

Small Press Publishing

What is an author? What is a book?

What is publication?

Importantly, the module also engages the history and theory of publishing. Which is why significant parts of your assessment will include a midterm essay on some aspect of the history of small press publishing and a written component to the small press project that establishes the historical and theoretical bases of your project.

Poets of The Ghost Town is a magazine that stipulates itself as an honest account of the anticipation, or lack thereof, for Coventry's 2021 City of Culture status. In the First edition [pictured on the right], the groundwork is laid for a magazine which recognizes that the funding of the programme is “desperately needed” (5) whilst also critiquing the fact that “Libraries are shutting; the homeless [are] lining the streets; ... [there is a] rise of knife crime” (5). Importantly it claims to not be “an exercise in cynicism ... [as] we celebrate the city, but we celebrate the truth of it” (6), speaking to a concern that the programme will shy away from the some of the issues in the city. Indeed, former radical Coventry MP Dave Nellist's initial reaction was to say “Hopefully, at least 50% of the events can be designed, developed and grown within the city itself” (Qtd, Coventry Socialists). As the Editor of the magazine, and as a Coventry local, I felt it was important to lay down some historical marker that was cultural and was a symbol of Coventry, but which was not ignoring the rampant issues of the city. It is as much a political magazine as a poetic one and the different voices across all four of the poets featured [the edition was slim to save on costs] reflect the statements made in the editor's introduction. On completion of the magazine I only wish I could have included more poets to represent the diversity of Coventry's voices, however as a magazine presenting the mood of a city towards it's supplicated one, it succeeds.



Figure 1: Cover Design for *Poets of The Ghost Town*.

Speaking for the Caribbean: The role of independence in London's small press during the 1950s

Caribbean press and its literature have struggled to establish themselves in mainstream British culture both in spite of and because of their colonial legacy. Caribbean publishing has tended to be strongly politicised and short-lived. Because it is produced “in exile,” it faces additional barriers of economic viability, cultural receptiveness and racial prejudice. Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite recalls of his time as a student: “I had set sail for Cambridge under the impression, I suppose, that my Barbados Scholarship and the entry to Pembroke had made me a Citizen of the World ... [But when I graduated] found that no one wanted to offer me, Citizen of the World, a bread but instead wanted to know why I didn't want to ... go back where you really come from; the tourist brochure, the coconut.” (24, 26) Although Caribbean press has continued to survive on the margins, its effect is by no means marginal and it is capable on having a powerful impact on the peoples whom it

The Influence of Small Press Publishing on French Surrealism

Word Count: 1946

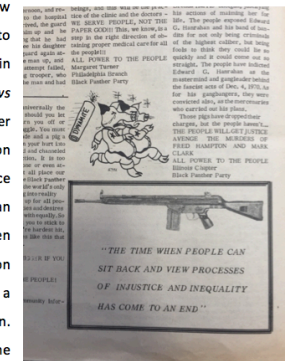
French surrealism, a product of post war ideology and ‘freedom of thought’, sprung from the experiments of Andre Breton and his band of artist-author-poets. The ‘automatic writing’ crafted by these writers lent itself handily to the creation of manifestos, pamphlets, and numerous other forms of creative publishing. Rather than focus on the artistic side of publishing, however, these surrealists focussed on the freedom of production, looking to avoid the ‘laborious processes of painting drawing and sculpting... at odds with the spontaneity of uninhibited expression.’¹ It was this lack of attention to form and structure that drove the surrealists, however in their publishing one can see that the movement itself was built around the capacity of the individual, of the movement, to craft, form and publish their own works. The question, however, is whether the small press works of the early surrealists built the foundation on which they started a literary movement, or rather was it the textual and literary quality that caused the movement to become so important. Had the surrealists not been so specific and insular in their publications, would they have still maintained their literary integrity?

Form and style in the NAACP's *The Crisis*

In ‘Little Magazines and Modernisms: New Approaches’, Churchill underlines Churchill and Mckible's definition of little magazines as “non-commercial enterprises founded by individuals or small groups intent on publishing the experimental works or radical opinions of untried, unpopular or under-represented writers. Defying mainstream tastes and conventions, some magazines aim to uphold higher artistic and intellectual standard than their commercial counterparts, whilst others seek to challenge conventional political wisdom and practice’ (Little Magazines)” (p.6). According to this definition, then, little magazines provide a counter to the mainstream print culture, and can be seen as a type of protest publication used to shape or alter public opinion.

Re-evaluation of The Black Panther Party's fight for equality throughout its small press

‘The time when people can sit back and view processes of injustice and inequality has come to an end’ were the words that you could read in the *The Black Panther Black Community News Service's* newspapers. The Black Panther Movement Party, founded in 1966 by Newton and Seale, was fighting against the violence committed by the police on the Black American community to obtain equal rights between races. However, fighting the society's oppression should apply for all discrimination to maintain a reliable position as a community organization. Thus, it could be interesting to focus on the gender relations within the movement and specifically in the newspaper's production. Knowing that 70%¹ of the organization was female members we could assume that women are highly represented in this movement. Nonetheless, while going through the newspapers we do not resent it. We can therefore ask ourselves to what extent goes the role of women within the paper.



Theoretical questions:

What is a book? What is an author?

What is publication?

Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library”

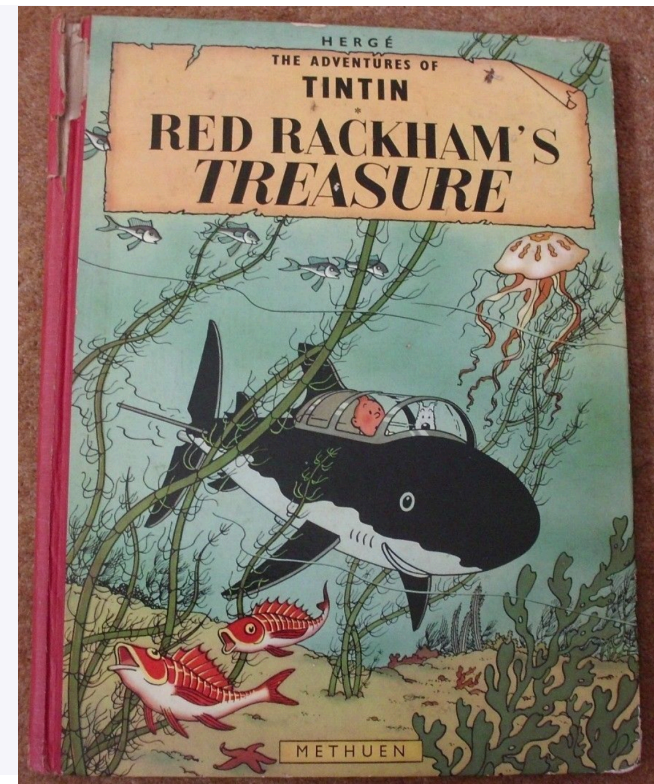
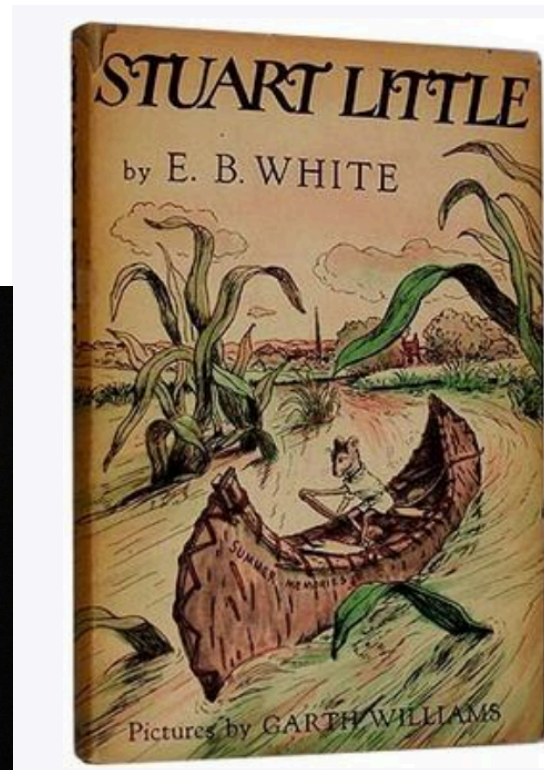
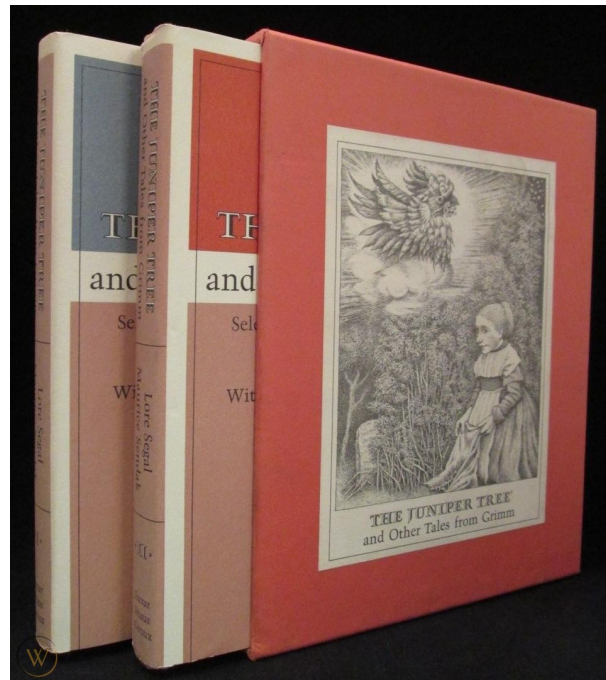


Coming to life inside of books:

“a relationship to objects which does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value—but studies and loves them as the scene, the stage, of their fate.”

Can you think of a book that changed your life? Is there a fetish book you keep safe and/or bring with you when you leave home for extended periods of time? Have you had the experience of returning to a lost period of your life merely by opening the covers of a book?

Just a few of my favorite children's books – they have traveled with me ever since.



Take a moment to think of a book from your past that you would like to hold in your hands right now, write down its details—author, title—and describe it from memory.

“Writers are really people who write books not because they are poor, but because they are dissatisfied with the books they could buy but do not like.”

“The purchasing done by a book collector has very little in common with that done in a bookshop by a student getting a textbook, a man of the world buying a present for his lady, or a businessman intending to while away the next train journey.”

“Dates, place names, formats, previous owners, bindings, and the like: all these details must tell him something – not as dry, isolated facts, but as a harmonious whole; from the quality and intensity of this harmony he must be able to recognize whether a book is for him or not.”

“There is no living library that does not harbour a number of booklike creations from fringe areas.”

“for a collector—and I mean a real collector, a collector as he ought to be—ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them.”

On the one hand, a book communicates authority – something underwritten by public and perhaps official recognition. Having attained a certain standard – as when we say a text is “publishable.”

On the other hand, a book seems rooted in a primary gesture of inscription, whose form and parameters are limited only by the human imagination and by the supporting material – originally, perhaps, trees.

BOOK

Old English *bōc* (originally also ‘a document or charter’), *bōcian* ‘to grant by charter’, of Germanic origin; related to Dutch *boek* and German *Buch*, and probably to beech (on which runes were carved). (OED)

Roland Barthes, “Death of the Author”



In "Death of the Author," Roland Barthes went as far as to suggest that literature is not made of authors but of books, and perhaps not even of books but of texts.

Authorship is a social relation embedded in the material culture of publication, that is to say, in a culture mediated by material and historical contingency. The destabilized circulation of meaning through texts might be stabilized somewhat, Benjamin seems to suggest, in the material form of the book. Authors are made by books, not the other way around.

And books are made by publishing. Without
publication, there is no author.

Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?”



An author, Foucault proposes, is a social “function,” the “author function,” one that, amongst other traits, is linked to “the juridical and institutional system that encompasses, determines, and articulates the universe of discourses.” Publication is the formation of this universe of discourse, in and through a “public.” Just as authors are made by books, not the other way around, books are made by a public, by publishing.

But how does this “public” sphere emerge? Is it just “out there,” waiting to receive authors? Or do authorship and publication in a sense make the public sphere?

Foucault again:

“Perhaps it is time to study discourses not only in terms of their expressive value or formal transformations but according to their modes of existence. The modes of circulation, valorization, attribution, and appropriation of discourses vary with each culture and are modified within each.”

Modes of (material print) production, too, one might add.

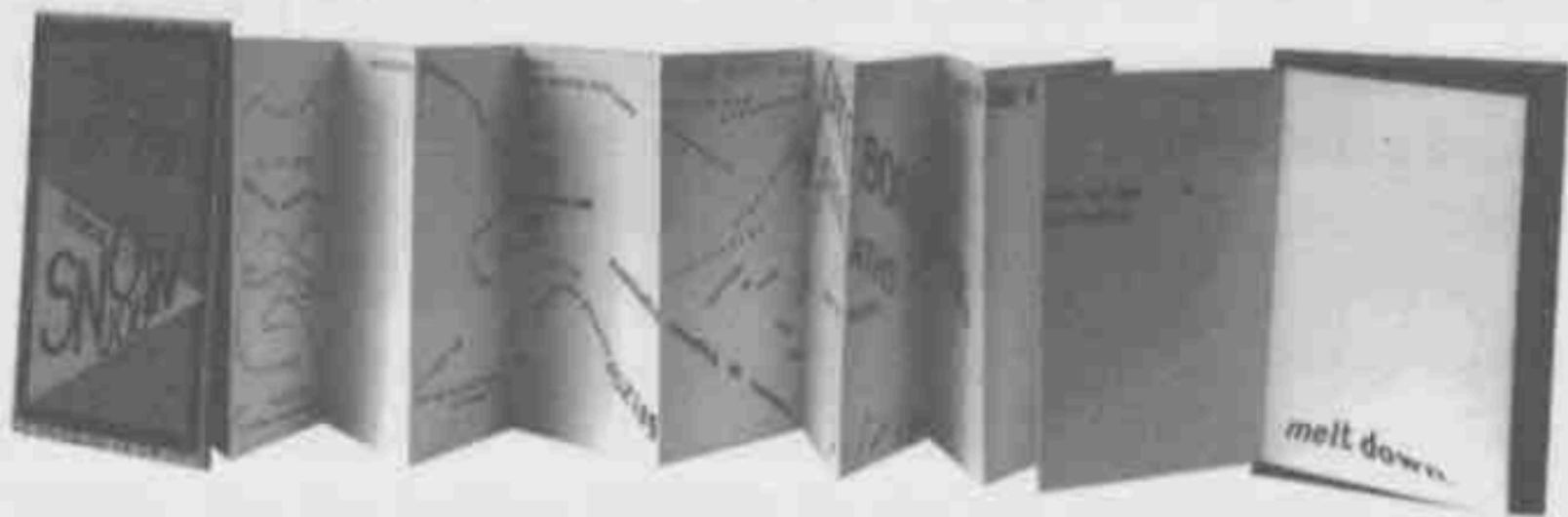
In Week 2 we'll look more closely at the role of small press publishing, in the "age of pamphlets," and the emergence of publishers, in the creation of a public and of what we now take for granted, a sphere of "public opinion." In some senses this early modern era also features the emergence of the author as a figure.

A book is tactile and three-dimensional:

“The best approach to gain a sense of the book is to become acquainted with the book as physical object. Pick up a book, hold it. Feel it. Look at it, examine it, not routinely or mechanically by habit”

— Keith A. Smith

“All [books] are a set of sheets (paper, wood, ivory, cloth, etc.) strung or bound together. The type of book is determined by how it is bound: at one or two points, along one or more edges.” (Smith)



Keith Smith, *Snow Job*, Book 115, 1986: an oriental fold book, edition of 300. Poem of a spring thaw is really speaking about a nuclear meltdown. 16 x 11.5 x 2 cm.

“Does a book have to be bound? If it weren’t, it would be a portfolio or a stack. Is a stack an unbound book?”

The oriental fold book is created by folding a long sheet of paper alternately back and forth on itself. There is no sewing or gluing.

Is a scroll a book?

Someone takes a large sheet of blank paper, wads it up, then throws it in a kitchen trash compactor. It is then compressed flat. The paper has been ‘folded’ by a machine. Is it then an oriental fold book, or is it trash?”

(Smith)



giving

cris cheek, “pressing matters”



standing in

“It depends upon intention. If that person declares it a book, it *is* a book! If they do not, it is not. Definitions are not ageless laws, but current understanding. They grow with usage through insight and error.”

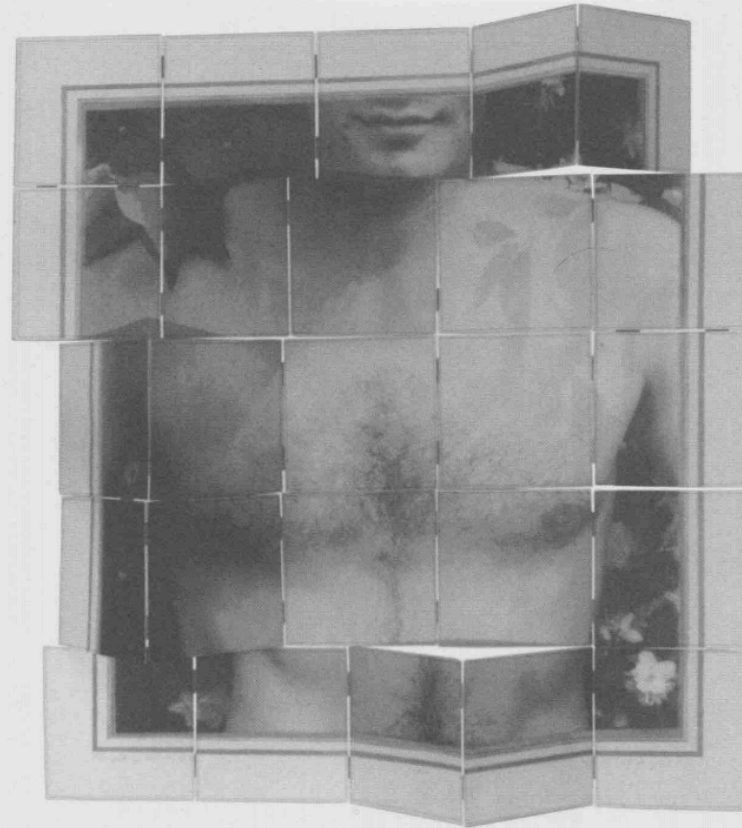
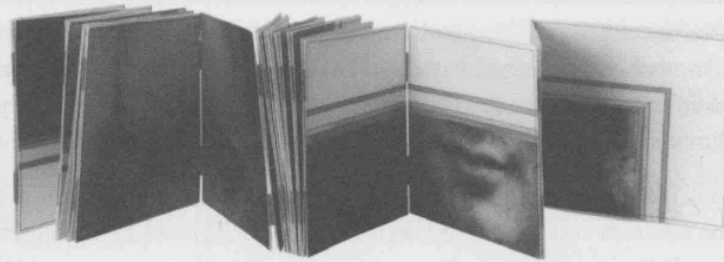
(Smith)

“If a broadside is folded into quarter and then eighths,
is it then a book instead of a poster?”

Definitions are not an end, but a springboard.”

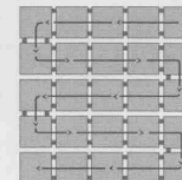
(Smith)

“Boustrophedon” or Snake Format



Keith Smith, *Book 141*, 1989. This fold book does not open to a straight line, but folds across a row, then down, then reverses back across and down in a snake fashion. The format was devised by Scott McCarney, who originally called it *bostrophedon* (as the ox plows). Now he refers to it as the *Snake Format*.

19 x 19 x 5 cm. Opens to 96 cm. square.



“A book is a physical object. The hand-held book demands touching. Effort must be taken to view it.

The book, as object, is intimate, it insists on a one-to-one confrontation: the bookmaker and viewer.

A mass produced book with its far reaching capabilities still remains a one to one experience.”

(Smith)

“Binding should not be an afterthought, or no thought.

If I structure a book as a loop, because it contains cyclical ideas, the fan is an appropriate type of book because it opens with circular movement, to a circular form.

The type of a book cannot be arbitrarily chosen and the contents stuck into it. The binding and display will alter the contents and one type of book will allow a better development of an idea than another.”

(Smith)

“TURNING THE PAGE

It is a physical movement

Turning the pages reveals the order of viewing

It places the book into time

The book is a single experience, a compound picture of the many separate sheets . . .

Turning the pages suggests the rate of turning. Trying to make every picture equally strong would be like reading with no inflection.”

(Smith)

A book is a “compound picture,” experienced over time.
The total is more than the sum of its parts.