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THE ONLINE LITERARY MAGAZINE: SOME PRELIMINARY RESPONSES

SETH PERLOW

OVER the past two decades, the apparatus of literary culture has largely moved online. Despite widespread skepticism about electronic publishing's ability to supplant paper – and despite paper's continued preeminence – an array of literary periodicals have found success on the Internet, enjoying levels of prestige once reserved for the best print journals. The low cost of Internet publishing, the power of online social networks, and the development of multimedia formats have profoundly altered the economic, social, and aesthetic profile of the contemporary literary magazine.

The rise of online periodicals culminates a long line of technological developments that have made small-scale publishing easier and cheaper. These innovations began with machines such as the rotary press and Linotype, and they continued in the twentieth century with a parade of new devices, from the mimeograph and photocopier to electric typewriters and laser printers. Online publishing does not simply continue this trend but radicalizes it. The Internet does not just make publishing easier; it enables even a novice to distribute a text in limitless numbers at effectively zero cost. Never before has the reproduction and global distribution of a text required nothing more than an editor's time (admittedly, not an unlimited resource) and a machine that most would-be editors already have in their homes. Yet certain factors counsel against viewing these developments in a wholly positive light: hardware and Internet access are unevenly distributed, and there are many uncertainties about archiving electronic texts.¹

Given how dramatically online publishing has changed literary cultures, it is surprising that the liveliest scholarly discussions of Anglophone literary magazines still focus on the first half of the twentieth century, especially the 'little magazines' that shaped high modernism.² Technological advances after 1945 caused an explosion of new magazines, but scholarship on postwar literary journals is more limited. Most studies of literary magazines since the 1960s focus on 'zines' and the counter-cultures with which they are affiliated. There is almost no scholarship at all about online literary magazines per se – only one slim edited volume and the occasional essay or interview.³

¹ On the challenges of archiving electronic texts, see MICHAEL LESK, *Understanding Digital Libraries*, New York, Morgan Kaufmann, 2004².

² See *Little Magazines & Modernism: New Approaches*, eds. Suzanne W. Churchill, Adam McKible, Burlington Vt., Ashgate, 2008. A journal dedicated to the study of modernist magazines, *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, confines itself to 1880-1950 and, ironically enough, appears only in digital format.

³ See MARY CELESTE KEARNEY, *Girls Make Media*, New York, Routledge, 2006, pp. 135-188; STEPHEN

This article pursues two broad strategies to outline the implications of literary reviews' shift to the Internet. It unpacks a few of the key questions raised by the recent flourishing of online literary magazines and describes the Internet's challenges to received ideas about literary periodicals in order to suggest directions for future research. Such preliminary responses are unavoidably speculative. This article also includes insights from interviews I have conducted with editors of four notable literary magazines – two online only, two in print with an online component – in order to help build the primary record of how the Internet is reshaping literary reviews. I am grateful to Ginger Murchison of *The Cortland Review*, Rebecca Wolff of *Fence*, John Tranter of *Jacket*, and Andrea Martucci of *Ploughshares* for taking the time to answer my questions.¹ The following three sections address the economic, social, and aesthetic implications of the online literary magazine in order to explore how the Internet reshapes every stage of a journal's life, from its production and distribution to its reception and endurance.

ECONOMIES OF SCARCITY

Money plays a crucial role in the production of literary magazines, even though they live on the margins of the market economy. In their seminal 1946 study *The Little Magazine*, Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn F. Ulrich write that «a little magazine is a magazine designed to print artistic work which for reasons of commercial expediency is not acceptable to the money-minded periodicals».² Such a magazine is «noncommercial by intent», for it publishes work whose merits will not necessarily bring profits.³ This indifference to profit remained central to the new literary magazines that emerged in the 1960s and later. As Stephen Duncombe puts it, «To say that zines are not-for-profit is an understatement. Most lose money».⁴ He considers this 'noncommercial' status central to their cultural logic.⁵ Across the twentieth century, economic marginality helped define the literary magazine, and money still decisively shapes their production. At a 2008 roundtable discussion, a group of literary review editors were asked, «What has been the darkest moment in your magazine's history?» The editor of *New Ohio Review*, Jill Allyn Rosser, responded, «Aren't they all going to

DUNCOMBE, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*, New York, Verso, 1997; ALISON PIEPMEIER, *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism*, New York, NYU Press, 2009; *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side*, eds. Steven Clay, Rodney Phillips, New York, Granary, 1998. The volume about online magazines is *Without Covers: Literary Magazines @ the Digital Edge*, eds. Lesha Hurliman, Numsiri C. Kunakemakorn, West Lafayette In., Purdue University Press, 2002.

¹ *The Cortland Review* publishes online at www.cortlandreview.com; *Fence* publishes on paper but offers samples from each issue and other features at www.fenceportal.org; *Jacket* published online at www.jacketmagazine.com until 2010, when Tranter passed editorial control to the University of Pennsylvania, which marked the transition by renaming the magazine *Jacket2*, accessible at www.jacket2.org; *Ploughshares* publishes on paper but offers samples from each issue and other features at www.pshares.org.

² FREDERICK J. HOFFMAN, CHARLES ALLEN, CAROLYN F. ULRICH, *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography*, Princeton, Nj., Princeton University Press, 1946, p. 2.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ STEPHEN DUNCOMBE, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁵ *Ivi*, p. 6.

be money answers?».¹ Most other participants agreed. The cost of publishing and the difficulty of recouping expenses deeply inform the character of literary magazines. While the minimal cost of Internet publishing alleviates such pressures, it also inaugurates new anxieties about literary value.

Online publishing heightens uncertainties about the relation between a magazine's economic marginality and its literary value. For some, a magazine's unprofitability supports claims of political or aesthetic subversiveness. Hoffman and his coauthors point out that «acceptance or refusal by commercial publishers at times has little to do with the quality of the work,» so they view the little magazine as «rebellious against the doctrines of popular taste».² A magazine's indifference to profitability frees it to privilege artistic quality. In his study of zines, Duncombe focalizes this subversiveness: «Zinesters consider what they do as an alternative to and strike against commercial culture and consumer capitalism».³ Although magazines gain charisma from their noncommercial status, the aesthetic markers of such rebellion are easy to coopt for profit. Duncombe acknowledges that the allure of the noncommercial has been «celebrated in the mainstream media and used to create new styles and profits for the commercial culture industry».⁴ Likewise, scholars of modernism such as Mark Morrisson question the assumption that because little magazines made little profits, they must have subverted the aesthetic values of capitalism; he traces the modernist magazines' «fascinating interdependence with the mass market press».⁵ On one hand, some might argue that the low cost of online publishing makes small Internet periodicals even less beholden to the economic pressures of the mass market. On the other hand, when literary magazines moved online, so did the whole apparatus of consumer culture and the mass media. The Internet facilitates surveillance, shopping, and normative political discourse as much as it opens new strategies of subversion. In any case, the literary magazine's movement onto the Internet does disrupt the economies of scarcity that shape editorial decisions.

When a periodical can publish an effectively unlimited amount of material at effectively zero cost, a crisis of value looms.⁶ In a conversation with Rebecca Wolff, I asked whether production costs prevent *Fence* from printing as much work as she would like. «Every issue is a sad thing,» she responded, «where we're like, "We've got too much material, and we're going to have to put it off to the next issue. And this issue is going to be fatter than we expected, and it's going to cost more to mail." There's always more that we'd like to publish than we can publish».⁷

¹ JILL ALLYN ROSSER, SPEER MORGAN, MARCO ROTH, RAYMOND HAMMOND, TODD ZUNIGA, ELI HOROWITZ, AARON BURCH, *A Roundtable on the Contemporary Literary Magazine*, in *Mississippi Review*, fall 2008, p. 52.

² FREDERICK J. HOFFMAN *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 2, 4.

³ STEPHEN DUNCOMBE, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁵ MARK S. MORRISSON, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905-1920*, Madison Wi., University of Wisconsin Press, 2001, p. 5.

⁶ The price of web hosting continues to decline. It is increasingly easy to publish a web site for free, even one with lots of video and audio. One of the most expensive hosting options, which features unlimited bandwidth and data storage, costs a mere \$60 US per year.

⁷ REBECCA WOLFF, Telephone interview, 3 May 2013.

Online publishing removes this constraint because it costs so little. At the 2008 roundtable, *Opium*'s Todd Zuniga explains that «there's endless space on the web and ultimately anybody can get published...[whereas] there's limited space in the print world and so that's value».¹ This discourse of economic scarcity has helped to sustain what Marion Wrenn calls a 'prestige gap' between print and online venues.² With the rhetoric of financial limitations unavailable, editors of online magazines must find new ways to account for their selectiveness.

The removal of financial alibis may highlight an editor's role as arbiter of literary value. In an essay from 1999, John Tranter writes, «Most of the mass of poems you find on the Internet are bad».³ The success of *Jacket* proves that Tranter's own 'editorial fine-tuning' provided readers with selections of more consistent quality.⁴ The emergence of online literary magazines thus disrupts the two economies that inform a paper magazine's editorial decisions – first, the limitation that money places upon the size of an issue and, second, the limited number of pieces a magazine can therefore accept. Tranter's effort to distinguish his selections from a 'mass' of bad writing indicates, further, that the new economics of online publishing unsettles the relation between niche periodicals and the 'mass' media against which they have often been defined. When offered online, a small magazine finds fewer reasons to agonize its relation to mass-market periodicals, for instance by casting its contents as superior but unfortunately less marketable; with less financial pressure, the 'mass' comes to stand not for superior marketing and profitability but, as Tranter uses the term, for unstructured and unrefined tastes.

A literary magazine reaches vastly more readers online than in print – and at much lower cost. Ginger Murchison writes that *The Cortland Review* gets «roughly 120,000 to 200,000 hits a month,» and the figure is «more like 900,000» during April, National Poetry Month in the US.⁵ By comparison, Rebecca Wolff estimates *Fence*'s circulation to be near 4,000.⁶ Andrea Martucci reports that *Ploughshares* publishes about 8,500 copies of each issue; its web site, which offers excerpts from each issue for 'promotional' purposes, gets over 60,000 page views per month.⁷ Martucci considers the juxtaposition of a print run with online page views to be «a bit like comparing apples to oranges,» and indeed recent studies by Franco Moretti and Nicholas Carr, among others, have underscored the differences between reading onscreen and on paper.⁸ It is hard to ignore the magnitude by which the web increases a magazine's visibility, even if online readers engage less

¹ JILL ALLYN ROSSER, et al., *art. cit.*, pp. 38-39.

² MARION WRENN, *When Horses Fly: Parables, Palimpsests and PBQ*, in *Without Covers: Literary Magazines @ the Digital Edge*, *cit.*, p. 98.

³ JOHN TRANTER, *The Left Hand of Capitalism*, in *Without Covers: Literary Magazines @ the Digital Edge*, *cit.*, p. 85.

⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁵ GINGER MURCHISON, *Re: questions*, E-mail to the author, 24 May 2013.

⁶ REBECCA WOLFF, *op. cit.*

⁷ ANDREA MARTUCCI, *Circulation Question*, E-mails to the author, 4-6 June 2013.

⁸ ANDREA MARTUCCI, *op. cit.* See FRANCO MORETTI, *Distant Reading*, New York, Verso, 2013; NICHOLAS CARR, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, New York, Norton, 2011.

attentively. But even the most popular online literary magazines still reach limited audiences, since poetry and short fiction are niche interests. Reduced production costs might not yield a bigger audience, but the economic change does mean that mass-market appeal no longer carries the seductive lure of financial viability. In the past, higher circulation meant more recuperated costs, but anyone can launch a web magazine for free, obviating this pursuit of readers for revenue. An online magazine can thus address a niche audience without sacrificing either financial solvency or breadth of distribution. A web magazine with a few interested readers dispersed across several continents faces none of the financial challenges such a readership would pose for a print publication. Appealing to a larger audience no longer promises to solve financial problems, for the cost of online publishing is already near zero.

When the choice between mass and niche audiences no longer marks the difference between solvency and bankruptcy, a pluralism emerges. Editors of small magazines are less likely to deploy oppositional rhetoric to justify a lack of mass appeal. As we shall see, online publishing may already have contributed to a less divisive literary culture. The success of online literary magazines offers no guarantee that innovative writers will interest more readers, but it does change the difficult economics of small-scale publishing enough to disrupt ideas about a magazine's audience, its distribution, and its selectiveness. While there is nothing new about publishing on a shoestring budget, the new potential to reach millions of readers worldwide for free carries profound implications.

COMMUNITIES OF TASTE

Literary magazines have always built communities among their readers, contributors, and editors. Those engaged with a given journal might share an ethnic, gender, or class identity, a politics, or a set of aesthetic preferences – but one way or another, a good literary magazine articulates a social scene. By making it easier to run a micro-press, computers render this socialization process more dynamic but also more private. Online and in print, the recent proliferation of what might be called 'tiny magazines' has yielded a more pluralistic literary landscape, but these many tiny magazines also atomize literary scenes, making them less cohesive and less publicly visible. The logic of pluralistic atomization is most evident when we think geographically. A literary magazine often constructs its community with reference to a specific place where its participants live. Paper reinforces this geographical organization of literary communities, since copies of a print magazine will mostly remain near the place of production. By contrast, even the most obscure online magazine is available to anyone with Internet access, anywhere on Earth. This is a major logistical improvement, but it makes geography a less salient factor in a magazine's community. The unmooring of text from geography motivates our geo-spatial metaphors for the Internet, from 'cyberspace' to 'the cloud'. To ask how literary communities function online, I want to advance another metaphor, that of the public and private spheres. Online

magazines help to move literary cultures out of the public sphere and into ‘walled gardens’, privatized sectors such as Facebook and e-mail that limit visibility and control exchange in ways that public print culture does not.

The atomization of literary scenes makes it more difficult to grow a community around a magazine. Online magazines may find it especially challenging to reach a broader public. Considering *Jacket*’s early days, John Tranter admits that «at the start I was uncertain about my ability to build a magazine that would attract a lot of attention». ¹ He intuited that although web publications are easier to distribute, they can be quite difficult to publicize. A print magazine has a wonderful tendency to lie around, awaiting a reader. I can publicize it by leaving a few copies around the office, a few at a local café, a few at a bookstore, and there they will sit. Web sites do not remain passively visible in this way; someone has to navigate to them. I can reach many people by posting a link on Facebook or e-mailing everyone I know, but such announcements soon disappear beneath newer messages from others. Moreover, these messages to friends have much less chance of reaching an interested stranger than a print magazine left at a coffee shop. Paper even socializes the editorial process. In the days of the mimeograph, «collating, stapling, and mailing parties helped to speed up production, but more significantly, they helped galvanize a literary group». ² It is awkward to gather around a computer. Similarly, Andrea Martucci reports that «our blog, our email newsletter, and social media presence allows us to stay in touch with our community on an unprecedented level,» but these avenues largely follow dyadic structures and take place in private spaces, enclosed by passwords and subscription lists. ³ Computers make more tiny magazines viable, increasing the diversity of literary production, but literary communities that develop online may prove more insular and fragmentary. Such communities follow more private social structures instead of building more capacious publics.

The era of online literary magazines has coincided with a surprising détente between experimentalist and traditionalist camps in Anglophone writing, and the Internet’s atomization of literary cultures facilitates this easing of tensions. One prominent sign of rapprochement is *Fence* magazine, named after some lines from John Ashbery about «a kind of fence-sitting / Raised to the level of an aesthetic ideal». ⁴ Rebecca Wolff links the title with her efforts to avoid doctrinaire editorial choices, but she acknowledges that «it’s always been very difficult for me to maintain even just the image of *Fence* as being not committed to any one aesthetic movement». ⁵ As a journal becomes increasingly «established [...] the tendency of a readership is to insist on it being a statement where there is no statement». ⁶ Online magazines face similar challenges but resolve them differently. Discussing the early days of *Jacket*, Tranter recalls that he «did turn many

¹ JOHN TRANTER, *Re: online editing*, E-mail to the author, 7 May 2013.

² STEVEN CLAY, RODNEY PHILIPS, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 14.

³ ANDREA MARTUCCI, *op. cit.*

⁴ JOHN ASHBERY, *Soonest Mended*, in *The Double Dream of Spring*, New York, Dutton, 1970, p. 18.

⁵ REBECCA WOLFF, *op. cit.*

⁶ *Ibidem.*

offerings down, particularly where I felt they were set up to be divisive,» but *Jacket* has nonetheless become affiliated with experimentalism.¹ Even if Tranter hoped to avoid divisiveness, he acknowledges that «people who were of a ‘traditionalist’ bent just didn’t bother to send material to me, because I would not be likely to publish it, and writers who felt their work was innovative felt positively toward the magazine».² Like the readers Wolff describes, Tranter’s contributors seem to have formed a community of taste even where a light editorial hand was at work. In the same years that *Jacket* was publishing the likes of John Ashbery and Paul Hoover, *The Cortland Review* was bringing out the first online publications by Billy Collins and Charles Simic. Ginger Murchison writes that *The Cortland Review* «is not at all bound to any aesthetic, nor are we trying to create one. We try to publish something for everyone».³ As with *Fence* and *Jacket*, though, the notable names that have gathered around *The Cortland Review* insinuate certain stylistic commitments where none may be intended. Many magazines from the modernist and postwar eras are remembered not for their inclusiveness but for their affiliation with a social or artistic movement. These three contemporary editors, by contrast, avoid linking their journals with a distinct aesthetics or politics. The unusual success of their magazines means that whatever the editors intend, their readers and contributors do affiliate each journal with a stance on aesthetic and, perhaps, political issues. If new media sustain greater numbers of tiny magazines with smaller, more atomized communities, then these technologies have helped to produce a more pluralistic, less oppositional literary landscape.

Whether large or small, the community around an online magazine is less informed by geography than its print equivalent. The Internet unhinges a text from constraints of distance and location, making it accessible almost anywhere. People in Maine or Oklahoma can easily read an online magazine edited in London or Seoul, and they do. Back in 1997, when Tranter launched *Jacket* from Sydney, Australia, he soon got an e-mail from a grateful reader in Nome, Alaska.⁴ The accidents of geography thus play a lesser role in shaping literary cultures. A paper magazine’s sheer physical inertia makes geography important. A magazine printing fewer than 500 copies will mostly circulate in the city or campus where it is produced. A magazine printing 2,000 copies in New York City might reach most major US cities and parts of Europe, but it will remain absent from rural areas. To get a copy to the other side of the world, someone has to mail or carry it there. Hence, participants in a paper literary magazine’s social scene often cluster geographically. An online magazine and its social scene seems to exist elsewhere and everywhere, not in a particular place.

Of course, plenty of locational factors still shape literary communities. Poetry readings probably cement social connections more strongly than whatever happens online, and I might care more about a magazine edited by a neighbor. More broadly, economic and political geographies determine who has Internet access

¹ JOHN TRANTER, *Re: online editing*, cit.

² *Ibidem*.

³ GINGER MURCHISON, *op. cit.*

⁴ JOHN TRANTER, *The Left Hand of Capitalism*, cit., p. 84.

and who does not, as well as how heavily censored and surveilled that access will be. An adequate geography of the Internet would also address the server farms, data cables, and hardware factories that make it materially possible. Such spaces lie beyond this article and, insomuch as we do not consider them while we read, may be peripheral to the experience of online literature. An online literary magazine can thus seem placeless. Online texts circulate not as distinctly located objects, the way print volumes do, but as hyperlinks nested in other, more dominant communications platforms, such as e-mail and online social networks. Indeed, as these platforms become the primary means to publicize new writing, they may marginalize the online literary magazine itself. If getting published in an online journal works more as a mark of prestige than as an avenue of distribution, then established writers or those who do not care about prestige might as well publish on their own web sites. Links to a personal site can circulate just as easily as links to a prestigious online journal. Already it seems that the online literary magazine I read most often is called *Facebook*, where recent publications, prize announcements, and calls for submissions appear alongside the usual cat videos and baby pictures. Anyone whose Facebook friends share an interest in literature knows the site's value as a way to discover new writing. But the literary community that forms on my Facebook news feed cannot recognize itself; some of its members have only me in common. This community exists in no place and never gathers in person. New social networks with different structures continue to emerge, but the Facebook news feed may provide a model for the more fragmentary, private structures of literary community that form online. If so, these communities are more diverse than their precursors – but also less public and cohesive.

AESTHETICS OF ENDURANCE

The most significant effects of literary magazines' move to the Internet may be aesthetic, but these remain the most difficult to judge. Computers have begun to transform the literary medium itself, opening new possibilities for writers and publishers, changing how we read, and raising uncertainties about how electronic texts might endure through the years.

The web has intensified the commingling of text, image, and sound that began in earlier media environments. Aesthetic tropes now common online have precedents in film and television, and writers experimented with computers long before the Internet reached them.¹ But the web brings multimedia objects to more people and enables more interactive, aesthetically diverse reading experiences than paper could. For instance, *The Cortland Review* pairs each text with a recording of the author reading it aloud. Before personal computers, such pairings required two distinct media, one for text and another for sound. Postwar experiments with audio tapes likewise preceded online magazines that publish

¹ See CHRISTOPHER FUNKHOUSER, *Prehistoric Digital Poetry: An Archaeology of Forms, 1959-1995*, Tuscaloosa Al., University of Alabama Press, 2007.

audio only, such as *TextSound* and *BoundOff*, but these web sites distribute sound more quickly, cheaply, and widely. Libraries have long held recordings of authors reading aloud, but digital archives like *PennSound* and *UbuWeb* increase the accessibility and prominence of literary audio. Many online literary reviews make aesthetically innovative use of computer code, offering animated title pages or complex modes of navigation. An online magazine can mingle text with video, still images, interactive graphics, and sounds of any kind – all without the difficulties these pose for paper journals. Such possibilities might eventually displace the aesthetic conventions inherited from print, but many online magazines still mimic paper forms, for instance by releasing each issue as a PDF. Commenting on *Jacket*'s design, Tranter writes, «I had as my model the first five hundred years of book and magazine design. It's hard to better that».¹ Instead of 'bettering' age-old stylistic principles, these new possibilities simply broaden the aesthetic field in which writers and editors can work.

The stigma of extended reading on electronic displays has begun to lift as new devices make it easier to read a screen for longer periods in more comfortable postures. Many think we read screens less attentively than paper, but why? Until recently, we have primarily used full-size computers that lend themselves to multitasking and mostly keep us sitting upright – not the ideal posture for long reading sessions. By contrast, smartphones and tablet computers are easier to use in reclined positions, and although their software often constrains users to a single corporate ecosystem, these limitations may also encourage sustained attention to a single text or activity. Despite these developments, online editors anticipate distracted readers. Explaining *The Cortland Review*'s avoidance of longer texts, Murchison writes that «we'd rather readers *finish* a book review or article or piece of fiction in the time they have online. The online attention span is shorter than that for print».² Responding to the same constraint, the online portion of *Opium* gives an «estimated reading time» for each text. New media's ramifications for literary reading have only begun to emerge. Readers might eventually become more attentive, resistant to distractions; or new devices might emulate paper more successfully, making it easier to concentrate; or critics might embrace distracted or 'distant' reading as new norms. In the meantime, as Rosser puts it, reading online often «feels [...] like provisional reading».³ The aesthetics of electronic literature may remain provisional, indistinct, until reading onscreen is seen as an independent configuration of the literary, not a mere proxy for reading paper.

The aesthetics of the screen also shape how and what editors publish. Online magazines face no financial constraints upon an issue's length, but Murchison recalls that «if we were limited, it was by the length of our menu [...] what could be seen at a glance on a computer screen. We never wanted so many poets in an issue that a reader had to scroll down to read all the names».⁴ Instead of citing limited funds as an enforcer of selectiveness, online editors negotiate the limits

¹ JOHN TRANTER, *Re: online editing*, cit.

² GINGER MURCHISON, *op. cit.*

³ JILL ALLYN ROSSER, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁴ GINGER MURCHISON, *op. cit.*

of a reader's attention. As editor of *Jacket*, Tranter chose a compelling way to keep readers engaged; he designed the site so that «readers could [...] see the next issue being built,» could observe as each new piece was added to an issue, «and read what had been posted there, before the issue was complete».¹ Instead of leaving readers adrift between issues, this format keeps them checking for new material. Such anecdotes give a basic idea how the structures of web sites inform editorial decisions, and computers also enable more radical revisions of the literary magazine's aesthetic parameters. Although the idea of literature as art made from words will surely endure, the shift to online publishing promises a significant reconfiguration of the guises in which new writing appears.

The most pressing aesthetic question about online literary magazines concerns their endurance through time. It has become a truism that once something is on the Internet, it is there forever, yet we are exhorted to keep multiple backups of important files or risk losing them. These contradictory anxieties suggest we remain far from understanding how to preserve electronic texts. A paper book will endure for decades, even centuries, if left alone in a dry place safe from fire. Electronic texts require more active care: they need electricity, of course, but also appropriate hardware platforms. As floppy and CD drives become rarer, files on these media become less accessible. Already most exhibitions of e-literature deploy obsolete computers and operating systems to support certain texts. The long-term maintenance of old hardware presents significant challenges. Improvements in software emulation and standardized file formats help to resolve these problems, but such standardization constrains the very experimental verve that makes computer-aided writing so compelling. The web itself has exhibited remarkable backward compatibility, but online literary magazines still face challenges to their endurance. If an online editor allows their web hosting service to lapse, the magazine may disappear. The Internet Archive might preserve a copy, but it will not appear on the open Internet. Any links to the site will be broken, isolating it. Likewise, editors who redesign an online magazine sometimes fail to carry over issues published earlier. Although paper magazines often circulate as ephemera, librarians and amateurs can easily preserve copies. As more publications move online, a more robust archival infrastructure may emerge, but until then scholars will mainly rely upon editors themselves to ensure their journals endure. Meanwhile, in coming decades it may be impossible to tell who read which magazines. Critics today can search an important writer's archives to see which literary reviews she possessed. Only the state surveillance apparatus keeps comparable records of an author's online reading habits. Even if an online magazine itself endures, then, the community of readers around it seems always ready to disappear into the secret enclosures of Internet history.

¹ JOHN TRANTER, *Re: online editing*, cit.

CODA

The question of endurance pertains also to criticism about electronic literature and online reviews. The literary critic's methods often presume sustained access to the texts under discussion. If online texts remain difficult to archive, then those critical strategies most comfortable with objects that transform rapidly or disappear, with indistinct or ephemeral texts, will prove most enabling. The difficulty of developing a criticism adequate to electronic literature stems from the pace at which new literary platforms continue to emerge. Although the proliferation of computers and the Internet has already inspired many promising critical innovations, these sweeping changes in the apparatus of literary production and reading will continue to challenge received ideas about the forms literature can take. Indeed, as we have just seen, online publishing alters the most basic character of literary reviews, and it opens difficult questions about what will or will not even count as a literary magazine in the future. The task of answering such questions is sure to prove as rewarding for scholars of literary reviews as for those who edit them.

ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, literary culture has largely moved online. Despite widespread skepticism about electronic publishing, an array of literary periodicals have found success on the Internet, enjoying levels of prestige once reserved for the best print journals. The low cost of Internet publishing, the power of online social networks, and the development of multimedia formats have profoundly altered the profile of contemporary literary magazines. Nevertheless, scholarly discussions of literary reviews often focus on modernist 'little magazines' or on the 'zine' countercultures of the 1960s and after. This article addresses the economic, social, and aesthetic implications of the online literary magazine in order to explore how the Internet reshapes every stage of a journal's life, from its production and distribution to its reception and endurance. It includes insights from interviews conducted with editors of four notable literary magazines in order to augment the primary record of how the Internet is reshaping literary reviews.

Nel corso degli ultimi venti anni, la cultura letteraria si è in gran parte trasferita online. Nonostante il diffuso scetticismo nei confronti dell'editoria elettronica, un numero considerevole di periodici letterari ha avuto successo in Internet e gode del prestigio un tempo riservato soltanto ai migliori periodici stampati su carta. I bassi costi dell'editoria in Internet, il potere dei *social networks* online e lo sviluppo dei formati multimediali hanno profondamente cambiato il profilo delle riviste letterarie contemporanee. Ciononostante, i dibattiti intorno alle rassegne letterarie spesso si concentrano sulle 'piccole riviste' moderniste oppure sulle controculture delle 'zines' dagli anni '60 in avanti. L'articolo prende in considerazione le implicazioni economiche, sociali ed estetiche della rivista letteraria online per analizzare come Internet riformuli ogni fase della vita di una rivista, dalla produzione e distribuzione alla ricezione e permanenza. Sono incluse riflessioni tratte da interviste ai direttori di quattro rilevanti testate, informazioni di prima mano su come Internet sta trasformando le riviste letterarie.