

[FC2](#)

written by Entropy | June 2, 2015



This is the forty-fifth in Entropy's small press interview series, where we ask editors about their origins, their mission, and what it's like to run a press. Find the other interviews from this series in our Small Press Database [here](#) and under the Resources tab at the top of the page.

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Interview with Lance Olsen, Chair of the Board of Directors

How did Fiction Collective 2 start?

In 1974 a handful of writers—including Jonathan Baumbach, Steve Katz, and Ronald Sukenick—started meeting in Baumbach's Brooklyn apartment. They were frustrated by the increasing McDonaldization of New York publishing, by how innovative writing practices were being marginalized to a greater and greater extent. Their solution: launch what then was a publishing experiment (and what now has become one of the primary paradigms among the small-press world): a collective run by and for authors. The idea was for that handful to contribute their own money to construct a small alternative publishing ecology that would last, at most, two or three years.

And here we are, 41 years later, understanding that the only thing that has remained the same about Fiction Collective, and its second iteration, FC2, is that nothing has remained the same.

Tell us a bit about FC2. What are your influences, your aesthetic, your mission?

Our mission seems relatively straightforward: publish innovative American fiction too heterodox, too challenging, for the commercial milieu. But immediately a series of complications (and hence delights) arise. What does "innovative" mean? What does "fiction" mean? How do such terms modify over time and space?

Our Board of Directors is comprised of eight voting members: Jeffrey DeShell, Noy Holland, Michael Mejia, Matt Roberson, Joanna Ruocco, Elisabeth Sheffield, Susan Steinberg, and me (I serve as chair). Ours is an ongoing conversation about problematizing those questions. While we all consider ourselves experimental writers (if that's the right word, troubled and troubling as it is), our aesthetics, our influences are tremendously varied. I'd like to think that's what makes our editorial and planning meetings so

vibrant.

Can you give us a preview of what's current and/or forthcoming from your catalog, as well as what you're hoping to publish in the future?

Our spring list—emblematic, I think, of what we are—looks like this. First up is the amazing Stanley Crawford's sharp, bitterly comic novel *Seed*, about Bill Starr's endgame in life, how he sets about giving away everything in his house as a kind of act of purification that turns out to be much less pure and much more lovable than the reader might first imagine.

Second is an extraordinary first novel called *Hospice* by Gregory Howard. I'll let the inimitable Laird Hunt speak about it: "One thinks of the Calvino of *Invisible Cities*, to be sure, but also of Bruce Chatwin and his *In Patagonia*, in each of which a highly inventive voyager goes wandering through the world and/or through the world's endless tales of itself. Still, deeply felt loss is the engine of the ludic impulse in *Hospice*, and the many games played, rituals enacted and songs sung by its characters evoke, with grace and power, our oldest truths, our most challenging conundrums, and the exhilarating ebb and flow of our sleep-wrapped lives."

Last is winner of FC2's Catherine Doctorow Innovative Fiction Prize (Sam Lipsyte, by the way, was this year's judge), which arrives with publication and \$15,000: Greg Mulcahy's *O'Hearn*, an acidic satire about the world of worker bees in the land of McJobs.

Next fall comes Melanie Rae Thon's *Silence and Song* and Jessica Richardson's *It Had Been Planned and There Were Guides*. The latter is winner of FC2's Ronald Sukenick Innovative Fiction Prize (Matt Roberson was this year's judge), which arrives with publication and \$1,500.

What do we hope to publish in the future? Precisely the sort of writing innovations I can't begin to imagine as I compose this sentence.

What about small/independent press publishing is particularly exciting to you right now?

Small/independent press publishing by its very presence in the world argues that anything is possible, everything can and should be tried and challenged, and that there's precisely zero correlation between quantity and quality.

How do you cope? There's been a lot of conversation lately about charging reading fees, printing costs, rising book costs, who should pay for what, etc. Do you have any opinions on this, and would you be willing to share any insights about the numbers at FC2?

Our print numbers for each book run around 1000, and over the years we've established what I think of as the hydra-headed-monster model of publishing. That is, FC2 is spread out across the country at various institutions so that, should one component go under because of, say, a financial cut at a university, we can fairly easily seed that component elsewhere without the whole organization imploding. I oversee FC2 from the University of Utah with the tremendous help from our FC2 Fellow, Rachel Levy. Layout occurs at

Illinois State University. Publication and distribution happen at the University of Alabama. Our Board of Directors is based at the University of Colorado-Boulder, Central Michigan, Wake Forest, and the University of San Francisco. In each case, student interns help with operations. In other words, FC2 functions as a way of teaching the next generation of literary activists how things might work. Most of what gets done is on a volunteer basis. Our operating budget comes in part from the Doctorow Foundation, for which we're tremendously grateful, and in part from monies generated through our two contests and through contributions. We're never rich, needless to say, but we are proof that when innovative literature wants to happen nothing can stop it.

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