i’m trying to help us survive & help you get as good a collection of this stuff as you can” (22), he delineates each role he has assumed as a custodian of experimental literature in Canada: “i will help in whatever way i can beyond having made the stuff in the 1<sup>st</sup> place, retrieved & stored it in the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup>, worked & catalogued it & gone to great lengths to ascertain that it be noticed & responded to” (22). jwcurry here presents a concise rearticulation of Robert Darnton’s communications circuit, recognizing that he has come to fill the roles of author, publisher, printer, bookseller, shipper, and reader (as well as critic, bibliographer, and archivist) for the material that is his primary concern.

As much as jwcurry operates from the margins, those margins nonetheless exist

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<sup>117</sup> He also notes that the largest collection of his material is held by the Sackner Archive in Florida, and asserts, “it strikes me as sorta sick that no effort has been made to acquire as complete a collection in the country where the stuff originates” (17-18). He explains that the standing order from the Sackners “has been pretty much my primary source of income since in terms of the trade in cultural artifacts (my own & others’)” (17).

within the larger field of cultural production. He shows an acute awareness of both his occasional reliance on the dominant modes of production and evaluation as well as his own efforts to resist and undermine them. He expresses his complicity in these matters to Spadoni: “it’s not i who insisted that the world value cultural artifacts or who invented archives or made grandiose statements about cultural imperatives or proposed economic models as indices of relative values [...]. i did however buy into the notion that these things are real & true” (19). He understands how cultural effects are commonly received, evaluated, and conserved or discarded, and he sees that he must operate, to some degree, within such structures.<sup>118</sup> Despite the joyful irreverence of much of his work, he maintains a sincere belief in the value of art as “real & true.” At the end of his second letter, he declares, “if no one else is going to fight for the preservation of this particular chunk (& it’s a big & significant one) of our culture, then i have no choice” (24). Echoing Drumbolis’s insistence that community is “more resonant [...] when its constituents put their shoulder behind [their] interest” (*Ravings* 19), jwcurry arrived at a role comprised of many smaller roles, each vital

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<sup>118</sup> In a 1994 interview with Chris Kubsch, jwcurry was candid about his attitude toward pricing:

and i don’t see the problem with insisting that books, certain books, have value. because they do: thought has value, perception has value, social observations have value. if i offer a book for sale that has a high price on it it means that there is value contained in that, and that i don’t want it to just go off to somebody who goes “oh what a neat thing, how much is that? oh \$2, here.” and then what happens is that it’s used to light the fire one night or something, because they don’t really fucking care. so for somebody to care, one way of making a point is through economic models. i don’t expect to sell these books [laughs] but i have them here in case somebody does want them. [...] so i price things to sit. that way i don’t have to think about it, ‘cause i know no one’s going to buy them [laughs]. so i don’t have to even address the problem.

jwcurry acknowledges price as both a relevant gauge of the interest of a prospective customer, as well as a measure of “value.” He concedes that he “[doesn’t] expect to sell these books,” but his practice shows that he sees critical value in placing high prices on them. jwcurry recognizes that his practices (as writer, publisher, bookseller), however oppositional they are, nonetheless take place within the same field of cultural production. His presence in the field realigns the relations of existing agents in the field, but is also affected by other practices. He playfully disregards existing rules in the majority of his practices, but he sees clearly that these practices will be monetized and will be absorbed into more mainstream cultural practices in a variety of ways. His high prices guard his practices, to some degree, by keeping uncommitted readers at bay. They also situate his productions and the stock of his store in economic terms that are recognizable to people who are yet to encounter such work.

to the preservation of his chosen “chunk” of culture.

His two letters did not receive any substantial response from Spadoni. Spadoni acknowledges the letters as well as a recent package of Curvd H&z and 1cent material. He suggests that McMaster’s collection is “committed to collecting Canadian poetry up to the year 2000” (24), justifying their reluctance to “[purchase] the imprints that you create after 1999” (24). He closes, “[w]e have a limited budget and many other collections besides Canadian poetry. I wish you well in all your endeavours” (24). While not the engaged response that jwcurry’s letters invited, it was perhaps the only response that an archivist could offer. The value of this correspondence derives from jwcurry’s own thinking. It offers a clear articulation of how he understands his cultural roles and interrogates his relationship to larger institutions. These letters trace his developing understanding that even a library like McMaster, which has been a supporter of his work (and of the small press in Canada generally), cannot collect, preserve, and make available such materials in ways that show a rounded understanding of their original conditions of production. These letters show the need for an alternative, minor archive to collect and ensure the survival of such materials.

### *A Beepliographic Cyclopoedia*

jwcurry’s relationship to bpNichol and his works (as publisher, peer, collector, bookseller, and bibliographer) is perhaps the clearest illustration of precisely what Room 3o2 Books offers as a minor archive. During his teenage years, jwcurry began a lifelong project dedicated to tracking down and documenting as many of bpNichol’s publications as possible—he calls the project *A Beepliographic Cyclopoedia* and describes it as “[...] an exhaustive bibliography of bpNichol’s works—possibly the most massive undertaking

(approx. 4000 pages) dedicated to a single artist ever (certainly in Canada)” (“in support of A Beepliographic Cyclopoedia”). It encompasses thousands of items and has taken many material and digital forms. The project exists in a series of handwritten file cards stored at Room 3o2 Books and is excerpted in occasional publications. In the 1986 *Open Letter* publication of bibliographic excerpts from the developing list, jwcurry declares prophetically, “this list is most likely far from being complete” (“Notes toward a beepliography” 270), and encourages collaboration in ensuring that the list is as accurate as possible (“any corrections that can be offered towards future drafts are most welcome” [270]). That publication listed 232 items. In its current digital expression hosted at jwcurry’s *Flickr* account, 3,521 items are documented bibliographically along with scanned reproductions of covers of books, magazines, and ephemera.<sup>119</sup> In the *Flickr* galleries for the project, he describes it as “detailedly indexed and crossreferenced information [that] occupies many many thousands of pages in tiny handwriting filling some 8 18-inch card-catalogue drawers.”<sup>120</sup>

The bpNichol one encounters at Room 3o2 Books is different from the bpNichol one encounters in university classrooms, in trade anthologies and reprints, and in the official verse cultures of Canadian literature. As Gregory Betts argues, “it is certainly the case that bpNichol’s ephemeral publications are more central to his poetics than his recognition within official verse culture. [...] his ephemera functions as a, if not the, central manifestation of his literary oeuvre” (“The bpnichol.ca Project”). Betts identifies the primary difficulty facing scholars and readers as access to these more marginal materials, despite the second decade of

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<sup>119</sup> The account name is “jwc 3o2,” and the project is gathered in a series of albums under the name “A Beepliographic Cyclopoedia: a gallery of rectos in progress.” The albums are broken down as follows: A: separate releases (537 items); B: contributions to works by others (436 items); C: work in periodicals (427 items); D: editorial responsibilities (195 items); E: works by others with reference to (1467 items); F: relevant extranea (343 items); G: grOnk (127 items).

<sup>120</sup> Note that its form on *Flickr* is, as jwcurry explains, “most emphatically not the *cyclopædia beepliographica*; it is merely the ongoing filling-in of the image bank required for it.”



the twenty-first century being a moment of heightened visibility and accessibility for bpNichol's primary works (in 2015, his works were the subject of a feature length film adaptation and interpretation [Justin Stephenson's *The Complete Works*], he is anthologized and taught, and a number of reprints from presses like Coach House, Talon, and BookThug keep his primary trade collections in-print). There is a marked difference between these works, the modes by which they are accessible, and their counterparts collected at Room 3o2 in terms of both quality and quantity.<sup>121</sup>

One measure of this difference between the *Beepliographic Cyclopoedia* and its institutional and bookselling peers is sheer volume.<sup>122</sup> As noted already, 3,521 items are documented in jwcurry's *Beepliographic Cyclopoedia* as it exists on *Flickr* (including 537 marked as "Separate Releases"). By contrast, *World Cat*, an online initiative that merges catalogue holdings from libraries around the world, lists a mere 133 items under "bpNichol" and 221 items under "Nichol, bp." Amazon offers 27 and 85 items in response to the same search terms, while Chapters lists 6 and 16. *Abebooks*, an online network of thousands of booksellers, lists 158 items and 488 items respectively.<sup>123</sup> Note, however, that the 646 items listed at *Abebooks* include copious duplicates; for example, the 646 include 110 cumulative listings for the nine books of *The Martyrology*. *bpNichol.ca*, the official online bpNichol archive and the resource with the most direct ties to the academic world, makes available a

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<sup>121</sup> Coach House, in addition to all books of *The Martyrology*, is responsible for *a book of variations: love – zygal – art facts* (2013), *The Alphabet Game: a bpNichol reader* (2007), and *Konfessions of an Elizabethan Fan Dancer* (2004); Talon is responsible for *bpNichol Comics* (2001), *Meanwhile: The Critical Writings of bpNichol* (2001), and *As Elected: Selected Writing* (1980); BookThug is responsible for *bp: beginnings* (2014), *Theseus: A Collaboration* (2014) with Wayne Clifford, and *The Captain Poetry Poems Complete* (2011). All of these books are currently in-print.

<sup>122</sup> The numbers below are all derived from searches performed between October 27 and November 3, 2016.

<sup>123</sup> "ABE" is an acronym for "Advanced Book Exchange." *Abebooks* was launched in April 1996 from Victoria, British Columbia. Cathy Waters owned and operated Timeless Books, and created *Abebooks* in collaboration with her husband Keith, and with Rick and Vivian Pura, in response to the perceived need for an online database of bookseller stock. It was originally conceived as a service for booksellers in Victoria, but quickly grew in size and international stature ("Cathy Waters"). It was bought by Amazon in 2008.

number of pdfs of complete bpNichol publications.<sup>124</sup> *bpNichol.ca* offers pdfs of 71 print titles, 5 recordings, 3 films, and 14 photos.<sup>125</sup> These numbers indicate the scope of publications not available in the most visible, accessible, and official repositories of bpNichol's works.

These are not perfectly analogous projects—*bpNichol.ca*, for example, scans and makes full-text documents widely available, while the *Beepliographic Cyclopoedia* works to track and compile bibliographic data and references from publications. While their goals, resources, and means of access vary, there are also useful comparisons to be drawn from looking at them side-by-side. The *Beepliographic Cyclopoedia* demonstrates clearly the depth of bpNichol's production that is unaccounted for by centralized collections. No single source, academic or in the book trade, despite greater access to resources, begins to approach the volume of bpNichol items held and documented at Room 3o2.<sup>126</sup> It must be noted that many of the items classified beyond the A section of the *Beepliographic Cyclopoedia* ("separate releases") may be held in these other collections; many of the anthologies and periodicals, works by others, and references to bpNichol are widely collected and available. They are not, however, classified or indexed in a way that connects them to bpNichol for researchers and readers, whereas in the *Beepliographic Cyclopoedia*, they are grouped, organized, and visible as a single unit (albeit in a venue that is less likely to be encountered via traditional channels).

Room 3o2 and the *Beepliographic Cyclopoedia* also offer a different qualitative experience than central repositories do. The peculiarities of jwcurry's decades-long process

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<sup>124</sup> It should be noted that *bpNichol.ca* is operated with the full support of the Estate of bpNichol and with financial support from Coach House Books and Brock University.

<sup>125</sup> As of October 2016.

<sup>126</sup> The closest comparison to jwcurry's holdings is found in Nelson Ball's bookselling catalogues discussed in chapter two, and even still, Ball's lists includes only hundreds of items, not approaching jwcurry's thousands.

are documented in his description of the project on *Flickr*. He began by “making an exoskeletal list of bpNichol’s publications to help as a finding aid” in his pursuit of publications; the “accumulation metamorphos[ed] into a collection then an archive.” He moved from documenting the material in a lined notebook, to “standard filecards that [he] could keep adding information to as [he] found it out, onto computer in the early ’90s, then back onto a new system of filecards/pamphlets that could better accommodate [his] bibliographical refinements & whims.” jwcurry’s “refinements & whims,” practices that would be unacceptable within the confines of a centralized library or archive, are themselves central to the shape of his *Beepliographic Cyclopoedia*. If, as Gregory Betts posits, bpNichol’s ephemeral publications “[function] as a, if not the, central manifestation of his literary oeuvre,” it follows that in addition to more centralized attempts to collect, document, catalogue, and make available bpNichol’s works, a more radical archive must also exist as counterweight and corrective to the larger absorption of bpNichol and his works into the official verse cultures of Canada. In this way, jwcurry’s *Beepliographic Cyclopoedia* is a minor archive that stands apart from efforts like *bpNichol.ca*. Room 3o2 Books exemplifies the terms of Morra’s minor archive, facilitating encounters with difficult-to-access material under non-traditional conditions, thus creating the possibility of alternate “systems of enunciability” and ensuring the survival of alternate articulations of bpNichol’s oeuvre. If bpNichol exists at the centre in traditional forms, as accounted for by the authority of the archive, as absorbed into the consignment of the central archive and its unified corpus, his life’s output also demands the existence of a site like Room 3o2’s archive in order to reveal the faultlines of those repositories and recollections.

To encounter bpNichol at Room 3o2 is to encounter a vastly different body of work

in a staggering array of forms organized by a minor archivist with an unusual degree of commitment to the intended forms of those publications. For example, in the *Beepliographic Cyclopoedia* and its digital traces, one encounters *Cold Mountain* (1966) by bpNichol. As jwcurry explains, the “early sculptural concrete poetry book/object” included instructions for its own destruction (instructions that jwcurry followed):

the pages were to be bent in to form loops & a lit match dropped down the central tube. due to the nature of the publication, it's highly unlikely that any copies were actually burnt [...] with the probable exception of a copy or 2 that he burned himself to "proof" the process.

when Brian Nash hired me into the crew of his documentary film *bp (pushing the boundaries)* as an archive source/bibliographer, i offered to burn a copy of the first edition for him to film – an offer never accepted.

i've been aware of this book since i was a teenager &'ve always wondered how well it might work: would it go up as intended?

turns out to be a very controlled burn, the central tube channelling the flame into a volcanic gout, the others following along as it spread from the bottom out until it was all consumed.

so, just short of 50(!) years later, a private ceremony to witness a copy finally consumed by the flames required for its completion.

A "COLD MOUNTAIN" indeed. beautiful! (“COLD MOUNTAIN”)

It is difficult, perhaps inconceivable, to imagine a formal archive purchasing an item simply to burn it in order to honour the original intention of the writer and publication. Room 3o2, as a minor archive, offers a qualitatively different form of access to materials, different in depth

but also in experience. It is an unsterile environment—there are no white gloves, no formal paperwork, no climate-controlled rooms. It is also a messy physical space that can appear to the uninitiated to be intensely disordered; this echoes Walter Benjamin describing his own collection of books as “a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order” (60). Its order, however, is a result of the growth of the collection through jwcurry’s particular fascinations and the steps of his personal timelines of interest and acquisition. Nicky Drumbolis describes the development of Room 3o2 as “the organic growth of a veritable beast: a filing system you develop as you go, a private universe” (qtd. in mclennan, “Not Exactly Two Cents Worth” 16). Materials receive tremendous care to the degree that jwcurry and Room 3o2 are able to provide, and the collection is more complete than any existing collection of bpNichol’s publications and related items. In the case of *Cold Mountain*, ‘caring’ for the publication just so happened to take the form of following its instructions.

Barbara Godard’s writing on the cultural fields of Canadian literature offers insight as well as a theoretical framework through which to understand the institutionalization of bpNichol’s writing, and by extension, jwcurry’s resistance to it. Godard, writing about the “partial inclusion of Quebec literary works” (“A Literature in the Making” 294) into the larger field of English-Canadian literature, argues that this partial inclusion “decontextualizes and refracts [the translated books]: a few works are admitted to inoculate the field against difference, against alterity, but not enough to effect real change in the field. [...] Rewriting the works participates in an operation of territorializing them, making them familiar, routine” (294). Godard identifies the problematic manner in which French literature is translated (often poorly and incompletely) in order to be absorbed into the field of English Canadian

literature. This work is always partial because the act of translating it and attempting to understand it within a foreign framework necessarily misrepresents and misunderstands the original conditions that governed the production, distribution, and reception of those works. These works cannot be neatly fit into an English-Canadian framework because their original French-Canadian frameworks are fundamentally different.

Similarly, works from the more radical and marginal end of the small press spectrum cannot be easily fit into the frameworks of Canada's official verse cultures, its university classrooms, or its central archives. Works produced in editions of 100, or 50, or 10, or fewer, cannot be widely collected and accessible because they are exceptionally limited. Works published in ways that eschew the traditional form of the codex are resource-intensive to store and make available. There are segments of bpNichol's work that fit easily into the official narratives of Canadian literature (such as the books of *The Martyrology* or individual concrete poems like "Blues" or "The Complete Works"). These works, to borrow Godard's language, "inoculate" the field. They can be smoothly divorced from their original forms and still maintain a kind of individual coherence suited to the types of analysis favoured in university English classroom. As Jamie Hilder notes in *Designed Words for a Designed World: The International Concrete Poetry Movement, 1955-1971* (2016), "[t]hough Nichol's style was varied, utilizing typewritten, handwritten, and cartoon-like language, it is only his cleanly printed work that appears in [...] anthologies" (227). It is not that *The Martyrology* is not representative of an important piece of bpNichol's output, or that it does not occupy an influential position in Canadian literature; it is, and does. bpNichol's work was more varied in its material forms of publication and distribution, and in its aesthetic forms, that a more complete understanding of bpNichol's work requires additional and alternative repositories

that can make possible contextualized encounters with the ephemera that is the “central manifestation of his literary oeuvre.” This is the role that Room 3o2 Books and the *Beepliographic Cyclopoedia* fill.

Yes, jwcurry’s “whims” make his archive at times inaccessible and difficult to navigate by traditional practices, but its scope is unparalleled. Nearly four decades of intense devotion to the project, combined with the wealth of personal contacts and relationships developed via jwcurry’s own writing, publishing, and bookselling, combined with its singular focus on an individual writer, render the *Beepliographic Cyclopoedia* an unparalleled achievement. Setting aside the occasional, deliberate destruction of an item like “Cold Mountain,” the store, its archive, and its *Beepliographic Cyclopoedia* may prove to have a surprising durability. As Betts notes, attempts to document and make available such material in a digital environment run up against “the speed of anachronism in computers” (“The bpnichol.ca Project”). Betts documents the hazards of digital collections that fall into obsolescence as technology changes more quickly than institutions can adapt. jwcurry’s index cards may last longer than digital collections; the technology of the card-catalogue is stubbornly reliable and jwcurry’s efforts are not dependent on continued funding from granting agencies or universities.<sup>127</sup> The *Beepliographic Cyclopoedia* is less easily accessible than a website, but it is also more complete and more likely to still be accessible in ten or twenty years in its current form. None of this is intended as criticism of efforts like *bpNichol.ca* to render materials “free, open, and awaiting your attention” (Betts, “The bpNichol.ca Project”) in the spirit of bpNichol’s own practices; however, the *Beepliographic Cyclopoedia* is a vital alternative that refuses the tenets of official verse culture and generates

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<sup>127</sup> The use of index cards also further underscores the commitment of cultural agents like jwcurry to salvaging and redeploying discarded technologies.

consequences that are in keeping with the small press spirit of the material archived and catalogued.

### **Messaggio Galore**

While the majority of jwcurry's many projects would bear scrutiny for the ways that they undermine and challenge central authority, I would like to emphasize and explore one of these projects specifically that does not initially appear to be archival in nature, but on closer investigation interrogates and redistributes the emphases and priorities of archival and preservational practices. His work adapting and performing sound poetry through his *Messaggio Galore* series, begun in 2004, illustrates his interest in the sustained investigation of a particular idea, his investment in searching for an increasingly appropriate form through which to express each interest, and fulfills the functions of the minor archive as described by Morra. *Messaggio Galore* is, in jwcurry's words, "a series of readings of, for lack of a more encompassing term, 'sound poetry', researched, curated, arranged, rehearsed & read by jwcurry with a constantly changing cast of coëlaborators" ("MESSAGGIO GALORE").<sup>128</sup> It extends Room 3o2's minor archive, as well as the *Beepliographic Cyclopedia*, by deploying embodied performance as an additional mode of "learning, storing, and transmitting knowledge" (Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* 16).

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<sup>128</sup> Performing under the name Quatuor Gualuor, collaborators have included Gary Barwin, Jennifer Books, Michael Dean, nina jane drystek, Maria Erskine, Laurie Fuhr, Gwendolyn Guth, Chris Johnson, Alastair Larwill, John Lavery, Rachel Lindsey, Lesley Marshall, Georgia Mathewson, Christine McNair, Max Middle, Gustave Morin, Sheena Mordasiewicz, Peter Norman, Brian Pirie, Pearl Pirie, Sierra Plummer, Trish Postle, Nicholas Power, Roland Prévost, Ross Priddle, Carmel Purkis, Rob Read, Sandra Ridley, Zachary Robert, Robert Rosen, Melissa Roy, and Grant Wilkins.. Installments have been performed in Ottawa, Calgary, Toronto, Saint Catharines, and Windsor, in venues as disparate as the Mayfair Theatre, the Ottawa City Hall Art Gallery, and the Rockcliffe Park Pavilion in Ottawa. The most recent take, *Take XIV*, was performed in April 2014 in Ottawa and included works by "Richard Beland, bill bissett, Jaap Blonk, Victor Coleman, Dureau de La Malle, Fortunato Depero, François Dufrière, Paul Haines, Raoul Hausmann, dom sylvester houédard, ernst jandl, Cøghdur Krübben, Alastair Larwill, F.T.Marinetti, Tomahawk, Richard Truhlar, David UU, Don Van Vliet (Captain Beefheart), Frank Zappa & more" (*MESSAGGIO GALORE take XIV*).



Diana Taylor, in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003), argues that “[e]mbodied performances have always played a central role in conserving memory and consolidating identities” (xviii). Taylor appeals to the idea of “repertoire,” that is, “performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing” (20), to capture “all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, non-reproducible knowledge” (20). Taylor posits repertoires of performance as alternative forms of archival memory that stand “opposed to the supposedly stable objects in the [print] archive” (20). “Repertoire” is a performative analogue to the minor archive in that it disregards the institutional authority of central archives and written records; the embodied performance posits orality, audience, presence, and ephemeral transmission as valuable forms of knowledge production and transfer that are not adequately accounted for by Western institutional practices. Just as Room 3o2 and its *Beepliographic Cyclopoedia* posit an alternative bpNichol, Messaggio Galore puts forward an alternative history of experimental writing and insists on the continued production and transmission of texts that do not exist primarily in print forms.<sup>129</sup> Steve McCaffery, founding member of the influential sound poetry group The Four Horsemen and frequent collaborator of bpNichol, argues that “the very attempt to write a **history** of sound poetry is a doomed activity from the outset” (“Sound Poetry: A Survey” 6), and that given the “complex, often oppositive and frequently antithetical interconnectedness of concerns—attempts to recover lost traditions mix with attempts to effect a radical break with all continuities” (6). The terms and frameworks traditionally used to write literary and

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<sup>129</sup> This stands somewhat in contrast to earlier performance groups such as The Four Horsemen whose performances were “highly improvisatory” (McCaffery, “Sound Poetry: A Survey” 17). Messaggio Galore performances by Quatuor Gualuor are intensely rehearsed, with their emphasis on re-presenting and re-interpreting earlier works (in addition to presenting entirely new compositions). This shift reflects an intention on the part of jwcurry that is different from earlier groups, and the fact that jwcurry has a deeper history of such works to draw from.

other types of history are not fully adequate when applied to performative modes of production and distribution, particularly ones deliberately invested in “break[ing] with all continuities.”

The public performance of poetry is often ascribed a spirit of resistance by critics. Charles Bernstein, as quoted in chapter one of this dissertation, conceives of the poetry reading as a “plural event” (9) that denies singularity and stability, instead emphasizing interrelation, adaptability, the physical body, and the specific material conditions and audience composition of a given event. The poetry reading, for Bernstein, creates “a space of authorial resistance to textual authority” (9) as a distinct medium that interrogates and modifies the printed word. Taylor echoes this, arguing that embodied memory, “because it is live, exceeds the archive’s ability to capture it” (20). *Messaggio Galore* produces and transmits knowledge in ways that can never be fully or adequately preserved in print-based archives.

jwcurry has described the series variously in promotional materials for different installments. *Take V* described it as “a celebratory investigation into what constitutes sound poetry, surveying its composers & structures through over 100 years of selected canadian & international works”; *Take VII* was more expansive, describing the series as

an organically thetic examination of the possibilities inherent in the wide range of activities that occur between literature and music [...]. it approaches the genre as inclusive (encompassing, for instances, chant, optophonetic texts, multilinear narrative, choral works, group improvisation, organized sound effects, concrete & visual poetry, letterpuzzles...) & investigates issues of writing/composing, scoring, transcription, reading, rehearsal, group dynamics,

audiencing & &. (*MESSAGIO GALORE take VII*)

The through-line from these descriptions is the interaction between performer and audience in a collective act of exploration; it is an embodied archive. It is a demanding undertaking that functions as an education for the performers (each learns about performing sound poetry and the history of the form) as well as the audience. Public performance insists on the presence of an audience, however small, and on the agency of that audience in the reception of the performance. As jwcurry writes, “sound poetry is gentrification sabotage, rupturing the passivity of somnolent audi(o)ence. audience is activerbal, re(ac)quiring an intercourse of emotion & intellection that allows the receipt the rapture of conception” (*MESSAGIO GALORE take V*). *Messagio Galore* exists in the space between the written score and the vocalized performance, insisting on the value of both. While Canada has dozens if not hundreds of reading series, there are few opportunities to hear sound poetry performed and certainly no equivalent performances to *Messagio Galore* in terms of breadth and depth of material.

The series offers an education in sound poetry to its audience similar to the efforts of Raymond Souster and his co-organizers in the Contact Poetry Reading Series to present modernist and early post-modernist poetry in Toronto between 1957 and 1962. The public nature of a poetry reading reconstitutes the relationship between the writer and the reader. Peter Middleton, in *Distant Reading* (2005), emphasizes reading aloud as a particularly significant “form of sociality” (75) in the context of contemporary poetry. According to Middleton, performance is “part of the long biography of poems, part of the distribution from poet to readers, and readers to readers” (102). Public performance is not afforded primacy, but is one of a number of processes that collectively constitute the “long biography” of a

poem. For Middleton, public reading gives the poet “significant new materials with which to extend the signifying field of the poem” (103). The program from Take VI is most explicit about the pedagogical force of the series. Recalling Bourdieu’s insistence that “works of art exist as symbolic objects only if they are known and recognized, that is, socially instituted as works of art and received by spectators capable of knowing and recognizing them as such” (37), jwcurry quotes Frank Zappa: “The most important thing in art is The Frame. For painting: literally; for other arts: figuratively—because, without this humble appliance, you can’t know where The Art stops and The Real World begins. You have to put a ‘box’ around it because otherwise, what is that shit on the wall?” Messagio Galore is precisely such a frame, rendering the unfamiliar legible for an audience that has otherwise limited access to such materials. Poetry readings in Canada generally take the form of the recitation or reading of works that have their primary life on the printed page. At Messagio Galore, the relationship is inverted; texts are performed that were not intended for the page, or texts that were intended for the page are reimagined in radically altered embodied performances.

jwcurry’s projects share a common investment in educating anyone interested in the historical and contemporary modes of a given form of artistic expression. These shows transform “readers or spectators into collaborators” (Benjamin, “The Author as Producer” 233); his “coëlaborators” at Messagio Galore, for example, do not always have a background in poetry, let alone experimental poetry, and the works performed are more often than not unfamiliar to the audience. To aid in this project, he produces characteristically detailed and annotated programs to coincide with each performance, documenting each piece to be performed, describing lineage, variations, previous performers, and including evaluative critical statements. In the program for Take VIII, for example, he explains that the

performance of bill bissett’s “please” is undertaken “in part to help dispel a formed notion that bissett’s sound work defies rendition by others, despite their rhythmic relentlessness.” Each individual take of the series is unique in terms of the performers, audience composition, set list, and performance space—as jwcurry notes, “given that sound poetry is a physical presence occurring in realtime often using more than a single voice, it has proven instructive to engage a shifting complement of readers to play with in varying degrees of immersion” (*MESSAGIO GALORE take VII*).

Messagio Galore is an ongoing performance of archival, contextual, and contributive practice. Peter Middleton argues, “the performance of the poem compels recognition of the limits of our understanding of language” (102), proposing that a poem is better thought of as “a large heteroclitite entity” composed of “texts, people, performances, memories, and other possible affines in a process that engages many people, perhaps only briefly, over a long period of time, whose outcomes are usually hard to see and that has no clear boundaries” (102-3). jwcurry captures this spirit in the name of his series—Messagio Galore contains an abundance of *messages* and an abundance of *forms*, and engages an abundance of people as performers, listeners, and collaborators. Just as the *Beepliographic Cyclopoedia* as a minor archive expands the limits of how we understand and approach the works of bpNichol, Messagio Galore as a series of embodied performances puts forwards an alternative type of archive for experimental poetry and performance. Messagio Galore asserts the value of that which takes place beyond the page, and is also a series that, in its *galore*-ness, is never complete and cannot be rendered fixed within a print-based archive.<sup>130</sup> It is also in keeping

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<sup>130</sup> jwcurry has himself archived parts of it; its ephemera (programs, posters, handouts) are scanned and documented bibliographically at his *Flickr* account, and videos of Take XIV are also available there. This is only what is publicly available; it is likely that jwcurry has other audio and visual material from past performances, but that these are withheld. This further expresses the impulse of the minor archive to restrict and

with the excessive nature of bpNichol's own gift-economic production discussed in the previous chapter, and relevant here given jwcurry's various investments in bpNichol's works. The work that Messagio Galore presents demands precisely such an alternative form of preservation and reproduction in order to resist the very stasis they resisted in their original contents and forms. Messagio Galore is an embodied archive that emphasizes above all else the need for a "constantly-revised series of takes" (*MESSAGIO GALORE take VII*) instead of the pursuit of a final, complete, authoritative form.

### **Conclusion**

Room 3o2 Books follows the logic of the small and micro press and is in keeping with the close interrogation of writing, publishing, and performance practices that are skeptical of mainstream approaches to the same. Room 3o2 Books is a functional and vital counterforce that, while not sufficient to outright replace institutional collections, does perform labour impossible at those sites. The existence of a store-as-archive like Room 3o2 is a criticism of the failings of central institutions and of their treatment of experimental artistic practices—the necessity of such a site derives from the failure to find the ephemeral materials required for reading, writing, research, and study in available collections. The minor archive is not a complete rejection of institutional collections, but there are kinds of focus, attention, and independence possible in marginal and "minor" spaces that are conducive to the forming of a collection like *A Beepliographic Cyclopoedia*, and that are not possible in major collections. While Library and Archives Canada is mandated to collect "one copy of all original material published in the country" (Starr 73), this is an impossible

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control access to such materials in service of maintaining a degree of control over how, where, when, and by whom such materials are encountered.

project even with adequate funding, personnel, and resources. Rather than “preserving the documentary heritage of Canada” (“Our Mandate”), Room 3o2 works to preserve and make available the print and oral histories of a small subsection of experimental writing. These are vastly different projects that can exist symbiotically.

While jwcurry exists at an extreme margin of literary publishing in Canada, his ex-centric practices provide balance to the field, identifying fault lines in rigid, formal practices while facilitating the production of new forms of output and reception. If the minor archive exists to critique “existing national arrangements,” and if we view Room 3o2 Books and its range of attendant publications and offerings as minor in these terms, different sorts of production and knowledge are made possible by its existence; Room 3o2 reveals that the official verse culture of Canada and the modes by which it is preserved fail to fully account for literary production in this country. Room 3o2 complicates notions of documentation and preservation, just as jwcurry’s writing and publishing complicate practices of poetic production and distribution. Room 3o2 is the temporal and spatial site of jwcurry as writer, publisher, editor, performer, bibliographer, librarian, and archivist. His total cultural praxis demonstrates new and underused forms of literary production, collects and makes visible alternative ideas and works that might otherwise be lost, and demands an engaged audience and reader willing to participate and be changed in the process (and to thereby transform modes of reception).

## Conclusion

### “what will happen to these books”?

“In every conversation, the question as to what will happen to these books was just below the surface.”

—Mark Medley, “The gallery of overlooked books,”  
*The Globe and Mail* (F3)

“In this Year of The Atom Death  
What is in store for you, poet, my poet?  
Hair turning grey, belly softening,  
Your days of romance behind you, Great Lover.

Turning the crank of a mimeograph  
In a basement cellar to produce the typical  
‘Little magazine’ perhaps fifty will read,  
Twenty remember (and with luck) five will learn from.”

—Raymond Souster, “Self Portrait from the Year 1951”  
(1-8)

Lingering beneath the surface of this dissertation (or perhaps hanging over it) is the insistent question posed above—what will happen to the books, knowledge, and labour of these cultural agents? If the eccentrically organized private collection of the bookseller is a vital counterweight to institutional collections, what happens when the bookseller retires? If the physical space of the contributive bookstore makes meaningful contributions to the small press gift economy, what or who takes on the responsibility of offering comparable gifts when the bookstore closes? If the bookseller catalogue organizes, preserves, and makes available the material traces of the small press, what happens to these traces if no one is producing new catalogues? Variations on these questions permeate Mark Medley’s 2016 profile of Nicky Drumbolis in *The Globe and Mail*. Medley polls a number of people with different anxieties and fears about the eventual resting place of the stock, contributions, and



spirit of Letters Bookshop. For his own part, Drumbolis says “[i]t scares the hell out of me thinking about it, because the word ‘landfill’ keeps coming up” (F3). Fellow booksellers jwcurry and Charlie Huisken share a belief that it should “probably just be turned into a museum” (F3) or that there needs to be “an institution to take care of [it]” (F3). Anne Dondertman of the Thomas Fisher Library is realistic: “There aren’t a lot of libraries who can cope with those numbers [of books], no matter what the books are” (F3). David Mason insists that there are “enough people in the book trade who know how important what he has is” (F3) that it will not be allowed to wind up in a landfill. Finally, Stan Bevington, Coach House founder and publisher, correctly identifies “what [Nicky] has in his head” (F3) as the most important part of what could potentially be lost, even more than the material resources of the shop.

Without falling prey to the tendency to generalize about the value of bookstores (a habit I was critical of in my introduction and throughout the dissertation), I do want to insist that *something meaningful* is lost when bookstores close, when another public and intellectual space dedicated to books is lost. The four chapters of this dissertation have made a case, as clearly and specifically as I have been able to, for the traceable contributions of bookstores to literary and small press culture, but can that *something meaningful* be transferred and preserved by simply moving stock into a library or archive? The short answer is no. Yes, the books can potentially be stored and preserved, assuming that one can find an institution willing to take them in (and that is not a given, as underscored by Anne Dondertman above). Moreover, even if the stock was saved, the entire “material machine” (37) of the bookstore, in Jean-Luc Nancy’s terms, its “argumentative, rhetorical, and encyclopedic apparatus” (37), is lost in the process. Indeed, if it were simply a matter of

making sure that material objects were not lost or destroyed, this dissertation would not have needed to be written.

The material machine of the bookstore, particularly the contributive bookstore, is a life's work. It cannot be transferred or perfectly duplicated; it can be partially recreated by another who dedicates her or his life to the same field, but even then it would not account for the deep, personal, and meandering interactions of that first life with books, writers, and communities. If it is absorbed into a larger collection, the connection to the individual, to the particular personality of a contributive bookseller, is severed. Institutions are stable, in part, because they are not tied to individuals; they can effect a smooth transition and the appearance of stability because they are beyond the realm of the individual. An independent bookstore, however, is intimately rooted to the realm of individual personality and history. Depositing such collections wholesale into institutional collections is clearly not a satisfactory solution, and would contradict the spirit of the small press that these collections are particularly invested in.

Walter Benjamin's "Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Book Collecting" is instructive here. For Benjamin, "the phenomenon of collecting loses its meaning as it loses its personal owner. Even though public collections may be less objectionable socially and more useful academically than private collections, the objects get their due only in the latter" (67). The term "collection" is not precisely analogous here. Benjamin's personal collection cannot be exactly mapped onto the bookstore-as-collection. The borders of the store-as-collection are traversable in both directions—that is, the collection grows with new acquisitions, but also shrinks as stock is sold. Nonetheless, Benjamin's insistence that the meaning of a collection resides in its personal owner holds true. The meanings of such bookstores-as-

collections reside to a large degree in the person of each bookseller, and their entire life of relationships to their holdings.

Benjamin continues, “[o]nly in extinction is the collector comprehended” (67). The formation of a collection like the holdings at Letters, or Room 3o2, is forever in process. These collections cannot be completed in the sense of finally holding all books related to their particular fields of interest. Benjamin is correct, though, that the collector (and collection) is *comprehended* in a manner of speaking at the moment of extinction. They are complete, that is to say, *completed*, when the store closes, or the collector passes away. They are not complete because they finally hold all possible items, but are complete, that is to say, *finished*, because they can no longer grow. They can be briefly seen and held and understood in their entirety before they are broken up, scattered, discarded, lost, put into storage, or distributed into other private collections or public institutions. Carolyn Steedman writes,

The object (the event, the happening, the story from the past) has been altered by the very search for it, by its time and duration: what has actually been lost can never be found. This is not to say that *nothing* is found, but that thing is always something else, a creation of the search itself and the time the search took. (*Dust* 77)

The thing that is found, that is completed, that is acquired, was never the object (the book) itself. The “search itself” and “the time the search took” are of greater importance. The goal of this bookselling, of this kind of cultural work, resides in trying to sustain the field for just a little bit longer. Yes, the search and the collection and the engagement alter the original object, but ideally, they alter it productively; ideally, the objects themselves “demonstrate the attitude with which [they are] to be followed” (“The Author as Producer” 233), as per

Benjamin, and the cultural workers that take up the labour do so in a critical and thoughtful manner.

One potential answer to the question of “what will happen” resides in my chapter one discussion of Raymond Souster. The work of the contributive bookseller follows from a version of the small press focused on educating and constructing an audience to encounter and receive small press works more effectively, more completely, to engage with them contributively and comprehensively. These collections, of course, cannot be passed on wholesale, but they can model and pass along modes of engagement, ways of reading and thinking about and trying to acquire, circulate, and recirculate small press books. This type of small press publishing, and by extension contributive bookselling, has always seen itself as part of a continuum. It has always understood itself as taking place on a larger historical timeline. Think of Raymond Souster publishing W.W.E. Ross and the *New Wave Canada* poets through Contact Press—this work looked backwards and forwards simultaneously, trying to build connections, to *make contact*, between previous and future generations. As Carolyn Steedman writes,

[The Archive] cannot help with what is not actually there, with the dead who are not really present in the whispering galleries, with the past that does not, in fact live in the record office, but is rather, *gone* (that is its point; that is what the past is for); it cannot help with parchment that does not in fact speak. It is a dream that the Historian makes in the Archive, and it is the dream to which we must return. (*Dust* 81)

All collections, institutional and personal, must fight against the inevitability of entropy, dispersal, and loss. The “dream” that Steedman insists we must return to finds expression in

the small press in the training of new people and the welcoming in of new readers and potential collaborators so that in some form the spirit of the small press is sustained. From Souster, through Ball, Drumbolis, jwcurry, MillAr, and myriad others who came before and after, there is a kind of small press work and engagement that perceives itself as responsible to the past and the future more than to the present. This offers one path forward.

The small press work described in this dissertation (that is, the work of writing, publishing, distributing, cataloguing, documenting, and preserving small press writing) is a perpetual intermediate step—it is never a point of completion. As Walt Whitman writes in “Song of Myself,” “I am an acme of things accomplish’d, [...] an encloser of things to be” (1148). The dominant attitude of work studied here is opposed to serving the individual, and is instead oriented towards recognizing that which came before (the “things accomplish’d”) and making possible that which is yet to come (the “things to be”). Souster saw his own work as “form[ing] a bridge over [...] which the modern Canadian poetical movement could begin its slow but determined march” (“Some Afterthoughts” 2). Nicky Drumbolis writes that small press cultural agents have the “privilege of conveying the tradition momentarily through history” (*Ravings* 16). These attitudes inform and reflect the small press work of the cultural agents studied in this dissertation. It is work that consolidates, as much as possible, the work of the past, and ideally facilitates future work.

This dissertation has worked to show how the small press contributive bookseller makes meaningful contributions to this larger project. I do not have a satisfactory answer to the question of what will happen to these books, nor do I think that a single answer or strategy will comprehensively solve the problem, but the responsibility of caring for these materials and their histories rests with the next generation of small press cultural agents, and

the next one after that, and so on. The fear that such material will be lost resides in the idea that it is possible to complete such a collection, to fix and make static the objects of, in this case, the small press in Canada. That attitude goes against what I have been arguing and what is reflected in the work of these cultural agents. The work examined in this dissertation is a mode of inquiry, a pattern of thought that sees itself not as a final resting place, but rather as a way station—a sum of that which came before, and a step towards that which will come next. The acme of this work today, its current state as embodied in stores like Letters and Room 302, will not be perfectly preserved, but the examples it sets will make it possible to sustain the small press in some future, yet-to-be-determined form.

The examples of these booksellers, and the terms through which I studied them, can also be generalized and applied to booksellers beyond the small press. The work of booksellers like Nicky Drumbolis or jwcurry takes place at the extreme end of the spectrum of contributive bookselling practices; they practice bookselling with a dedication and obsessive attention-to-detail that is beyond most booksellers; their practices are “unrewarded in a capitalist economy” (beaulieu and Christie 8), and thus the numbers of booksellers willing to follow such a model are limited. Examining extreme manifestations of these ideas demonstrates the potential that these practices hold, practices that are discernible in the labour of many booksellers at different positions along the spectrum. The vague descriptions of booksellers as “unabashed stewards of culture, knowledge, and progress” (Garber) that prompted my inquiries into what precisely the bookseller does, and how she or he can serve different communities, nonetheless contain insight into how booksellers are viewed by their communities. Not every bookseller is also a writer, and publisher, and editor, and organizer of events, and archivist, and bibliographer (and -, and -, and -), but the great majority of

independent booksellers do offer something tangible and significant to their local communities of readers and writers. My study offers ways to think about the labour of the bookseller that can be applied to small press and non-small press bookselling alike. For example, my examination of the bookseller catalogue as a genre of publication that is valuable not only for its bibliographic data, but also for its productive mediation of encounter with books and its navigation and realignment of symbolic and economic terms of valuation is meaningful whether applied to a bookseller like Nelson Ball who specializes in bpNichol, or a different bookseller who specializes in History, or Philosophy, or Science. The specific contributions of catalogues are tied to their field, but the ways that catalogues provide value are applicable widely.

Similarly, the value of studying the bookseller as a possible librarian, archivist, and bibliographer is applicable across specialties. Accounting more broadly for the bookseller can open up the history of Canadian literature as a discipline (that is, as a field of study and a national cultural force). Information about Canadian literature was scattered and unorganized prior to the Second World War. In the decades immediately following the war, there was a gradual effort to identify, collect, document, and preserve the materials of Canadian literature by researchers, scholars, bibliographers, librarians, archivists, universities, and cultural institutions, and the bookseller was at the front lines of the processes by which this information was gathered and organized. The bookseller was often the only cultural agent in Canada that possessed, and therefore could disseminate, the bibliographical and literary-historical data upon which the foundations of the discipline rested. Booksellers like Bernard Amtmann and David Mason intervened actively in the collection, consecration, and critical evaluation of such materials, influencing what libraries were able to collect and what subject

areas could thus be taught and studied. The growth of the study of Canadian literature and history occurred in tandem with the growth and professionalization of Canadian booksellers, and the material connections between them are many and deserving of study.<sup>131</sup>

Seeing the bookseller as an active cultural agent not a passive salesperson holds the potential to reform and deepen our understandings of book history, of the histories of specific disciplines, and in the case of this dissertation, of the history of the small press in Canada. Disregarding the many contributions of the bookseller creates significant blind spots concerning how cultural fields are developed, formed, contested, and expanded. Robert Darnton's insistence that "more work needs to be done on the bookseller" (78) is as true in 2017 as it was in 1982, and remains especially so in Canada. This dissertation has attempted to perform some of this much-needed work, and to identify some of the ways that more work can and should be done going forward.

Raymond Souster's words in his preface to *Cerberus* capture, in his characteristically modest tone, the vision of 'contact' he espoused that has proven so influential (and that provides the title for this dissertation):

S. has always believed (and still believes) that the primary function of poetry is to communicate something to somebody else. Not too important what that something is, the big thing is to get it across, "make contact." If you fail here all that follows, everything else you throw in, is wasted, and you might as well

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<sup>131</sup> For example, The Antiquarian Booksellers' Association of Canada, founded in 1966, held its first Canadian Antiquarian Book Fair in Toronto, June 4-7 1969 at York University "in conjunction with the Learned Societies Meetings" ("1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Antiquarian Book Fair"), and the first general meeting of the organization was held within the framework of the Canadian Library Association's Annual Convention in June 1967. *Abacus*, the trade journal of Antiquarian booksellers in Canada, was the original publisher of *Canadian Notes and Queries* as a supplement, beginning in July 1968. These are relationships that, if untangled, could further illuminate our existing studies of the birth of the discipline of Canadian literature.



as start all over again. Ninety percent of modern poetry fails here. And will go on failing until it learns this and puts the remedy into practice. (75)

Contributive bookselling is part of a larger small press praxis for the people studied here, and is one of the ways that they have each worked to “make contact” between other people in other positions in the cultural field, past, present, and future. Understanding how literary works circulate in the small press (and elsewhere) requires looking at the bookseller as a key figure. The contact made possible by these booksellers is directly tied to the modes by which they practice bookselling, and their respective communities would be radically and detrimentally different in their absence.

## **Appendix A:**

### **The Contact Poetry Reading Series: Readers, Locations, Dates**

My article “‘poet and audience actually exist’: The Contact Poetry Reading Series and the Rise of Literary Readings in Canada” (2015) was the first dedicated study of the Contact readings. It included an appendix with the first complete and correct list of the readers, locations, and dates for the full run of the series. That list is reproduced below. Note that for the first two seasons, the events were billed as “Greenwich Gallery Poetry Nights,” owing to their location at the Greenwich Gallery.

The following note accompanied the list in my article, and it seems appropriate to reproduce given the focus of this dissertation:

A broadside was produced in 1998 to celebrate the Contact Readings at the Harbourfront Reading Series in Toronto. It includes Souster’s poem “Charles Olson at the Ford Hotel” on one side, with a list of the dates, locations, and poets included on the other. This information was gathered by Nicky Drumbolis of Letters Bookshop. This list included in the appendix to this paper corrects several inaccuracies. Drumbolis has been among the most vocal proponents of Souster’s editorial legacy, and of the legacy of the Contact Readings. As Drumbolis is a bookseller not a traditional scholar, his efforts have been received primarily with indifference. His book catalogues are remarkable bibliographic and historical resources deserving of greater attention and respect. (Anstee, “poet and audience” 90)

**Season One: 1957-1958 | Greenwich Gallery Poetry Night**

Location: Greenwich Gallery (736 Bay St.)

1957	Apr.	23	D.G. Jones
	May	12	James Reaney
	Oct.	10	Irving Layton
	Nov.	13	Jay Macpherson
1958	Jan.	25	Louis Dudek
	Feb.	22	Peter Miller, Kenneth McRobbie

**Season Two: 1958-1959 | Greenwich Gallery Poetry Night**

Location: Greenwich Gallery (736 Bay St.)

1958	Nov.	21	F.R. Scott
	Feb.	23	Raymond Souster
1959	Apr.	25	Hungarian Translations: Margaret Avison Marshall McLuhan, Kenneth McRobbie Peter Miller Raymond Souster

**Season Three: 1959-1960 | Contact Poetry Readings**

Location: Isaacs Gallery (736 Bay St.)

1959	Oct.	3	Ralph Gustafson
		31	Leonard Cohen
	Nov.	28	Denise Levertov
	Dec.	19	Alfred W. Purdy
1960	Jan.	23	A.J.M. Smith
	Feb.	20	Alden Nowlan
	Mar.	26	Michèle Lalonde, Gilles Hénault
	Apr.	30	Charles Olson

**Season Four: 1960-1961 | Contact Poetry Readings/Poetry Centre Recitals**

Location: Y.M.-Y.W.H.A. (750 Spadina Ave.)

1960	Oct.	15	Leroi Jones
		29	Francis Sparshott, Milton Acorn
	Nov.	19	Louis Zukofsky
	Dec.	10	George Johnston
1961	Jan.	21	Cid Corman
	Feb.	25	Phyllis Gotlieb, Margaret Avison
	Mar.	25	Jacques Godbout, Yves Préfontaine
	Apr.	29	Theodore Enslin

**Season Five: 1961-1962 | Contact Poetry Readings**

Location: Isaacs Gallery (832 Yonge St.)

1961	Oct.	21	Robert Creeley
	Nov.	11	Miriam Waddington, Peter Miller

	Dec.	9	Louis Dudek
1962	Jan.	20	Eli Mandel
	Feb.	3	Frank O'Hara
		24	Charles Olson
	Mar.	17	Diane Spiecker
	Apr.	7	Gael Turnbull
		28	James Reaney

## Appendix B:

### Nelson Ball's Bookseller Catalogues: A Bibliography

In Nicky Drumbolis's catalogue dedicated to Nelson Ball, *Nelson Ball Cited: A Bibliophilography From Stock* (1992), Drumbolis asserts that the "history of mimeo in this country, would be incomplete without an account of [Ball's bookseller catalogues]." He also notes that "[u]nfortunately, several of the early lists are missing from [his] file." I provide the following bibliography as a supplement to Drumbolis's work, and to help further fill out the histories of "mimeo" and bookselling in Canada.

I am only providing such bibliographic data for Nelson Ball. jwcurry has already documented and made publicly available full bibliographic information about his bookseller catalogues at his *Flickr* account. Nicky Drumbolis has similarly documented his own catalogue (and other) practices in *Loose Canon* (1999), *Letters Ecspress* (1999) and *eh? A SPECULUM OF DEGENERATE ART for the dilettante* (2004). Apollinaire's Bookshoppe does not issue standalone catalogues.

Subject and title information is drawn from the cover page of each list. All of the lists below were examined, except for Lists 5, 7, 25, 61, 92, 95, and 99, Supplemental Lists A73, 76A, 76B, 77B, 79-3, 86-5, and an unnumbered supplemental list from 1978 titled "Dreams Surround Us." They are marked as such.

#### **William Nelson Books**

List No. 1: Canadian Literature. May 1972. 70 listings.

List No. 2: Canadian Literature. 1972. 79 listings.

List No. 3: Modern Canadian Poetry. August 1972. 83 listings.

List No. 4: Canadian Poetry. September 1972. 122 listings.

List No. 5. Unexamined.

List No. 6: Canadiana (with pamphlets by Wilfrid Jury & W.R. Riddell). November 1972.  
118 listings.

List No. 7. Unexamined.

- List No. 8: Canadian Poetry. January-February 1973. 227 listings.
- List No. 9: Canadian Poetry. March-April 1973. 253 listings.
- List No. 10: Canadian Poetry. June 1973. 223 listings.
- List No. 11: Canadian Literature. September-October 1973. 120 listings.
- List No. 12: Canadian Poetry. November 1973. 474 listings.
- List No. 13: Canadian Fiction. November 1973. 287 listings.
- List No. 14: Canadian Literature. December 1973. 170 listings.
- List No. 15: Canadian Poetry. January 1974. 128 listings.
- List No. 16: Canadiana. February 1974. 323 listings.
- List No. 17: Canadian Poetry. February-March 1974. 129 listings.
- List No. 18: Canadian Poetry. April-May 1974. 810 listings.
- List No. 19: Canadian Literature. July 1974. 388 listings.
- List No. 20: Canadiana. June 1974. 67 listings.
- List No. 21: Literary Periodicals & Little Magazines. August-September 1974. 1316 listings.
- List No. 22: Canadian Fiction. August-September 1974. 560 listings.
- List No. 23: Canadiana. [No date]. 76 listings.
- List No. 24: Canadian Poetry. [No date]. 333 listings.
- List No. 25. Unexamined.
- List No. 26: Modern American & British Poetry. January-February 1975. 784 listings.
- List No. 27: Canadian Literature. January-February 1975. 507 listings.
- List No. 28: Canadian Literary Periodicals & Little Magazines. March-April 1975. 740 listings.
- List No. 29: Canadiana. [No date]. 171 listings.
- List No. 30: Canadian Poetry. [No date]. 220 listings.
- List No. 31: Literary Periodicals & Little Magazines. August 1975. 803 listings.
- List No. 32: Canadian Fiction. September 1975. 810 listings.
- List No. 33: Canadian Literature. October 1975. 116 listings.
- List No. 34: Canadian Poetry: Part I (Modern). December 1975. 809 listings.
- List No. 35: Canadian Poetry: Part II. January 1976. 521 listings.
- List No. 36: Canadian Art. February 1976. 236 listings.
- List No. 37: Canadian Literature. March 1976. 153 listings.
- List No. 38: Canadiana: Ontario – Upper Canada. March 1976. 158 listings.
- List No. 39: Canadiana: Atlantic Provinces – Quebec – Prairie Provinces – British Columbia. April 1976. 225 listings.
- List No. 40: Canadian Literature. May 1976. 130 listings.
- List No. 41: Canadian Literature. June 1976. 140 listings.
- List No. 42: Canadian Literature. July 1976. 108 listings.
- List No. 43: Canadiana: Agriculture & Natural History – Arctic – Biography – Education – Military – Native Races – Science & Medicine – Sports. July 1976. 252 listings.
- List No. 44: Canadiana. August 1976. 201 listings.
- List No. 45: Canadian Fiction. August 1976. 815 listings.
- List No. 46: Canadian Poetry: Part I: A – M. September 1976. 318 listings.
- List No. 47: Canadian Poetry: Part II: M – Z. October 1976. 270 listings.
- List No. 48: Canadian Literature. October 1976. 113 listings.
- List No. 49: Canadian Literary Magazines & Periodicals. November 1976. Unexamined.
- List No. 50: Canadian Periodicals. December 1976. 109 listings.

- List No. 51: *Canadiana*. December 1976. 136 listings.
- List No. 52: *Canadian Literature*. February 1977. 164 listings.
- List No. 53: *Canadian Literature*. March 1977. 981 listings.
- List No. 54: *Canadiana*. April 1977. 71 listings.
- List No. 55: *Canadiana*. April 1977. 110 listings.
- List No. 56: *Scarce Canadian Literature*. May 1977. 62 listings.
- List No. 57: *Canadian Literature*. August 1977. 105 listings.
- List No. 58: *Canadiana: Ontario – Upper Canada*. August-September 1977. 178 listings.
- List No. 59: *Canadiana*. September 1977. 489 listings.
- List No. 60: *Canadian Poetry*. October 1977. 135 listings.
- List No. 61: *Canadian Literature: October-November 1977*. Unexamined.
- List No. 62: *Canadian Fiction: 1840-1977. Part I: A – K*. November 1977. 703 listings.
- List No. 62: *Canadian Fiction: 1840-1977. Part II: Anthologies – Canadian Fiction L-Z – Juveniles – Temporary Residents & Foreign Authors (Canadian Settings) – Temporary Residents (Foreign Settings)*. December 1977. 1080 listings.
- List No. 63: *English-Canadian Poetry: 1840-1927. March-April 1978*. 438 listings.
- List No. 64: *Canadian Literature*. April 1978. 150 listings.
- List No. 65: *Canadian Literature*. May 1978. 167 listings.
- List No. 66: *English-Canadian Poetry: 1928-1978. Part I: A – D*. June 1978. 474 listings.
- List No. 66: *English-Canadian Poetry: 1928-1978. Part II: D - I*. July-August 1978. 424 listings.
- List No. 66: *English-Canadian Poetry: 1928-1979. Part III: A Selection of Desirable Listings. April-May 1979*. 104 listings.
- List No. 66: *English-Canadian Poetry: 1928-1979. Part IV: Addenda A - I, J – Z*. November 1979. 1310 listings.
- List No. 67: *Canadian Literature*. June 1978. 155 listings.
- List No. 68: *Canadian Poetry*. September-October 1978. 123 listings.
- List No. 69: *Canadian Literature*. November 1978. 189 listings.
- List No. 70: *Canadian Fiction: 1769-1978*. March 1979. 383 listings.
- List No. 71: *Canadian Literature*. March 1979. 107 listings.
- List No. 72: *Canadian Literature*. March-April 1979. 295 listings.
- List No. 73: *Canadian Literature*. March-April 1979. 65 listings.
- List No. 74: *Canadian Literature*. July 1979. 310 listings.
- List No. 75: *Canadian Poetry: Broadsides & Leaflets – Ganglia Press*. August 1979. 283 listings.
- List No. 76: *Canadian Poetry Anthologies: 1864-1979*. January 1980. 333 listings.
- List No. 77: *Canadian Literature*. January 1980. 240 listings.
- List No. 78: *Canadian Literary History and Criticism*. April 1980. 304 listings.
- List No. 79: *Canadian Literary Periodicals*. May 1980. 516 listings.
- List No. 80: *English-Canadian Poetry: 1830-1978: A Selection of Desirable Items*. May 1980. 53 listings.
- List No. 81: *Canadian Poetry: Recent Acquisitions*. July 1980. 75 listings.
- List No. 82: *Canadian Literature*. February 1981. 367 listings.
- List No. 83: *Canadian Literature*. June 1981. 243 listings.
- List No. 84: *Canadian Literature*. December 1981. 147 listings.

- List No. 85: Canadian Literature. January 1982. 222 listings.  
 List No. 86: Canadian Literary Periodicals. February 1982. 684 listings.  
 List No. 87: Canadian Literature. July 1982. 482 listings.  
 List No. 88: Canadian Literary Periodicals. May 1983. 546 listings.  
 List No. 89: Canadian Literature. December 1983. 314 listings.  
 List No. 90: Canadian Literature. August 1984. 566 listings.  
 List No. 91: Canadian Literary Periodicals. October 1984. 543 listings.  
 List No. 92: Canadian Literature. May-June 1985. Unexamined.  
 List No. 93: Canadian Fiction: Part I: A – G. January 1985. 593 listings.

List No. 93 includes the following note: “Please note change of address and name of business effective March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1985: Nelson Ball, Bookseller, 31 Willow Street, Paris, Ontario, N3L 2K9.”

**Nelson Ball, Bookseller**

- List No. 94: Modern Canadian Poetry: A Selection of Scarce and Interesting Items. November 1985. 467 listings  
 List No. 95: Canadian Literature. April 1986. Unexamined.  
 List No. 96: Canadian Fiction: A Selection of Scarce and Desirable Items. December 1986. 552 listings.  
 List No. 97: Canadian Fiction II: A Comprehensive Listing from Stock. April 1987. 1618 listings.  
 List No. 98: Canadian Literature. July 1987. 180 listings.  
 List No. 99: Proofs, Advance Copies, etc. July 1987. Unexamined.  
 List No. 100: E.J. Pratt. September 1987. 54 listings.  
 List No. 101: Canadian Literature. April 1988. 250 listings.  
 List No. 102: Raymond Souster. April 1988. 141 listings.  
 List No. 103: Canadian Literature. January 1989. 453 listings.  
 List No. 104: Canadian Literature. February 1989. 196 listings.  
 List No. 105: Modern Canadian Poetry. March 1989. 362 listings.  
 List No. 106: Canadian Poetry. August 1989. 764 listings.  
 List No. 107: Canadian Fiction. September 1989. 555 listings.  
 List No. 108: Canadian Literature. May 1990. 350 listings.  
 List No. 109: Canadian Fiction. April 1991. 464 listings.  
 List No. 110: Canadian Literature. August 1991. 407 listings.  
 List No. 111: Canadian Literary Periodicals. October 1991. 632 listings.  
 List No. 112: Canadian Literature. September 1992. 637 listings.  
 List No. 113: Modern Canadian Poetry: A Selection of Scarce and Interesting Items. March 1993. 506 listings.  
 List No. 114: Glynn Davies’ Collection of Rikki Ducornet Material Including Manuscripts, Correspondence, Books and Periodicals and Other Related Items. March 1993. 55 listings.  
 List No. 115: Canadian Fiction. May 1993. 512 listings.  
 List No. 116: Canadian Drama and Theatre. October 1994. 162 listings.  
 List No. 117: Canadian Literature. November 1994. 76 listings.  
 List No. 118: Canadian Literature. March 1995. 204 listings.



List No. 119: bp Nichol and Ganglia Press. September 1996. 200 listings.

### **Supplemental Lists**

Supplemental lists were issued between full catalogues or as supplements to them. Inconsistency in the format of the numbering below follows the lists. Numbers correspond to the years in which a list was issued; they are not dated individually until List No. 79-1 (January 1979), and inconsistently after that. If no date is listed below, no date was given on the list itself.

### **1973**

List No. A73: Unexamined.

List No. B73: Canadiana - Literary Periodicals. 9 listings.

List No. C73: Canadiana – Bibliography, Biography, Criticism, Essays, Literary History. 31 listings.

List No. D73: A Miscellany. 13 listings.

List No. E73: Canadiana. 23 listings.

### **1974**

List No. A74: Canadian Literature. 23 listings.

List No. B74: Canadian Poetry Anthologies. 66 listings.

List No. C74: Canadiana. 24 listings.

List No. D74: Canadian Literature. 28 listings.

List No. E74: Canadiana. 23 listings.

List No. F74: Bibliographies Etc. (Non-Canadian). 23 listings.

### **1975**

List No. A75: Poetry Anthologies. 43 listings.

List No. B75: Modern Poetry: Broadsides & Leaflets. 157 listings.

List No. C75: Canadiana: Bibliographies Etc. 30 listings.

List No. D75: Canadian Literature. 30 listings.

List No. E75: Canadiana. 28 listings.

List No. F75: Weed Flower Press Poetry Books & Pamphlets. 47 listings.

List No. G75: Canadian Literature. 33 listings.

List No. H75: Canadiana. 32 listings.

List No. I75: General. 32 listings.

### **1976**

List No. 76A. Unexamined.

List No. 76B. Unexamined.

List No. 76C: Canadiana. 22 listings.

List No. 76D: Canadiana. 28 listings.

List No. 76E: Canadiana. 24 listings.

List No. 76F: Canadiana. 40 listings.

List No. 76G: Modern Poetry. 54 listings.

List No. 76H: Canadiana. 29 listings.

List No. 76I: Literature. 40 listings.

**1977**

List No. 77-A: Canadian Literature. 38 listings.

List No. 77-B. Unexamined.

**1978**

List No. [?]: Dreams Surround Us. Unexamined.

**1979.**

List No. 79-1: Canadian Poetry. January 1979. 25 listings.

List No. 79-2: Canadian Literature. January 1979. 33 listings.

List No. 79-3. Unexamined.

List No. 79-4: Canadian Poetry. February 1979. 39 listings.

List No. 79-5: Canadian Literature. February 1979. 35 listings.

List No. 79-6: Canadian Fiction. February 1979. 42 listings.

List No. 79-7: Canadian Literature. Toronto Antiquarian Book Fair, 9-11 May 1979. 14 listings.

List No. 79-8: Recent Acquisitions: Canadian Poetry. June 1979. 54 listings.

List No. 79-9: Recent Acquisitions: Fiction. September 1979. 90 listings.

**1980**

List No. 80-1: Canadian Fiction Anthologies. January 1980. 46 listings.

List No. 80-2: Canadian Poetry: Ephemeral Verse. [No date]. 121 listings.

List No. 80-3: Recent Acquisitions: Fiction. February 1980. 95 listings.

List No. 80-4: Recent Acquisitions: Fiction. April 1980. 73 listings.

List No. 80-5: Canadian Poetry. August 1980. 56 listings.

List No. 80-6: Canadian Literature: Recent Acquisitions. November 1980. 53 listings.

List No. 80-7: Canadian Poetry. December 1980. 47 listings.

**1981**

List No. 81-1: Canadian Poetry. May 1981. 125 listings.

List No. 81-2: Recent Acquisitions: Poetry. June 1981. 16 listings.

List No. 81-3: Recent Acquisitions: Poetry. August 1981. 16 listings.

**1982**

List No. 82-1: Recent Acquisitions: Fiction. June 1982. 18 listings.

List No. 82-2: Recent Acquisitions: Poetry. June 1982. 22 listings.

List No. 82-3: Canadiana. July 1982. 25 listings.

**1983**

No supplemental lists were issued in 1983

**1984**

List No. 84-1: Canadian Literature. February 1984. 63 listings.

List No. 84-2: Canadian Literature. April 1984. 126 listings.

List No. 84-3: Canadian Literature. May 1984. 121 listings.

- List No. 84-4: Stephen Leacock. [No date]. 155 listings.  
 List No. 84-5: Canadian Literature. June 1984. 79 listings.  
 List No. 84-6: Canadian Literature. September 1984. 52 listings.  
 List No. 84-7: Foreign Periodicals With Contributions by Canadian Authors. November 1984. 38 listings.  
 List No. 84-8: Canadian Literature. November 1984. 50 listings.  
 List No. 84-9: Canadian Literature. December 1984. 21 listings.

### **1985**

- List No. 85-1: Literary Periodicals. 37 listings.  
 List No. 85-2: Canadian Literature. 25 listings.  
 List No. 85-3: Modern Canadian Poetry. 57 listings.  
 List No. 85-4: Stephen Leacock. 54 listings.  
 List No. 85-5: A Miscellany. 15 listings.  
 List No. 85-6: Canadiana. 21 listings.  
 List No. 85-7: Canadian Literature. 53 listings.  
 List No. 85-8: Canadian Literature. 85 listings.  
 List No. 85-9: Canadian Literature. 100 listings.

### **1986**

- List No. 86-1: Canadian Literature. 58 listings.  
 List No. 86-2: Religion. 120 listings.  
 List No. 86-3: Proofs, Advance Copies, Etc. 53 listings.  
 List No. 86-4: Canadian Literature. 25 listings.  
 List No. 86-5. Unexamined.  
 List No. 86-6: Canadian Literature. 110 listings.  
 List No. 86-7: Canadian Fiction. 25 listings.  
 List No. 86-8: Canadian Poetry. 23 listings.  
 List No. 86-9: Canadian Literature. 22 listings.

### **1987**

- List No. 87-1: Canadian Literature. 18 listings.  
 List No. 87-2: Canadian Literature. 82 listings.  
 List No. 87-3: Canadian Literature. 47 listings.  
 List No. 87-4: Canadian Literature: Recent Acquisitions. 58 listings.  
 List No. 87-5: Canadian Fiction. 24 listings.  
 List No. 87-6: Canadian Poetry. 31 listings.  
 List No. 87-7: Robertson Davies. 24 listings.  
 List No. 87-8: Stephen Leacock. 24 listings.  
 List No. 87-9: Canadian Literature: Recent Acquisitions. 58 listings.

### **1988**

- List No. 88-1: Canadian Literature. 88 listings.  
 List No. 88-2: The Torch Press, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. 22 listings.  
 List No. 88-3: Canadian Literature. 77 listings.

**1989**

- List No. 89-1: A Selection of Canadian Literary Periodicals. March 1989. 111 listings.  
 List No. 89-2: Canadian Literature: Recent Acquisitions. March 1989. 20 listings.  
 List No. 89-3: Canadian Literature: Recent Acquisitions. 98 listings.  
 List No. 89-4: Canadian Literature: Recent Acquisitions. 113 listings.

**1990**

- List No. 90-1: Canadian Poetry. 16 listings.  
 List No. 90-2: Canadian Literature. 47 listings.  
 List No. 90-3: Canadian Fiction. 52 listings.  
 List No. 90-4: A Miscellany. 25 listings.  
 List No. 90-5: Canadian Poetry. 25 listings.  
 List No. 90-6: Canadian Poetry. 82 listings.  
 List No. 90-7: Canadian Fiction. 22 listings.  
 List No. 90-8: Canadian Literature. 24 listings.

**1991**

- List No. 91-1: Canadian Poetry. 83 listings.  
 List No. 91-2: Canadian Literature. 28 listings.  
 List No. 91-3: Canadian Poetry: 57 listings.

**1992**

- List No. 92-1: Canadian Literature. 95 listings.  
 List No. 92-2: Canadian Literature. 98 listings.

**1993**

- List No. 93-1: Canadian Literature. 39 listings.  
 List No. 93-2: Canadian Fiction. 30 listings.  
 List No. 93-3. 8 listings.  
 List No. 93-4. 18 listings.  
 List No. 93-5: Canadian Fiction. 39 listings.  
 List No. 93-6. 40 listings.  
 List No. 93-7. 14 listings.  
 List No. 93-8: Canadian Poetry. 25 listings.  
 List No. 93-9. 23 listings.

**1994**

- List No. 94-1: A Collection of Books By and Concerning Archibald Lampman and Duncan Campbell Scott. 75 listings.

**1995**

- List No. 95-1: Canadian Poetry. 11 listings.  
 List No. 95-2: Proofs & Advance Copies. 21 listings.

**1996**

- List No. 96-1: Canadian Fiction. 25 listings.

List No. 96-2: Canadian Poetry. 23 listings.  
List No. 96-3: Canadian Literature. 19 listings.

## **Appendix C:**

### **A Gallery of Images**

Given that a portion of this dissertation is concerned with describing the appearance of books and their material modes of production, it seems only reasonable to include an image gallery. These images are included to provide additional context for various points of discussion in this dissertation, including to illustrate arguments about the visual codes of publications and to present, however partially, some of the primary documents and bookseller catalogues that are particularly difficult to access. If no source is given, the scan or photograph is of my personal copy.

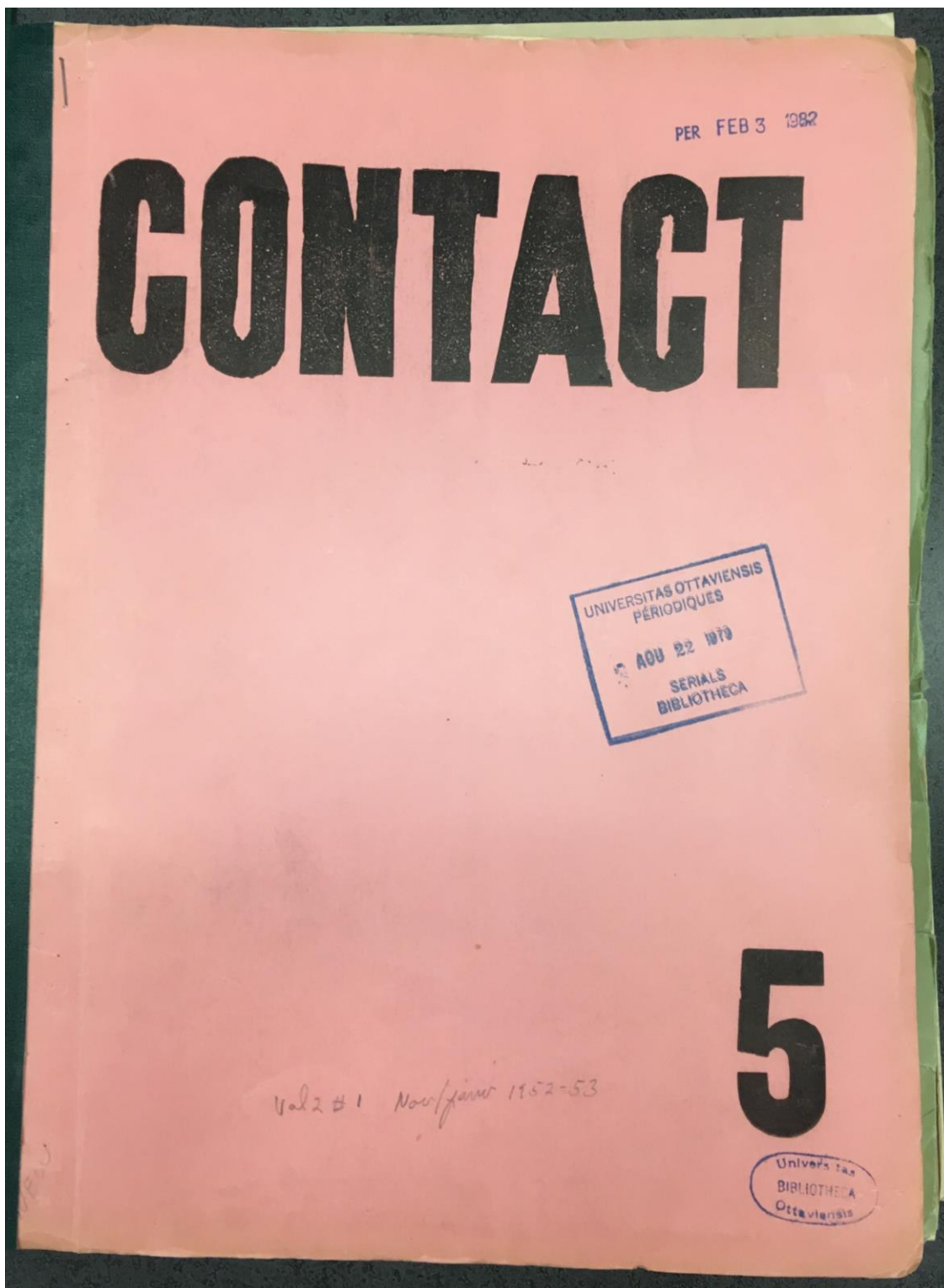


Fig. 1: Cover, *Contact* 2.1 (November-January 1952-1953). Source: University of Ottawa Library.

*Compliments of the Editors*

CONTACT VOLUME TWO NUMBER ONE NOVEMBER-JANUARY '52-'53

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DAVID PALMER

OCTAVIO PAZ

A. WILBUR STEVENS

COLLEEN THIBAudeau

LAWRENCE TYNDALL

CURTIS ZIMM



CONTACT is an international magazine of poetry published quarterly by CONTACT PRESS, 28 Mayfield Ave, Toronto 3, Ontario, Canada. Editors: Raymond Souster, Jack Hersh. Associates: George Nasir, Louis Dudek, Irving Layton. Subscriptions: 4 issues for \$1. Please make all cheques and money orders payable to R.H. Souster. Contributions invited. In addition, Canadian poets are invited to submit manuscripts for possible publication in the CONTACT PRESS POETRY SERIES. Address: CONTACT PRESS POETRY SERIES, c/o Irving Layton, 8035 Kildare Ave, Cote St.Luc, Quebec, Canada. The usual return rules apply.

Fig. 2: Title Page, *Contact* 2.1 (November-January 1952-1953). Source: University of Ottawa Library.



COMBUSTION      NUMBER EIGHT      NOVEMBER 1958

COMBUSTION is a review of modern poetry published at no fixed time by CONTACT PRESS, 28 Mayfield Ave, Toronto 3, Canada. Contributions of experimental poetry, both original and translated, invited. No payment, usual return rules. COMBUSTION is distributed solely by mailing list, which is full at the moment. Donations, payable to R.H. Souster, always welcome.

A LITTLE ANTHOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN POETRY

IT'S FUNNY HOW IN DREAMS      EDWIN LENT

It's funny how in dreams  
 thoughts and desires jumble  
 ("A dream is a wish your heart makes"--  
 I guess it's true)  
 and fuse past and present  
 into one dream-logical whole.  
 Last night I dreamed I was reading Scripture  
 from my Bible  
 to a group of people.  
 I think I was reading  
 three chapters  
 from Jude  
 (although now I see that Jude has only one).  
 After I had read the first two,  
 the group had to move on.  
 I moved with them, hoping to read the third chapter  
 when we reached our destination.  
 But when we stopped  
 it seemed the group had no time to listen to me further,  
 so I gave them the number of the third chapter so that they  
     could continue the reading themselves.  
 As I was reading  
 and turning my Bible's pages  
 I discovered new features  
 I had never seen there before.  
 There were many illustrations:  
 Some like cartoons, and comic strips--  
 and the words of Christ were in red.  
 And toward the front  
 I saw a picture of Jesus  
 with a coke in his hand.

A VIEW OF EL PASO      EDWIN LENT

I ride by, and I see them.  
 I see the men, in undershirts  
     standing under dim light bulbs  
     talking.  
 I see the women and children  
     huddled on front stoops and rickety balconies  
     staring into the darkness.  
 Except the oasis of light made by our headlights as we sweep by.  
 I ride by, and for a moment I hear  
     a snatch of plaintive guitar.  
     No more; just a snatch-- then it's gone.  
 I couldn't even tell what tune it was.  
     Where we going? to old Wazoo!  
     We're gonna live it up!

Fig. 3: Cover/First Page, *Combustion* 8 (November 1958). Source: Philip Smith, Bookseller. Abebooks.

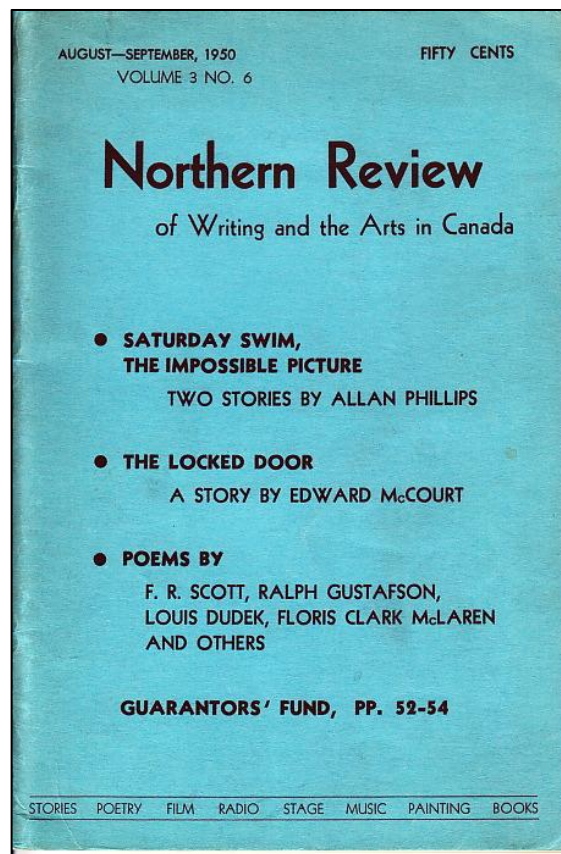


Fig. 4: Cover, *First Statement* 2.12 (April-May 1945). Source: *The Dusty Bookcase*, August 2013.

Fig. 5: Cover, *Northern Review* 3.6 (August-September 1950).

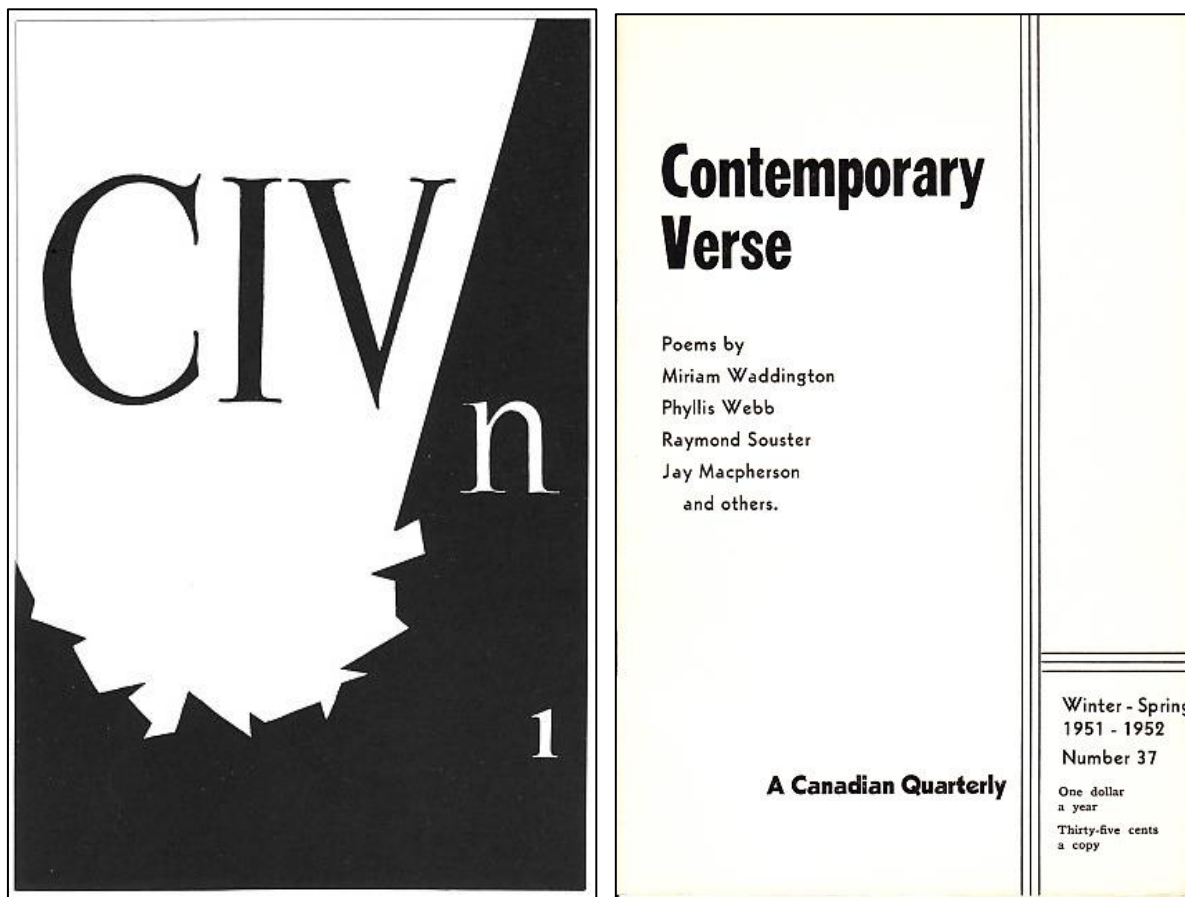


Fig. 6: Cover, *CIV/n* 1 (January 1953). Source: *CIV/n: A Literary Magazine of the 50's*, ed. by Aileen Collins. Montreal: Vehicule, 1983.

Fig. 7: Cover, *Contemporary Verse* 37 (Winter-Spring 1951-1952).



PER      no. 1

# PREVIEW

F R SCOTT MARGARET DAY BRUCE RUDDICK PATRICK ANDERSON NEUFVILLE SHAW

MARCH 1942

## STATEMENT

This is no magazine. It presents five Montreal writers who recently formed themselves into a group for the purpose of mutual discussion and criticism and who hope, through these selections, to try out their work before a somewhat larger public.

As the group takes shape, it becomes clear that general agreement exists on several points. Among them are the following. First, we have lived long enough in Montreal to realize the frustrating and inhibiting effects of isolation. All anti-fascists, we feel that the existence of a war between democratic culture and the paralysing forces of dictatorship only intensifies the writer's obligation to work. Now, more than ever, creative and experimental writing must be kept alive and there must be no retreat from the intellectual frontier - certainly no shoddy betrayal, on the lines of Archibald MacLeish, Van Wyck Brooks and others, of those international forces which combine in a Picasso, a Malraux or a Joyce. Secondly, the poets amongst us look forward, perhaps optimistically, to a possible fusion between the lyric and didactic elements in modern verse, a combination of vivid, arresting imagery and the capacity to "sing" with social content and criticism.

Thirdly, we hope to make contact, as a group, with new writing movements in England, the United States and other parts of Canada. We will welcome such contributions as space and the aims expressed above permit. We have envisaged from the start a gradually widening of our group to about twice its present size. And may we add that you can receive six issues of "PREVIEW" for the sum of fifty cents, mailable to any of us.

## AT THE PLANT

He cleans the sinks, the water closets, urinals, scrubs the floors and hides himself, as he walks, behind a great tumble of tissue towels and toilet paper. He is badly paid, hates his work but like all of us has his secrets.

What does he look like? I see his sharp dark face usually half masked behind his large paper load. His hair is greased and shines like black marble. His eyebrows are large, immobile like spun iron.

He likes to talk and he and I have large conversations beside the burette stand or in the long moderately clean lavatory set aside for foremen and engineers. I'm not an engineer but own a key to their excretory sanctum.

In a way he is symbol to me of hard insistent work, of a kind of hidden protest mixed with impotent longings and dreams to which he hangs on like a life belt.

I have said that he hates his work but still he does it. His hate is a small one. I don't think that it ever bothers him because of those secret dreams of his. He tells me about some leading up to them with an impressive series of irrelevant generalities which gradually get more concrete as we get to his point.

Fig. 8: Cover/First Page, *Preview* 1 (March 1942). Source: University of Ottawa Library.

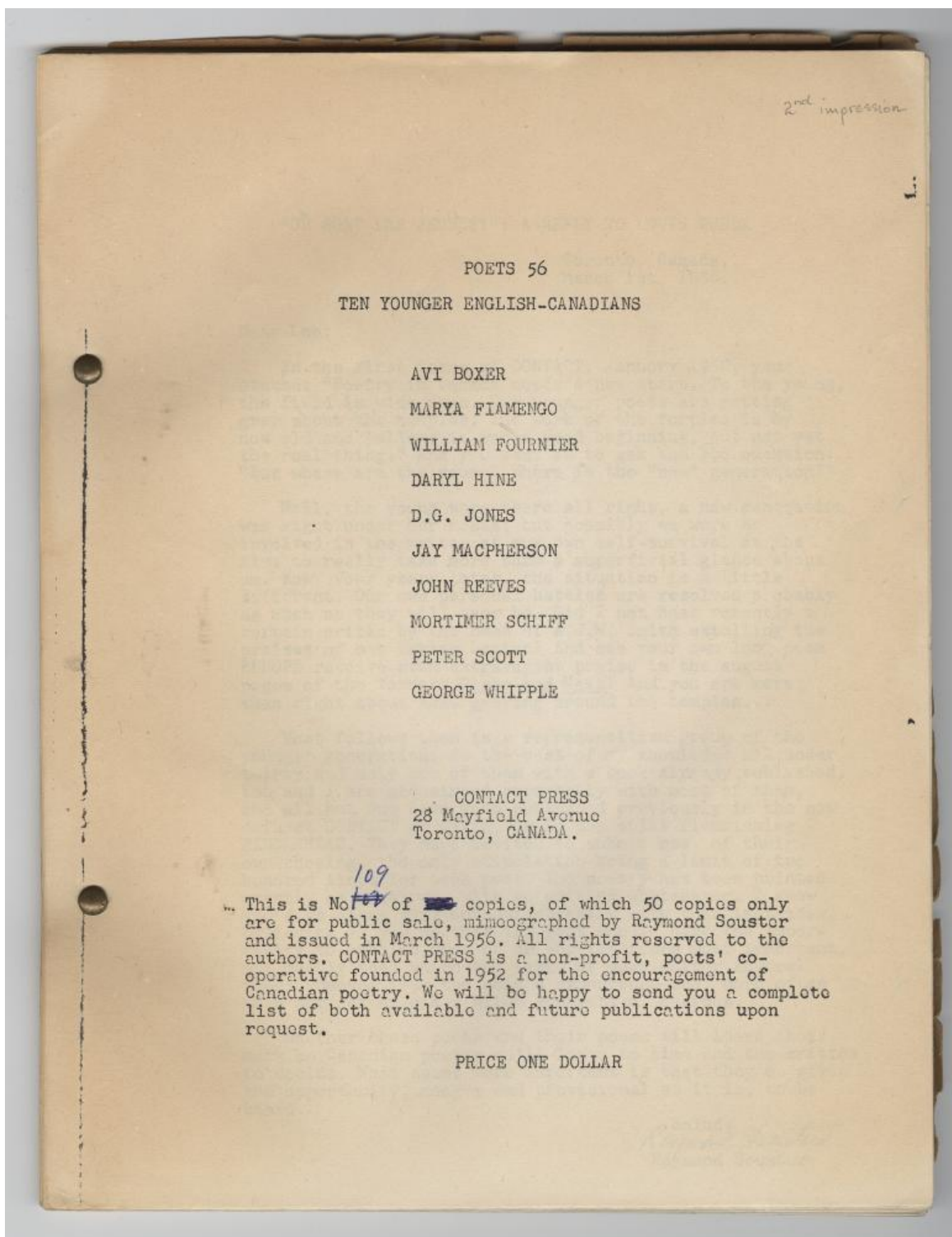


Fig. 9: Title Page, *Poets 56: Ten Younger English Canadians*, ed. Raymond Souster. Toronto: Contact Press, 1956. Source: David McKnight, "The Poetic Achievement of Contact Press (1952-1967)." *Historical Perspectives on Canadian Publishing*. McMaster University.



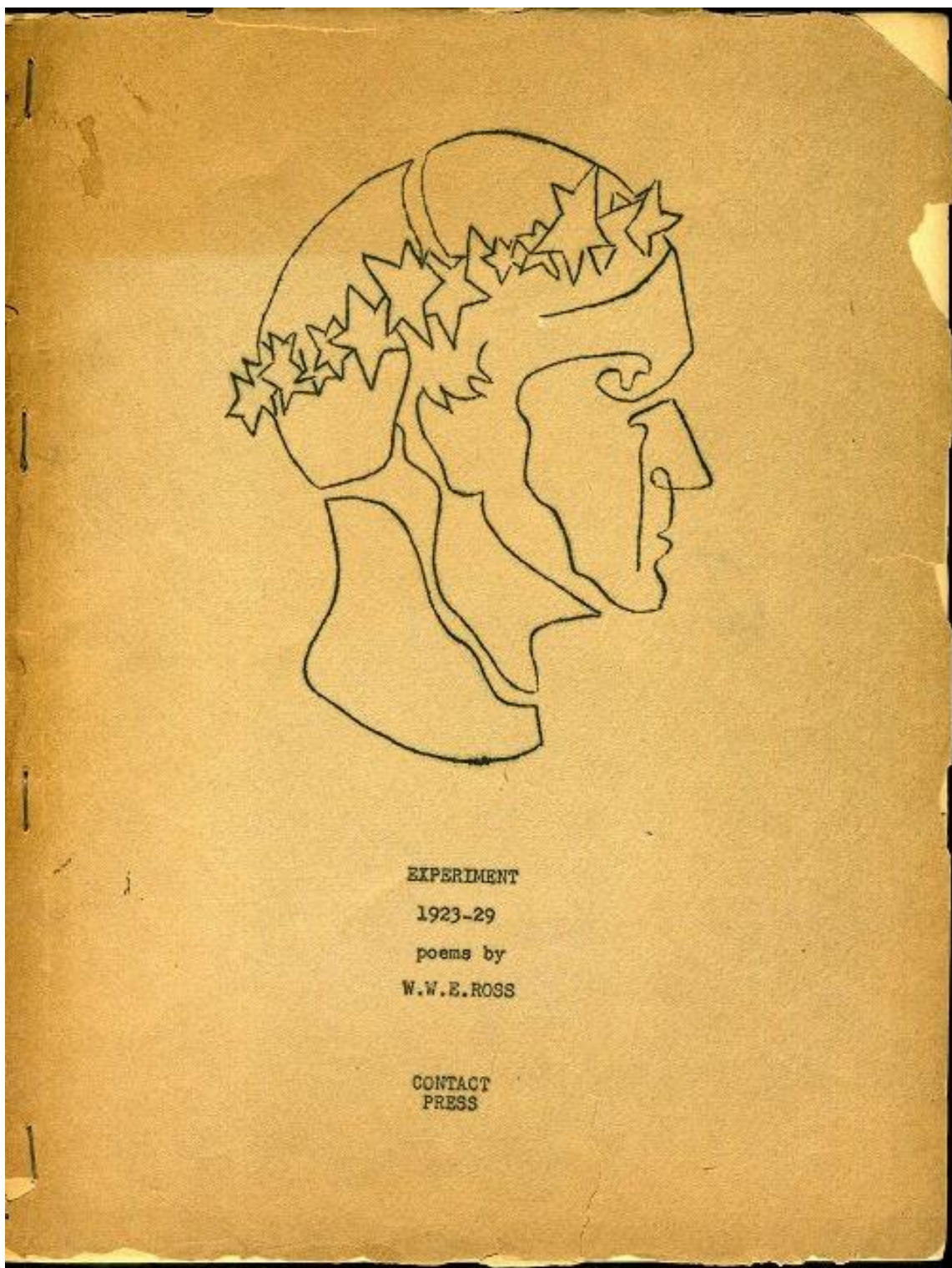


Fig. 10: Cover, *Experiment: 1923-1929*, by W.W.E. Ross. Toronto: Contact Press, 1956. Source: David Mason Books, *Antiquarian Booksellers' Association of Canada*.

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LIST NO. 93-7

1. CURVD H&Z Collection. This collection includes all series issued by the press: 1Cent (early issues poemz a penny); Card (early issues poemcard and postpoetics); cloneclone; Hangnail (early issue broadside); Industrial Sabotage; Sticky Lights; Systems Retrieval; Toybox; th wrecking ballzark. Also present are the Curvd H&Z publications given a Curvd H&Z number but not part of any of the above series.

With the exception of the first 14 titles (a preliminary series) of which only one title is present, this is a complete collection of Curvd H&Z publications from its beginning in 1979 to the present. The collection consists of more than 550 titles, an additional 56 variants and a number of pieces of ephemera.

The collection is housed in protective envelopes in 15 binders, several filing boxes and a flat package. The collection is accompanied by a 192 page descriptive catalogue with indexes prepared by David UU. In fine condition \$ 3,600.00

Curvd H&Z is a literary small press begun in 1979 by poet jw curry who is its editor, publisher and printer. Curvd H&Z provides a forum for experimental poetry and has become the foremost publisher in Canada of visual and concrete poetry. The format varies from very small to regular size broadsides and leaflets to pamphlets and books up to 35 pages in length. Most of the titles were printed in ink with moveable type rubber hand stamps. Other methods of production include photocopy, serigraph, holograph, typewriter and offset. Many of the titles were printed in editions of fewer than 100 copies. The usual edition size of recent titles has been 100 to 150 copies.

Some of the Curvd H&Z titles are co-publications with other small presses including Proper Tales Press, Pangen Subway Ritual, Guardian Angel, Utopic Furnace Press, Scenario Press, Serif of Nottingham, Nietzsche's Brolly, Silver Birch Press, Approach 137 and fingerprinting inkoperated.

Writers published by Curvd H&Z include Canadians David Aylward, bp Nichol, jw curry, Steve McCaffery, David UU, Paul Dutton, Victor Coleman, George Swede, Gerry Gilbert, Doug Fetherling, Nelson Ball, Judith Copithorne, Peggy Lefler, bill bissett, Brian Dedora, Steven Smith, Nick Drumbolis, Stuart Ross, Richard Truhlar, Shant Basmajian, Mark Laba, LeRoy Gorman, Lillian Necakov, Michael Dean, Marshall Hryciuk, Greg Evason, Nicholas Power, Wharton Hood, damian lopes, Gustave Morin, Gerry Shikatani, Beth Jankola, Jasmine Silverwind, Beverley Daurio, Don Daurio, Gary Barwin, Daniel f. Bradley, Michael Dudley, John Riddell, Clint Burnham, Barry McKinnon, Hart Broudy, and Brian David Johnston. Non-Canadian writers include Jiri Valoch, Karl Kempton, Bob Grumman, Tuli Kupferberg, Richard Kostelanetz, d.a. levy, Dom Sylvester Houedard, Dave Cunliffe and P.C. Fencott.

2. BLEW OINTMENT PRESS, vol. 3, no. 1, Nov. 1965. Edited by Bill Bissett. Vancouver. Contributors include Milton Acorn, Margaret Avison, bill bissett, Judith Copithorne, Dorothy Livesay, Sam Perry, bp Nichol, David Cull, Pat Lane, Al Neil, John Newlove and many others. Very good 50.00

Fig. 11: Front, *List 93-7*. Paris: Nelson Ball, Bookseller, 1993.

3. BLEW OINTMENT PRESS, vol. 4, no. 1 [1966]. Vancouver. Contributors include bill bissett, bp Nichol, Maxine Gadd, Pat Lane, Judith Copithorne, Jamie Reid, Pat Lowther, Milton Acorn and others. Very good 40.00
4. BLEW OINTMENT PRESS, vol. 5, no. 1, Jan. 1967. Vancouver. Contributors include Pierre Coupey, Milton Acorn, Judith Copithorne, David Philips, bp Nichol, Maxine Gadd, Earle Birney, Pat Lane, Gerry Gilbert, David Cull, Seymour Mayne, bill bissett, Pat Lowther, David Aylward, Margaret Avison, Jamie Reid, David W. Harris and many others. Very good 50.00
5. BLEW OINTMENT PRESS, vol. 9, no. 1, June 1967. Vancouver. Contributors include John Newlove, Wayne Clifford, Gwen MacEwen, bill bissett, Lionel Kearns, bp Nichol, David W. Harris, Pat Lowther, Gerry Gilbert, Judith Copithorne and others. Two short tears in front cover otherwise very good 50.00
6. GANGLIA, no. 1. Toronto. Edited by David Aylward and bp Nichol. Contributors include Margaret Avison, David Aylward, bill bissett, George Bowering, bp Nichol, Judy Copithorne, David Phillips and others. Fine 40.00
7. LANE (R. S.) THE 1962 POEMS. Issued as GANGLIA, no. 2. Toronto, Nov. 1965. Introduction by George Bowering. Fine 50.00
8. GANGLIA, no. 3. Toronto. Jan. 31, 1966. Contributors include bp Nichol, James Alexander, David Aylward, George Bowering, Martina Clinton, Victor Coleman, Judy Copithorne, Pat Lowther, Pat Lane and others. Features Nichol's "Captain Poetry" poems. Fine 40.00
9. GANGLIA, no. 5. Toronto. Contributors include Margaret Avison, Nelson Ball, Douglas Barbour, Wayne Clifford, Judy Copithorne, bp Nichol, John Riddell and others. Fine 35.00
10. GANGLIA, no. 7, March 1967. Toronto. This issue entitled FOUR: Douglas Barbour, Bill Bissett, Wayne Clifford, Dave Cull. Fine 35.00
11. GRONK, no. 3, March 1967. Toronto. Edited by David Aylward, David W. Harris, bp Nichol and Rah Smith. Contributors include bp Nichol, David Harris, David McFadden, bill bissett and others. Fine 35.00
12. GRONK, no. 4, April 1967. Toronto. Contributors include David Aylward and bill bissett. Fine 35.00
13. IS FOUR [no. 4]. Edited by Victor Coleman. Twelve leaflets and broadsides + colophon on small card in printed envelope. Contributors are Stephen Jonas, David Federman, Anselm Hollo, Lynne Knight, Bill Hutton, Besmir Brigham, Jonathan Greene, David McFadden, bill bissett, Robin Eichele, Scott Davis and David Rosenberg. Contents fine in fair to good envelope. Rare 100.00
14. NICHOL (bp) RUTH. Issued as LUV (for poems) # 5. Toronto, Fleve Press, 1967. 8 leaves. Printed front cover. Publisher's copy, not so marked. Near fine 100.00

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Fig. 12: Back, *List 93-7*. Paris: Nelson Ball, Bookseller, 1993.



CANADIAN LITERATURE

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POETRY

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|--|---------|
| 1. BALL, Nelson. Evidence: Canadian Winter. (Santa Barbara, 1969). A Broadsheet from Unicorn Folio, Series 3, No. 1. Illus. by Janeen Vanden Berg. Signed by the author on verso. Fine.  | \$ 4.00 |
| 2. _____ Room Of Clocks. Kitchener, Weed/Flower Press, 1965. First Edition. First WFP publication. Wrappers. Fine. Out of print.   | 7.50    |
| 3. BISSETT, Bill. Of Th Land Divine Service. Toronto, Weed/Flower Press, 1968. One of 300 copies. Wrappers. Fine. Out of print.  | 6.00    |
| 4. BURGESS, Ivan. Flowers Of Grave Concern. (Toronto, Cameron Press, 1966). Wrappers. Fine.  | 3.00    |
| 5. COLEMAN, Victor. Light Verse. (Toronto) Coach House Press, 1969. Signed by the author. One page of text has margin tear else a fine copy. Wrappers.   | 4.50    |
| 6. DICKIE, Reid. Prism Prisons. (Shoal Lake, 1970) Wrappers. Fine.   | 2.50    |
| 7. EVERSON, R. G. The Dark Is Not So Dark. Drawings by Colin Haworth. (Montreal, 1969) Wrappers.   | 2.00    |
| 8. FINCH, Robert. Poems. Toronto, 1946. Wrappers.  | 2.00    |
| 9. GANGLIA PRESS (bp Nichol's press)   |         |
| A. Ganglia 5 1/2 Mini Mimeo Series. Toronto, 1968-70. Small format leaflets and pamphlets. Some of them have been bound in card covers by the previous owner. Most are concrete poetry. The following items from the series are available. |         |
| A.1. AYLWARD, David. Theory Of Mailing. (No. 8)  | 1.50    |
| A.2. BALL, Nelson. Metamorphosis. (No. 38)   | 2.00    |
| A.3. BISSETT, Bill. Bissett/67. (no. 10)   | 2.00    |
| A.4. COLEMAN, Victor. Early Con. (No. 2)   | 2.00    |
| A.5. _____ Interruption #1. (no. 6)  | 2.00    |
| A.6. (HARRIS, David W) Electric Pussyfoot by david uu. (No. 15)  | 1.50    |
| A.7. MC CARTHY, Cavan. Soundstruct. (No. 16)   | 2.00    |
| A.8. NICHOL, bp. The Complete Works. (No. 5)   | 3.00    |
| A.9. _____ A New Calendar. (No. 11)  | 3.00    |
| A.10. _____ Third Fragment From A Poem Continually In The Process Of Being Written. (No. 18)   | 3.00    |
| A.11. WADE, Seth. Poem. (No. 9)  | 1.00    |
| A.12. WAGNER, D. R. Ther Dreame Sandwich. Poems Maybe Prose. (No. 3)   | 2.00    |
| B. Gronk, Toronto, 1968-70.  |         |
| B. 1. ALL AMERICAN ISSUE (Series 3, No. 2)   | 3.00    |
| B. 2. AYLWARD, David, The War Against The Asps. (Series 4, No. 4) Wrappers.  | 3.00    |
| B. 3. BALL; Nelson. Force Movements. (Series 3, No. 4) One of 235 copies. Wrappers.  | 3.00    |
| B. 4. BIRNEY, Earle. Phomes, Jukollages, And Other Stunzas. (Series 4, No. 3) One of 400 copies. Sheets and booklets in envelope. Envelope a bit discoloured otherwise fine.   | 10.00   |
| B. 5. GILBERT, Gerry. Quote. New York, July 1965. (Series 3, No. 1) One of 300 copies. Small sheets in envelope.   | 3.00    |
| B. 6. MC CAY, Winsor. The Magic Of Winsor McCay. (Series 2, No. 7-8) (Comic World No. 3) Reprints of Winsor McCay Comic Strips. (1906-2) from the private collection of bp Nichol  | 4.00    |

Fig. 13: Cover/First Page, *List No. 1: Canadian Literature*. Toronto: William Nelson Books, 1972.

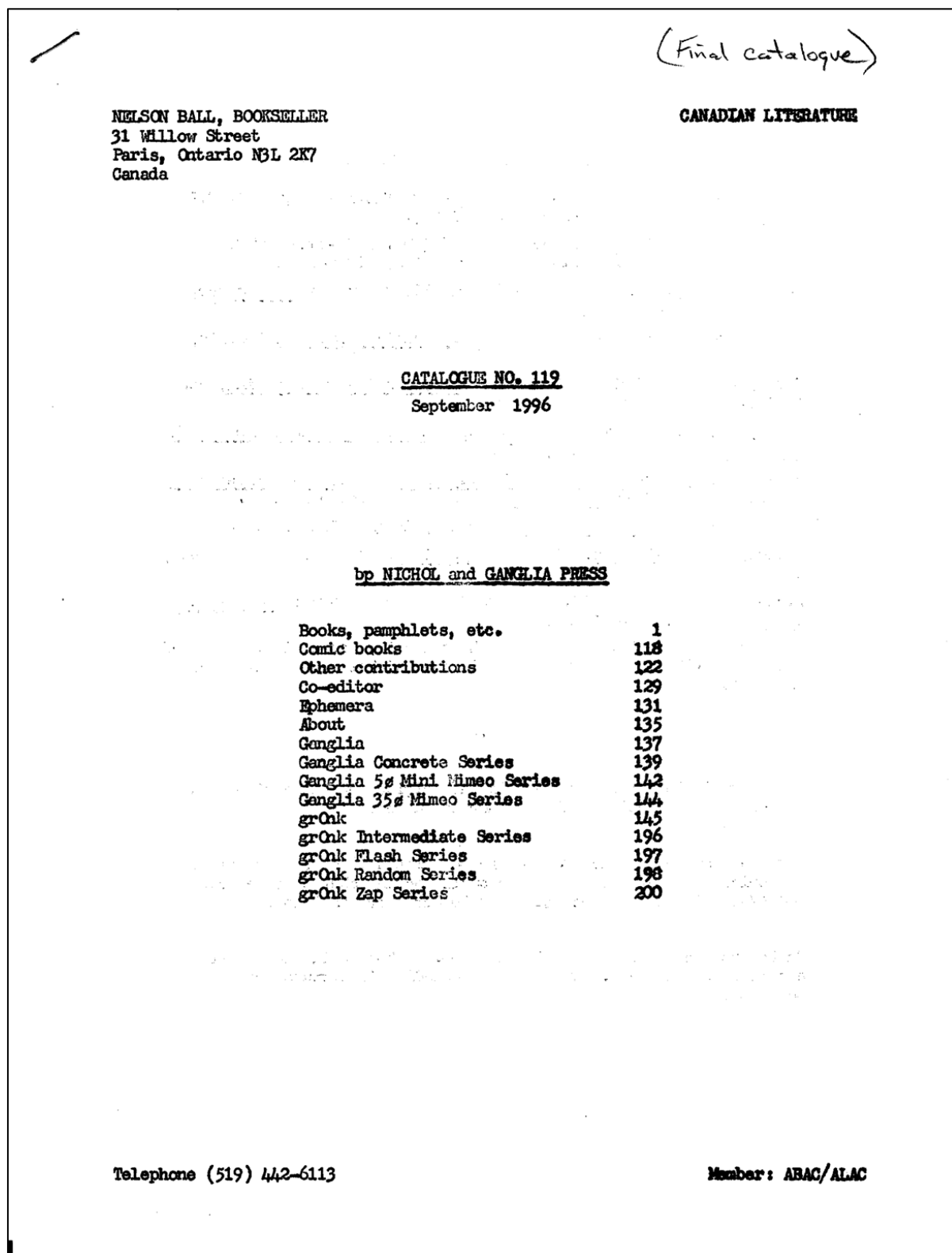



Fig. 14: Cover, *List 119*. Paris: Nelson Ball, Bookseller, 1996.



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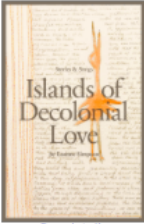
**SIMPSON, Leanne [Ed]: Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations**

SIMPSON, Leanne [Ed]. *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2008. First Edition. 216x141mm. Trade Paperback. New. 232pp. This remarkable collection of essays by leading Indigenous scholars focuses on the themes of freedom, liberation and Indigenous resurgence as they relate to the land. They analyze treaties, political culture, governance, environmental issues, economy, and radical social movements from an anti-colonial Indigenous perspective in a Canadian context. Editor Leanne Simpson (Nishnaabekwe) has solicited Indigenous writers that place Indigenous freedom as their highest political goal, while turning to the knowledge, traditions, and culture of specific Indigenous nations to achieve that goal. The authors offer frank and political analysis and commentary of the kind not normally found in mainstream books, journals, and magazines.

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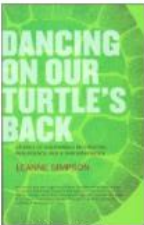
**SIMPSON, Leanne: Islands of Decolonial Love**

SIMPSON, Leanne. *Islands of Decolonial Love*. Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2013. First Edition. 214x140mm. Trade Paperback. New. 143pp. In her debut collection of short stories, *Islands of Decolonial Love*, renowned writer and activist Leanne Simpson vividly explores the lives of contemporary Indigenous Peoples and communities, especially those of her own Nishnaabeg nation. Found on reserves, in cities and small towns, in bars and curling rinks, canoes and community centres, doctors offices and pickup trucks, Simpson's characters confront the often heartbreaking challenge of pairing the desire to live loving and observant lives with a constant struggle to simply survive the historical and ongoing injustices of racism and colonialism. Told with voices that are rarely recorded but need to be heard, and incorporating the language and history of her people, Leanne Simpson's *Islands of Decolonial Love* is a profound, important, and beautiful book of fiction.

---

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**SIMPSON, Leanne: Dancing on Our Turtle's Back**

SIMPSON, Leanne. *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2011. First Edition. 216x141mm. Trade Paperback. New. 164pp. Many promote Reconciliation as a "new" way for Canada to relate to Indigenous Peoples. In *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence* activist, editor, and educator Leanne Simpson asserts reconciliation must be grounded in political resurgence and must support the regeneration of Indigenous languages, oral cultures, and traditions of governance. Simpson explores philosophies and pathways of regeneration, resurgence, and a new emergence through the Nishnaabeg language, Creation Stories, walks with Elders and children, celebrations and protests, and meditations on these experiences. She stresses the importance of illuminating Indigenous intellectual traditions to transform their relationship to the Canadian state. Challenging and original, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back* provides a valuable new perspective on the struggles of Indigenous Peoples. \$19.95

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Fig. 15: Screenshot, *Apollinaire's Bookshoppe*, Homepage. January 2017.

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