

From the Editors

The experimental viewpoint... necessarily holds that avant-gardism is first and foremost an attitude towards life if it is to be anything at all. This raises the question of whether the long-standing debate over 'the avant-garde' and its various manifestations is simply a contest over terminologies or whether it is tied-in to a broader aestheticisation of ideology and of ideological purchase upon critical 'praxis' and upon the 'real.'

Louis Armand, *Avant-Post* 16

The eleven essays collected in this issue of *PJAS* germinated as scholarly and artistic responses to the call for papers written for the Innovative Poetries / Innovations in Poetry Conference, hosted by the Department of American Literature at the University of Łódź, in September 2016, and were subsequently developed and sent to us in the wake of the event's illuminating lectures, sessions, and discussions featuring scholars and artists from Europe and the U.S. Drafting the first conference circular, we were wary of a politically and aesthetically naïve ring to the present-day use of the words "innovative" and "innovation." We thus modulated the idea of poetic innovation as a kind of versatile textual praxis that extends across the traditional barriers of the academic, artistic, aesthetic, and political: we wanted to treat it as an intervention into the real as a field of meaning making. The responses of our contributors have followed this idea, by tracing several modes, in the historical and formal contexts, in which innovation and originality have remained a feature of poetic efficacy even as originality is no longer treated as an attribute of the expressive lyrical subject. Such an approach to innovation takes into account the legacies of Modernism, the ongoing succession of avant-gardes, specifically the New York School and the Language movement, as well as present and future consequences of Language writing visible in post-Language poetries and in the recently burgeoning Conceptualism.

The chronologically earliest impulse to technical innovation that the participants of the conference chose to focus on has been the styles found within The New York School of poetry. Clearly, the New York poets' major and ongoing significance lies in their infringement upon the more established generic categories,

enshrined within the post-war, modernist legacies. The energy of the poems by Ashbery, Schuyler, or O'Hara, continues to be important for the critics in the way their work bursts open the boundaries of verse and proliferates into stylistic shapes associated with prose. This has a lot to do with various other conceptual and aesthetic shuttlings, notably those between psychologically posed interior and materially captured externality of the world, or between the abstract or lofty on the one hand and the particular or banal on the other.

This is precisely the reason why we decided to open the issue with two texts that return to the New York School innovation. Joanna Orska investigates the complex relation between John Ashbery's poetic prose in *Three Poems* and Andrzej Sosnowski's prose poem "Konwój." Through close attendance to Ashbery's rhythms and the way Sosnowski renders them in his translations of *Three Poems*, Orska's groundbreaking reading shows the originality with which Sosnowski remains a poet independent from Ashbery in his "Konwój." At the same time, her discussion illustrates how Sosnowski's innovative approach to translation and poetic prose alters the tradition of poetic prose in Poland. Also concentrating on poetic prose, Mikołaj Wiśniewski investigates the relations between James Schuyler's diaristic entries and his other projects, both poetic and novelistic. As Wiśniewski shows, the element of the quotidian inscribed in the very procedure of keeping a diary is a source of inspiration for Schuyler. The deliberately "flat" style of the diary becomes a sort of experimental ground and major aesthetic impulse behind the more well-known works by Schuyler, notably his long poems.

Another area of interest in the issue is the experiment of the Language movement. The Language poets shaped a kind of poetic utterance that proved to be an expansion and reinforcement of the modernist experiment. In some sense, such expansion can be treated as a development of at least some of the impulses signaled by the New York School. Continuing to work with textual disjunction and dispersal of the lyrical subject, the Language poets stressed the importance of linguistic medium to the conceptual schemes by which the community shapes its lifeworld, also stressing the immediately public and political character of the shifts of emphasis in our understanding of the "poetic."

The contribution that most directly refers to the activities of this poetry group is Tadeusz Pióro's "Autobiography and the Politics and Aesthetics of Language Writing" that surveys the Language poets' collaborative endeavor of *The Grand Piano: An Experiment in Collective Autobiography* (1998-2010). Pióro discusses in his contribution *The Grand Piano's* intellectual and political potential, examining it in the broader context of the authors' theoretical and poetic practices. By departing from the complexity inherent in *The Grand Piano's* concept of "collective autobiography," calling it a "provocative group memoir," Pióro concentrates on two writers from the Language group, Carla Harryman and Lyn Hejinian, and shows how the aesthetics of their work is inextricable from their nature as acts of opposition to the dominant political orders of the day.

The radical formal gesture of the Language group finds its poignant continuations in the poetry of Susan Howe. Two of our contributors comment on her poetry. Jacek Partyka analyzes the relations between poetry and history in Howe's 2014 collection *Spontaneous Particulars*. Partyka puts Howe's practice in the context of Marjorie Perloff's concept of the "unoriginal genius." But his discussion goes beyond the affinities between Howe's archival procedure and Walter Benjamin's aesthetics of quotation and montage, already spotted by Perloff. According to Partyka, Howe's poetry finds an early equivalent in Charles Reznikoff's utilization of legal documents as material for his "poems."

A further exploration of Susan Howe's interdisciplinary poetics is found in Floriana Puglisi's contribution. Puglisi focuses on the poet's collaboration with avant-garde musician and composer David Grubbs. Examining *Thieft* (2005), Puglisi shows how the aural aspect of the project augments Howe's graphic experimentation by bringing to the foreground the materiality of language. For Howe, as Puglisi contends, sound enhances the anti-expressivist mode of the poet's visual texts, as if releasing them from the domain of signification founded on the notions of hierarchy, authority, and stability.

The next group of the texts we have selected for this issue discuss poetries of concrete social, political, and public engagement. The poets discussed in them have absorbed the avant-garde formal impulse toward building oppositional, politically critical stances of more direct engagement with the materiality of political and social life. Małgorzata Myk's "Citizen Myles," a reading of Eileen Myles' 2007 poetry collection *Sorry, Tree*, moves away from the a-subjective Language-oriented poetry towards Myles' defiantly frank semi-autobiographical writing. Via Agamben, Myles' fate as the contemporary is seen as inevitably shot through with the sense of the untimely. Myk looks at Myles' *oeuvre* through the lenses of Lauren Berlant's notion of "intimate citizenship" and Lee Edelman's reflections on queer sexuality, as well as Berlant's and Edelman's co-authored rehabilitation of negativity in discussions of queer publics. The chapter on Myles' minoritarian poetics is followed by Magdalena Zurawsky's review-essay of Anne Boyer's 2015 prose-poetry collection *Garments Against Women*. Zurawsky approaches Boyer's text as an example of proletarian, materialist poetics indebted to contemporary American avant-garde poets, in particular Alice Notley and Bernadette Mayer. Zurawsky's fierce indictment of the early days of the Trump era that frames the piece becomes an extension of Boyer's Marxist feminist call for interrogation of the major institutions of American social and political life.

The materialist notes of Myk's and Zurawsky's essays are complemented by Jerzy Kamionowski's contribution devoted to Claudia Rankine's highly acclaimed volume of documentary poetics *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Kamionowski begins the essay by a re-appraisal of the concept of innovation itself. A cornerstone of his analysis of Rankine, innovation becomes equated with "poetic ore" as a special kind of "knowing," as well as a new way of seeing. In Rankine's case, as Kamionowski's

reading shows, it is formal innovation that largely produces in the text the conditions for increased legibility of instances of racism. Indeed, the reader of *Citizen* confronts his or her own obliviousness and blindness in a way that is felt more acutely not only due to Rankine's use of disturbing narrative vignettes, but also due to the text's complex and disquieting visual discourse.

The next two articles in the volume, by Marianne Ølholm and Kacper Bartczak, explore the more recent developments in technical and conceptual innovation. Ølholm's article discusses the conceptual poetics which continue the avant-garde gesture of problematizing the boundaries of the poetic by engaging with radically non-“literary” materials. Ølholm discusses Christian Bök's experiment of encoding a poetic text into the DNA sequence of bacteria. This post-humanist gesture is consistent with the idea of testing and probing the dependence of the literary output on the material conditioning of the text. By foregrounding the character of the poem as a product of a formula, a procedure, a process within a defined material-biological environment, Bök's texts follow other experiments in the appropriation of external materials and they help us to rethink the concepts of both author and reader.

While Ølholm discusses a poetry whose exploration of material externality erases the human, Kacper Bartczak's article is devoted to Peter Gizzi whose work becomes a witness to a specific form of the return of the human. Bartczak shows Gizzi as a poet of what he calls the “poetics of plenitude,” an aesthetic-poetic negotiation of the energy-surplus of externality. Gizzi's strategy of listening to a “dictation” of the outside confronts externality as an impinging overabundance of stimuli. Such confrontation redefines Harold Bloom's idea of influence. Here, the defense is not against a predecessor-poet, but against the painful birth of the very act of cognition and sensation established by the fluency of the poem. However, as the poem becomes a device that registers the tension of such defenses, it also becomes a stage on which a kind of artifice-bound subjectivity emerges, fully conscious of its belonging to the formal field of the poem.

As theoretical takes on poetry are themselves altered by the energies of technical innovation, the boundary between the theory of poetry and the poetic text itself blurs. Thus, the final contribution to the issue is Joel Katelnikoff's performative essay that engages with the poetry and poetics of Steve McCaffery. Using cut-up and montage, Katelnikoff remixes McCaffery's work, “producing critical writing by means of poetic technique.” The text's critical gesture unfolds in a non-standard way by re-aligning the author's Recombinant Theory with the artistic energies and forces underlying McCaffery's writing.

Work Cited

Armand, Louis, ed. *Avant-Post: The Avant Garde Under “Post” Conditions*. Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006. Print.