

ALBUM
EXACT
CHANGE

Album
Exact Change

20 YEARS OF PUBLISHING



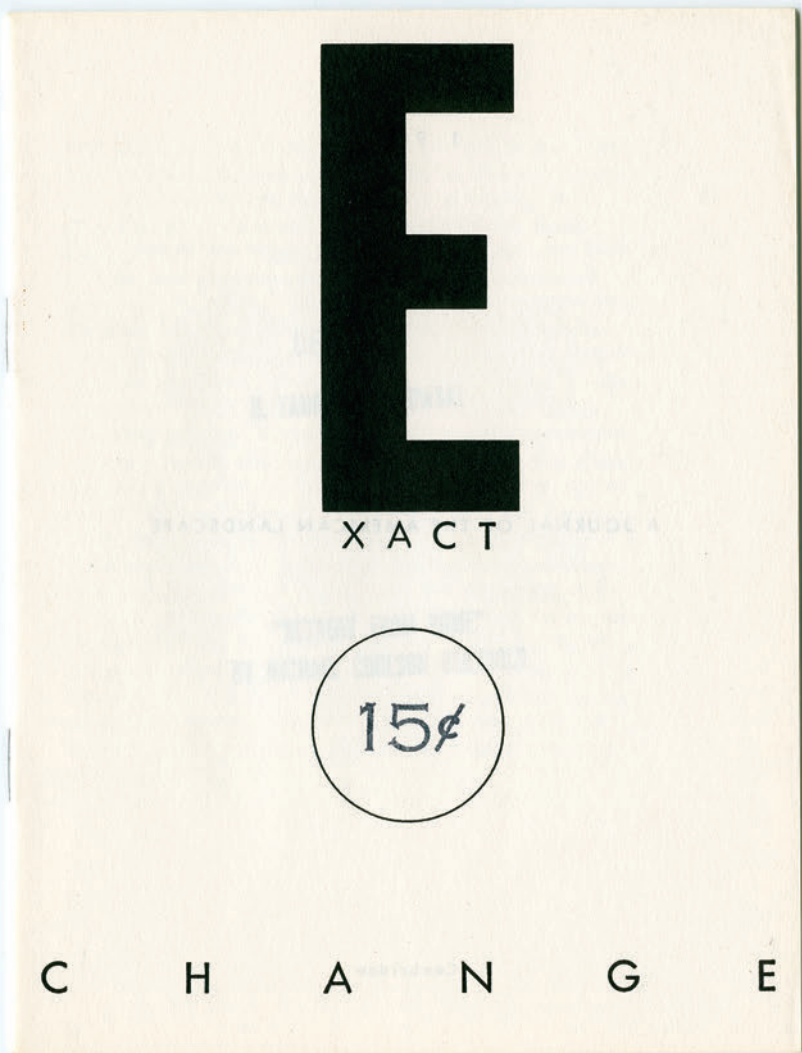
AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY

BY DAMON KRUKOWSKI

& NAOMI YANG

E

EXACT CHANGE



WE STARTED MAKING BOOKS before we had a publishing house, just as we started touring before we were in a band. One summer during college, in 1984, we rented a car and wandered around the American south and midwest together. We're both native New Yorkers, raised in the middle of Manhattan, so everything we saw seemed at once extraordinarily banal, and thrillingly exotic. Naomi took photos, for herself and also for one of her professors, an architectural historian who gave her a list of slides he needed for lecture. Damon took note.

Back at school, we sat in an art history class on early American modernism, and marveled at the "little magazines" of the 1910s and 20s that the professor showed us: *Broom*, *Contact*, *transition*, 291... These magazines, like the landscape we had wandered through, seemed radically plain. Inspired to make a contribution to the American avant-garde (if that of fifty years previous!), we took the bits of banality we'd documented over the summer, and made a magazine of our own. *Exact Change*, we called it, using a phrase plucked from the urban landscape of our childhood, yet which seemed to capture some of the urgency of those communi- qués from the early part of the century. "Exact" we heard as an imperative: Make change happen!



left: *Exact Change* magazine #1, 1985.

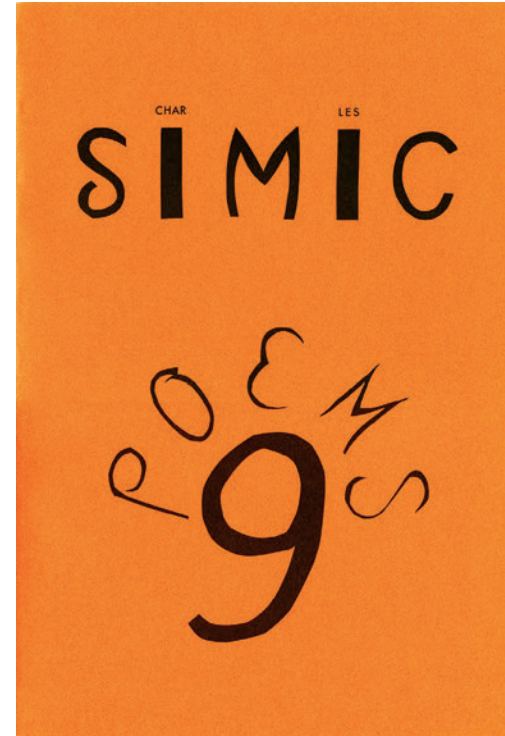
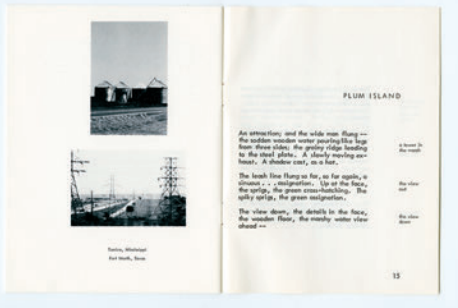
above: Exterior of first office, a loft in Fort Point, Boston, 1991–1999.

We stamped a price on the cover, to complement the title, matching the cost of coffee and pie in *It Happened One Night*. Ordering the custom rubber stamp took us to a wonderfully old New England business, one of so many that we

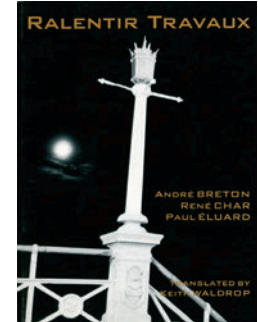
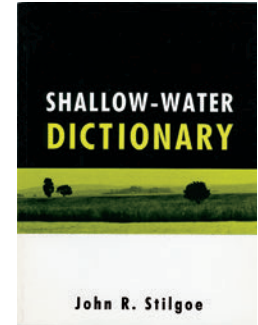
had no idea would soon be extinct. All those typesetters, printers, binders, color separators, sign painters, and stamp makers which we enjoyed visiting in the course of our first projects, have long since disappeared — many of their functions replaced by computers, and their dilapidated brick buildings converted to condos or malls. But what of their expertise? We feel lucky to have been exposed to it, coming of age as we did at the tail end of the analog era.

The finished magazine — there were two numbers in the end — we gave to friends, who would glance at the cover and awkwardly fumble for coins, much to our chagrin (the title and price hadn't been meant as a panhandling device). We also gave copies to our favorite teachers. One — Charles Simic — gave us a book in return. A book to print.

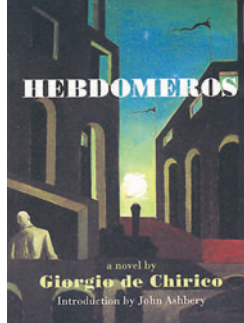
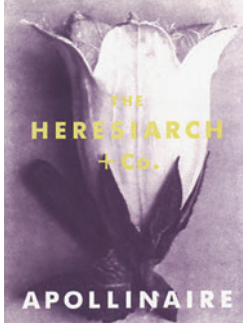
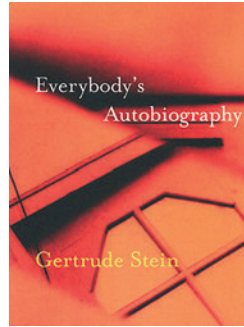
Now what to do? Charles Simic is a great writer. And when a great writer gives you a book to print... you start a publishing house.



left: Interior spreads from *Exact Change* magazine #1, 1985.



above: First *Exact Change* books: chapbook by Charles Simic (1989); essay by John R. Stilgoe (1990); translation by Keith Waldrop of collaborative Surrealist poems (1990).

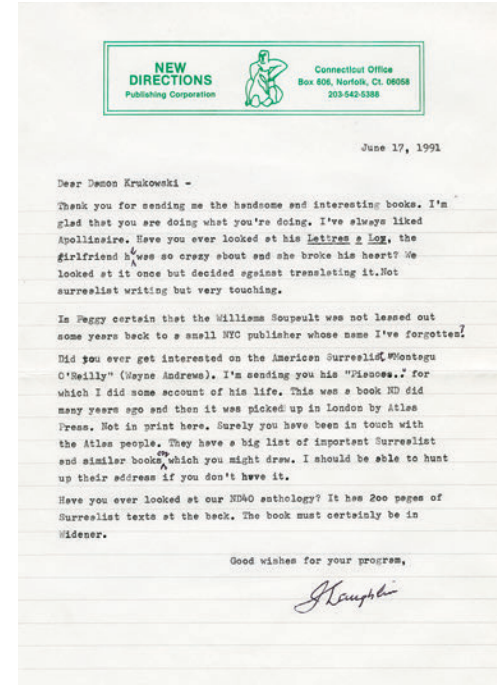


It was 1989, by then we were in graduate school, and we had continued our wanderings but as part of a rock band, Galaxie 500. We knew a lot of small record labels, run by people more or less our age and with no more resources or know-how. Why not do the same, but with books? The name of our little magazine still seemed to fit the spirit of the enterprise. And so Charles Simic's *9 Poems* became the first Exact Change book, edited by Damon Krukowski and designed by Naomi Yang.

Twenty years later, we have gained somewhat in know-how, if not much in resources. Publishing books turns out to be a very different business than pressing records, no matter how similar the motivation may be. Books, we found out quickly, are not only a hallmark of civilization — they are heavy, paper objects, which cost a lot to move around, damage easily, *and are subject to return!*

Live and learn.

By the time the Simic project had sold through its run of several hundred, our band was selling records by the tens of thousands, and we



above: Letter from J. Laughlin, founder of New Directions.

left: Selected Exact Change titles, 1991-1994.

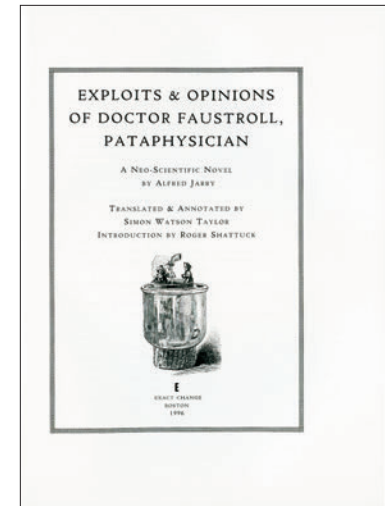
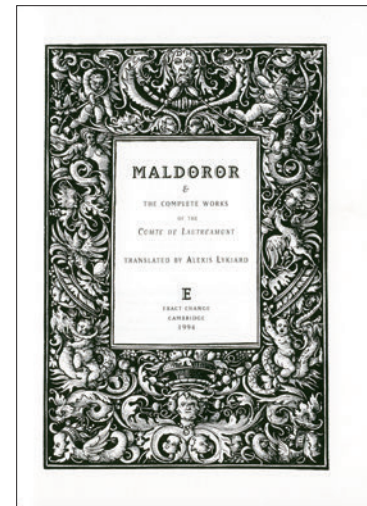
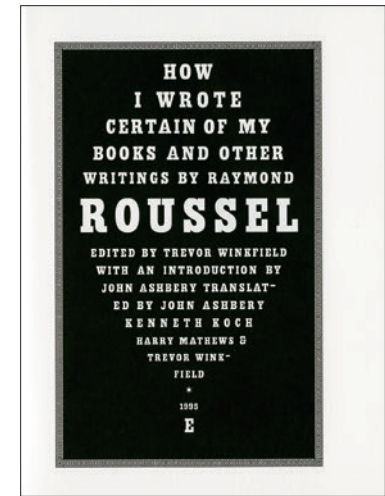
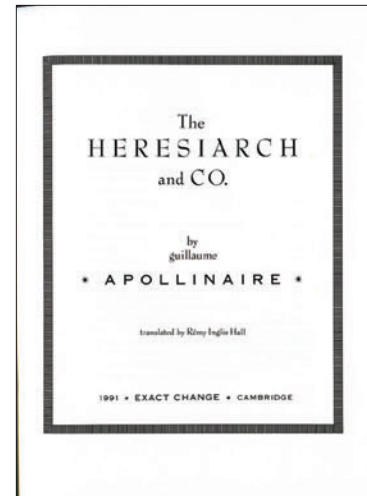


above: Catalogue 1992-93. Illustration by Max Ernst, originally used by Surrealist publisher José Corti.

right: Title pages.

were earning more on the road than we needed for the rent on our student apartment. We marveled at the many wonderful texts we could find in the university library, but not in any bookstore — how could these classics be out of print? A publishing program formed immediately, around our taste for the early modern avant-garde — both American and European — and the lack of interest US publishing houses were showing in the period at that time. Treasures were in need of reprint: Kafka, Apollinaire, Gertrude Stein...

We rented a sixth-floor walk-up overlooking the Gillette razor factory in Fort Point, Boston (“World Shaving Headquarters”), and set up shop. Computers were still out of reach for an operation like ours, so we typed our letters on an IBM Executive, and sent the books out to be typeset by professionals. Damon’s mother, Nancy Harrow, pitched in as copyeditor. (She had honed her skills at William Morrow and Company in the 1950s, where she proofread Earle Stanley Gardner. Gertrude Stein presented a new kind of challenge.)



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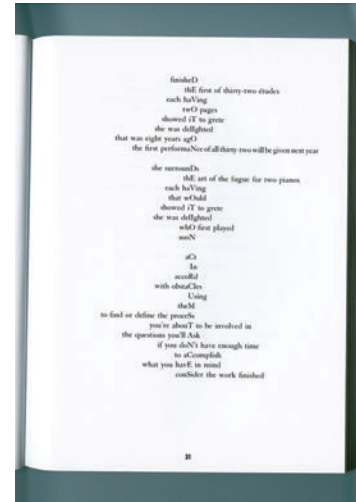
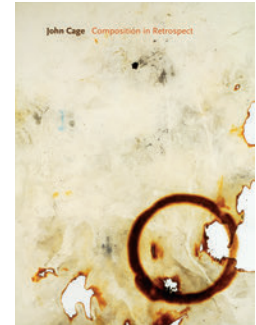
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MESSAGE	REPLY
<p>TO Exchange PO Box 574 Cambridge MA 02139</p> <p>DATE May 19, 1992</p> <p>— <i>Some time ago you asked whether there was some text of mine that I wanted to have printed. I have my idea now: to print as a pamphlet or small book my <u>Composition in Retrospect</u> which is in X <u>together with its recent additions which are in the source texts of I-IV, but not in musical form. Would you want to do this?</u></i></p>	<p>DATE <i>I find it ^{would be} useful because at present I am obliged to Xerox etc. in order to prepare copies of the complete text.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Cordially, John Cage</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">(212) 989 7132</p>
<p>BY Item # NR73 The Drawing Board, Dallas, Texas 75266-0429 © Wheeler Group, Inc., 1992</p> <p style="text-align: center;">INSTRUCTIONS TO SENDER: 1. KEEP YELLOW COPY; 2. SEND WHITE AND PINK COPIES INTACT.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">INSTRUCTIONS TO RECEIVER: 1. WRITE REPLY; 2. DETACH STUB, KEEP PINK COPY, RETURN WHITE COPY TO SENDER.</p>

above: Note-O-Gram from John Cage.

right: Cover and interior page from *Composition in Retrospect*.



We put on our nicest clothes and went to the ABA convention (later to be renamed BEA), where we met other young people in their Sunday best who were starting up complementary businesses — Sharon Gallagher from D.A.P., for US distribution; Claire Thompson from Turnaround, for UK distribution; and Ira Silverberg, for publicity. (These remain our closest publishing allies and friends, though Ira long ago gave up publicity for editorial, and then agenting.) We also met other publishers there for the first time — our idols New Directions, and City Lights; those closer to us in scope, but already well established, like Sun & Moon; and contemporaries in whom we felt we could detect a similar spirit of the time, despite widely different publishing programs, like ReSearch.

As we pursued our own particular program of reprinting classics from the historical avant-garde, we began to come into contact with contemporary artists and poets devoted to these texts. John Ashbery contributed an introduction and translations for a collection of Giorgio de Chirico's writings, *Hebdomeros*; and, together with his friends Trevor Winkfield and Harry Mathews, helped us compile a volume of Raymond Roussel, *How I Wrote Certain of My*



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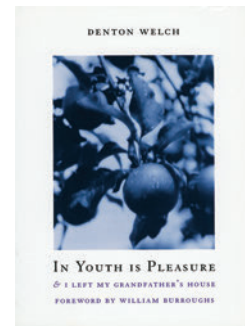
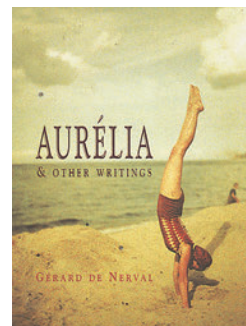
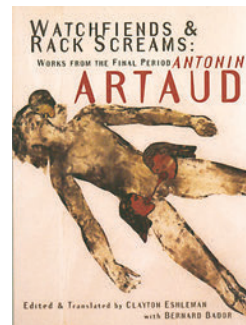
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above: Catalogue 1994-95; announcement of D.A.P. distribution, 1993.

right: Selected Exact Change titles, 1994-1997.

Books. We approached John Cage for a foreword to Gertrude Stein's *Everybody's Autobiography*, knowing of his admiration for her work. He declined, but later surprised and delighted us by offering a text of his own: *Composition in Retrospect*.

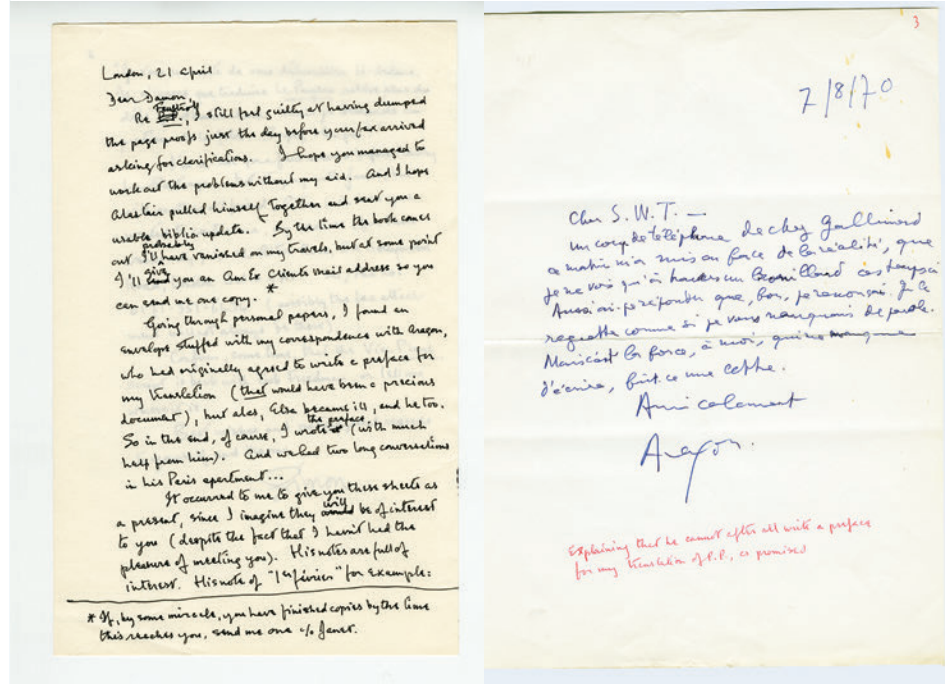
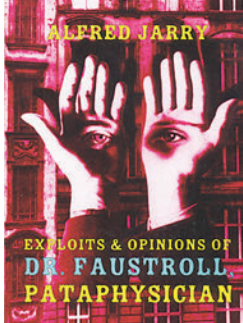
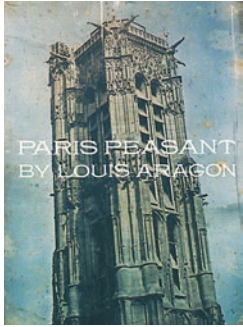
Each book led to the next, in a chain of influence, association, and enthusiasm. Louis Aragon's *Paris Peasant*, translated by the eccentric and learned Simon Watson Taylor (retired BOAC steward, member of the Collège de 'Pataphysique, then-resident of Goa), was soon joined on the list by his annotated translation of Alfred Jarry's *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician* — which led in turn to a reprint of Barbara Wright's vibrant and funny version of Jarry's *The Supermale*. Poet Keith Waldrop shared one of his many enthusiasms in British fiction with us, the darkly comic and philosophical writer Stefan Themerson — publisher of Gaberbocchus Press, friend to Kurt Schwitters during his exile in England — which led to a reprint of our two favorite Themerson novellas, *Bayamus* and *Cardinal Pölättiö*, and to a collection of Schwitters' own texts, edited



and translated by Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris.

In 1995, we decided to honor and expand this network of influence and friendship with an anthology, modeled after annuals published in the past by New Directions, City Lights, and the great Fluxus press Something Else. The *Exact Change Yearbook* was a celebration of our list of historical works, placed alongside adventurous contemporary writing which seemed to us influenced by this same tradition. We asked editor Peter Gizzi to gather the new work, and he rallied over a hundred poets and translators from around the world. Since we knew well how to make a CD, we threw one of those in, too, with a program of poets reading aloud. It was an ambitious project — too ambitious, it turned out, to repeat. Yearbook #2 has remained on the drawing board ever since.

Despite the arduous labors of the *Yearbook*, we increased our output of titles in this period, in no small part thanks to the efforts of a new assistant in our office, Marc Lowenthal. Marc showed up first as a volunteer intern, on his winter break from Bennington College; his input was so immediately valuable we insisted on paying him. In the following years, Marc would work for us whenever his schedule, and our finances, would allow — he ended up doing a bit of everything at Exact Change, from correspondence to copy editing to translation to overseeing a project on his own (Salvador Dalí's *Oui*).



above: Letter from Simon Watson Taylor, presenting Exact Change with letters from Louis Aragon; letter from Aragon to SWT.

left: Exact Change titles translated by Simon Watson Taylor.



NAOMI -
 Thanks for the catalog & letter. No, I didn't know about Exact Change. I'd heard some vague words about you putting out books (I also having a post-6,500 grand- tree?) but my follow-up was lacking. The catalog came good. Only book I've actually read in there's Heddonismo. Being a dad has made severe inroads into my available reading time. Still, send me a small one - maybe Robinson Tavares & I'll see if I can contribute long enough to get my brain working. If so, I'll gladly review it in EE. I'd like to think that there are people out there who appreciate both good music and literature, but I've yet to find many ~~out~~ readers who'd even do it. I'd like something as approachably great as Harry Matthews' Cyarella. Doesn't leave much fuckin' hope for a Louis Aragon → Yo La Tengo continuum does it? Anyway, looking forward to seeing the fruits of your labor.

All the best
 Byron
 Coley P.O. Box 627 Northampton MA 01060

As the press grew, we began to feel the effects — positive and negative — of being a part of the larger world of publishing. These were years in the industry marked by the expansion of the chainstores Barnes & Noble, and Borders, and we watched as one excellent independent store after another closed. Our mailing list shrank; yet our orders increased. Could it be that we were selling more books through these chilly big boxes, than we had through all those wonderful smaller stores we loved to shop at ourselves?

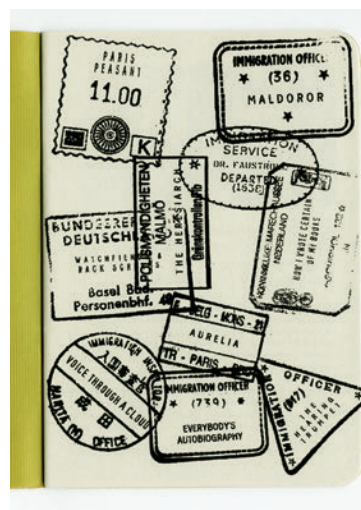
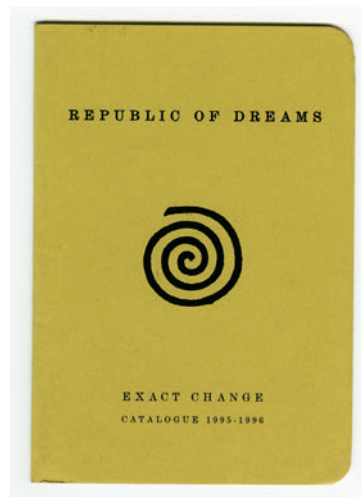
left: Matchbook catalogue for ABA convention.

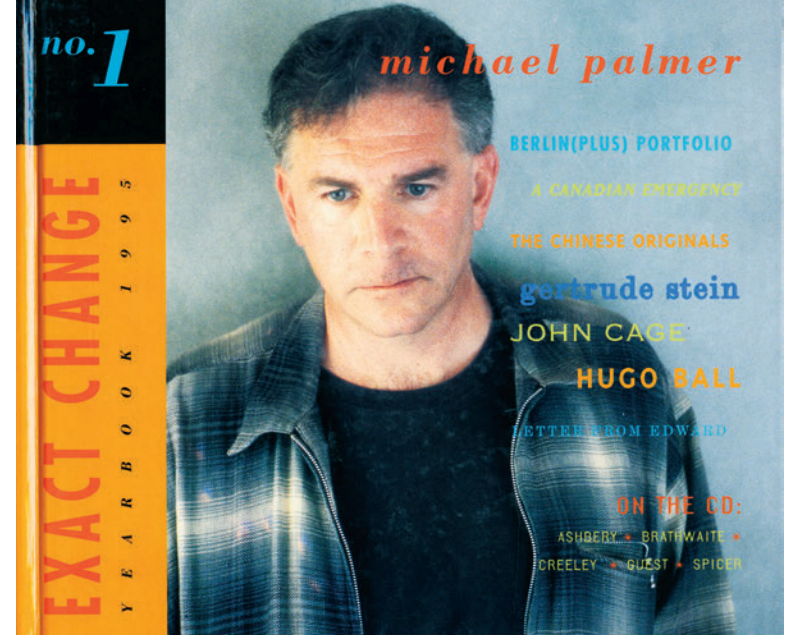
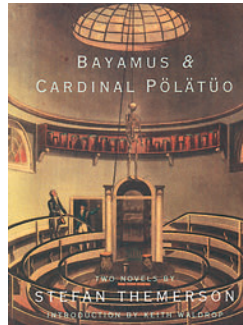
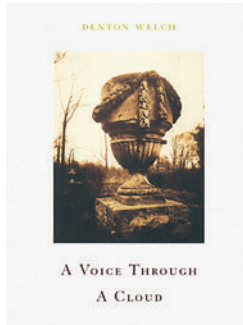
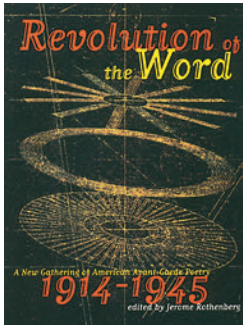
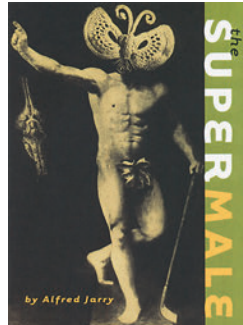
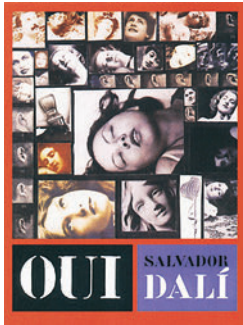
above: Letter from Byron Coley, scholar of rock.

right: Catalogue, 1995-96.

It didn't seem possible, and it wasn't. By mid-2001, the real story of the last several years was all too clear: Barnes & Noble and Borders were now returning stock at such a rate, they sent us more books back that fiscal year than they had ordered. We owed *them* money! We had no choice but to shrink our operation to suit: regretfully, we cancelled titles we had announced, and gave our one employee notice. (Marc would continue his excellent work in publishing, but for MIT Press).

In the meanwhile, our music career had also changed, and likewise to the financial detriment of the press. Our first band, Galaxie 500, had long since broken up; and its record label, Rough Trade, declared bankruptcy without ever having delivered the royalties we had earned on all those record sales. We started recording on our own, as the duo Damon & Naomi, but we knew this project would never be as commercial as the previous one. Nevertheless, music and publishing remain entwined for us, especially as each overseas tour provides us with an opportunity to meet our





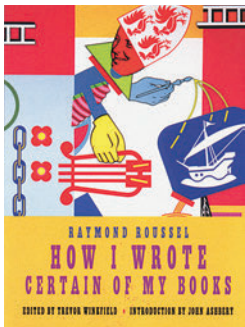
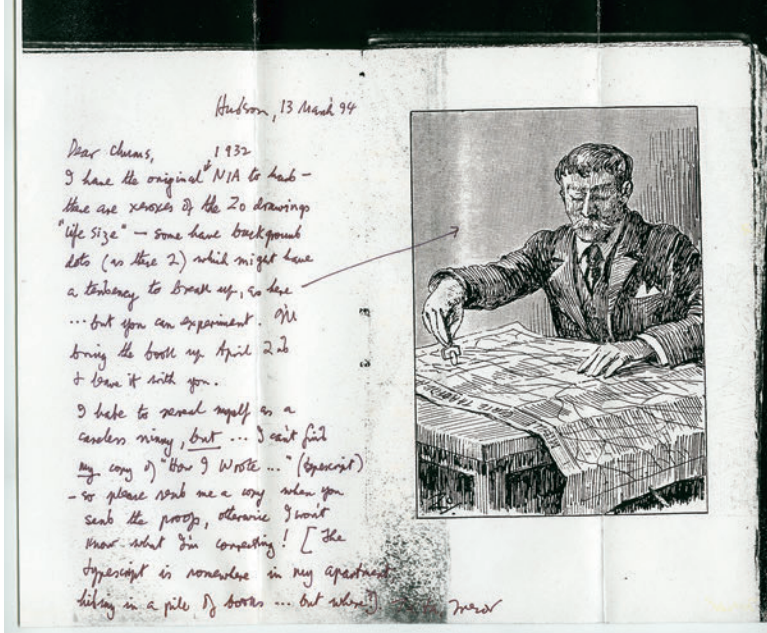
English and European colleagues. In London, we never turn down an invitation to spend the afternoon at a pub with Alastair Brotchie of Atlas Press. And in Paris, we never fail to pay a call on Anne-Solange Noble, *Directrice des droits étrangers* for Editions Gallimard.

Gallimard! Standard bearers of French culture, guardians of the authors of the Pléiade, and patient, if sometimes skeptical, party to an American publishing venture staffed entirely by two rock musicians who have to schedule meetings around soundcheck. And who is back in their office, if they are both here...?

Indeed, it was Anne-Solange who pointed out recently that we must be on the verge of a significant anniversary. “You’ve been doing this a

above: *Exact Change Yearbook* #1, 1995.

left: Selected *Exact Change* titles, 1996-99.

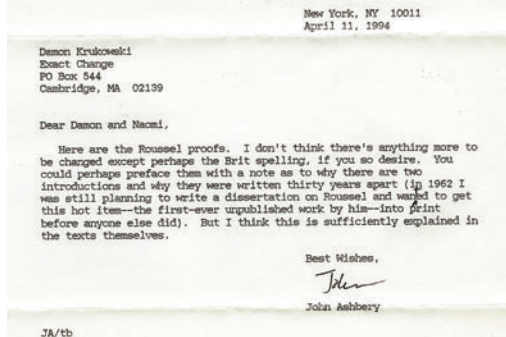


this page: Letters from Trevor Winkfield and John Ashbery regarding *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*.

right: Ad run in NYRB.

long time, haven't you?" she said, as we showed up in her office again — broke, as usual, yet asking that another pearl of French culture be added to our list. Was that a note of weariness in her voice? Or camaraderie, possibly even pride? A bit of all three, most likely; even after twenty years, and with all of Gallimard's generous trust and support, Exact Change remains a small operation. "Why is it always you?" Anne-Solange had asked us once — at the time we heard only exasperation in her voice, though this was some years ago. "This author is published by the largest houses of Europe, in Holland, in Germany, in Denmark... in Romania! And in the US, the biggest market in the world, it's you!" We could do nothing but try and look sorry.

In truth, since we started publishing, other presses have stepped in and picked up the cause of reprinting classic backlist, some with far greater resources than we. As a result, our frontlist features fewer reprints; why duplicate the effort, now that others are willing? At the same time, a different group of projects have steadily presented



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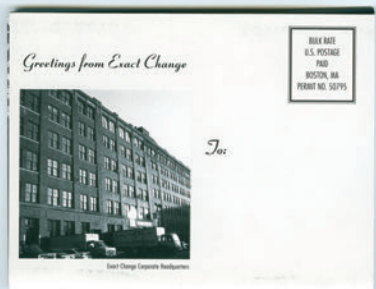
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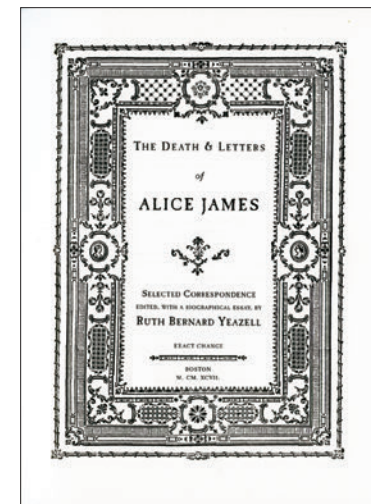
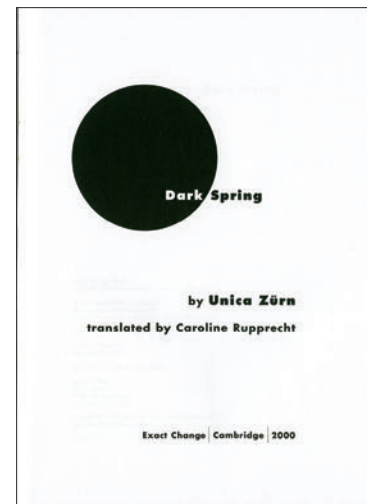
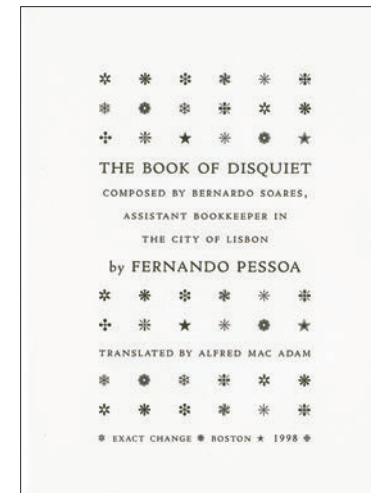
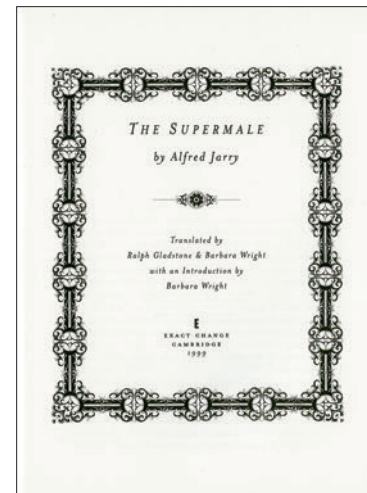


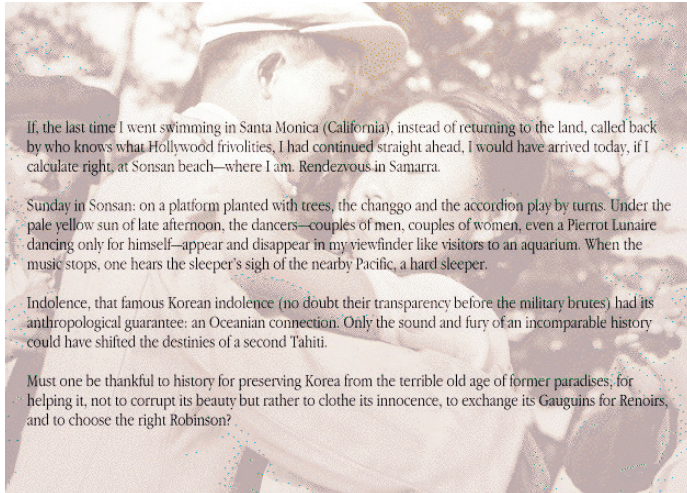
above: Fold-out postcard catalogue for ABA convention.

right: Title pages.

themselves, books which seem no less uniquely suited to Exact Change — new translations (Fernando Pessoa, Pablo Picasso, Unica Zürn), new collections of artists' writings (Morton Feldman, Joseph Cornell), and, though it remains the rare exception, at least one new work.

It is no coincidence that Chris Marker and John Cage are the authors of the only contemporary works published by Exact Change: they are two of our greatest artistic heroes. These are thinkers who have changed not only their own media (film and music), but the world of



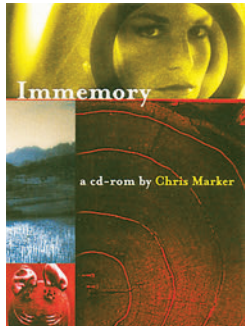
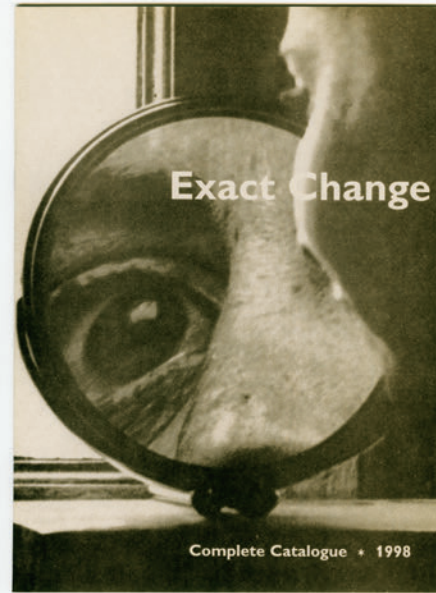


If, the last time I went swimming in Santa Monica (California), instead of returning to the land, called back by who knows what Hollywood frivolities, I had continued straight ahead, I would have arrived today, if I calculate right, at Sónsan beach—where I am. Rendezvous in Samarra.

Sunday in Sónsan: on a platform planted with trees, the changgo and the accordion play by turns. Under the pale yellow sun of late afternoon, the dancers—couples of men, couples of women, even a Pierrot Lunaire dancing only for himself—appear and disappear in my viewfinder like visitors to an aquarium. When the music stops, one hears the sleeper's sigh of the nearby Pacific, a hard sleeper.

Indolence, that famous Korean indolence (no doubt their transparency before the military brutes) had its anthropological guarantee: an Oceanian connection. Only the sound and fury of an incomparable history could have shifted the destinies of a second Tahiti.

Must one be thankful to history for preserving Korea from the terrible old age of former paradises, for helping it, not to corrupt its beauty but rather to clothe its innocence, to exchange its Gauguins for Renoirs, and to choose the right Robinson?



above: Screen shot and cover of *Immemory*.

right: Floppy disk with editorial corrections from Chris Marker.

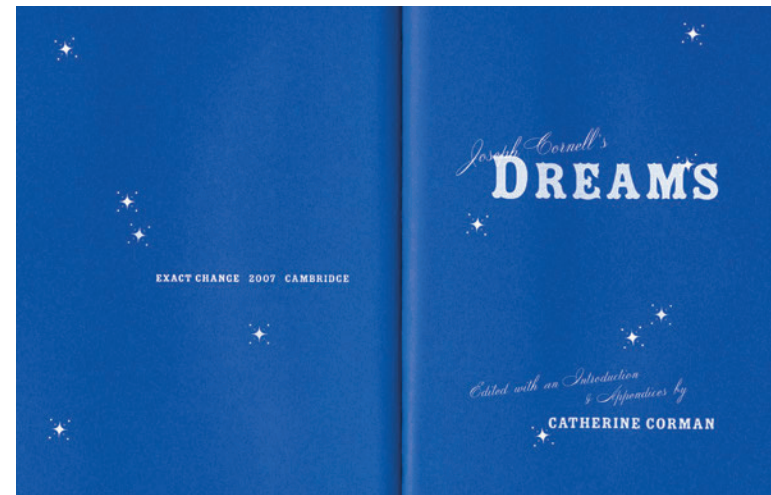
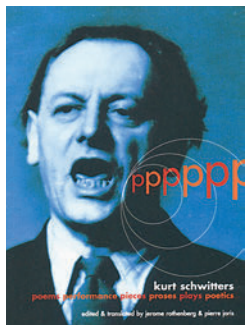
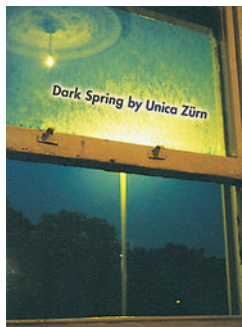
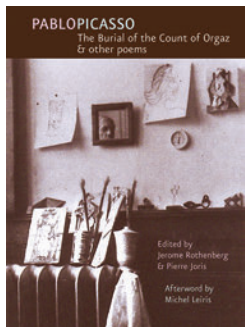


art at large. They are also among the most politically engaged artists of their time.

Chris Marker's *Immemory* marks a departure for our list in another way: it is not printed on paper. Created for viewing exclusively on a computer screen, *Immemory* is truly a book of the present. However, publishing *Immemory* has also demonstrated to us the durability of the books of the past. We take our role as guardian of the texts we publish seriously — for each title, we create an archive of materials relating to editorial decisions, so that others might retrace our steps. (This was something we found lacking in so many reprint projects we took on, we didn't want to pass the same problem on to others.) But as we've learned,



above: Catalogue, 1998; Exact Change titles by Fernando Pessoa.



an entirely digital work like *Immemory* resists archival efforts. To keep it readable, you need more than paper and ink — it is tied to and dependent on the mutable world of microchips, operating systems, and compatible computer programs. In other words, it's as difficult to keep a digital work current, as it is to keep your own computer up to date. Planned obsolescence, and the interests of a literary publisher, would seem to be at odds.

Which is as good an explanation as any for why we publish books we love — and why we continue to do so, after twenty years.

DAMON KRUKOWSKI & NAOMI YANG
CAMBRIDGE, JANUARY 2009

above: Title page from *Joseph Cornell's Dreams*.

left: Selected Exact Change titles, 2000–2008.



above: Exact Change office, Cambridge, 2009.

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