

If a Leaf Falls Press

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Interview with Sam Riviere, Editor

How did If a Leaf Falls Press start?

I had the name of the press for a while but wasn't sure of the exact form it would have. I moved to Edinburgh in 2015 for a temporary job at the University, where I found out I had a staff discount at their printing services. Scotland has a particularly good/interesting small press tradition, so it felt appropriate that it came together here. I had also started thinking about the materiality of publications being important somehow, in thinking of publishing as a kind of extension of a writing/working practice. Publishing is basically a kind of appropriation art, maybe? The small print runs started off as a necessity, but have become part of the idea of the press—the seeding of an audience through coterie reading, and also taking texts whose provenance is often online into more intimate or private offline spaces. Moschatel Press, Sine Wave Peak, more recently SPAM zine/press all informed the way I tried to go about this.

Tell us a bit about If a Leaf Falls Press. What are your influences, your aesthetic, your mission?

If a Leaf Falls Press publishes very limited-edition pamphlets (or chapbooks as you call them), normally 20–40 copies, typically of procedural or appropriated writing. The obvious reference point is conceptual writing, which despite its terrible reputation still has some interesting things to offer, I think. Perhaps we have to talk about 'post-conceptual' writing now. But in a really obvious way, it's as if any new movement in poetry, often brought about by changes in technology, gradually becomes part of the everyday vocabulary. It would seem fairly irrelevant to talk about Flarf, for example, but the idea of using text found online is a normal one for a lot of poets now. I'm interested in the power dynamics of appropriation increasingly, and how appropriation strategies or intense systemisation in writing can discover a sort of expressiveness, which is perhaps not a type of expressiveness that we usually expect from poetry. I feel appropriation might actually be a good way of imaginatively pursuing different types of expression—so a way of escaping poetry's tendency to promote quite prescriptive types of expression, connected to often simplified ideals of 'authenticity' and 'voice' (where, interestingly, the appropriation of form or address or subject position is completely uncontroversial)—and also of disrupting—in a minor way, humour is definitely part of this—the way literature regards texts and thoughts as definitely owned by certain individuals. In a way I think writing is really a more fluid part of reading/thinking/living, which shouldn't be as limited as it is by the fairly extreme expectations and rules our culture has about publication.

...Basically I don't believe subjectivity or expressiveness to be nullified in appropriated or process-led writing—I am starting to believe something like the opposite, maybe—and the press has become a way of exploring this, or thinking about it (semi)publicly.

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?

The last four publications, concluding Season Two (2016–2017), were 'I Don't Remember' by Zain Aslam, 'Sex and the City 2' by Susan Finlay, 'cante jondo mixtape' by Rowan Evans, and 'About the Author' by James Carter. Several new things are lined up and submissions are open for Season Three.

We used to ask, "What about small/independent press publishing is particularly exciting to you right now?" We're still interested in the answer to that, but we're even more interested to know what you think needs to change.

I wouldn't want to say what any press should be like. For me it was important to feel like there was a reason for the press to exist, that it was going to do something different to other presses. 'Competition' only exists if you're attempting to do the same thing as other publishers. I feel like I appreciate publishers who have a distinct editorial position, a kind of identity. Publishers are like authors in that way. Even with the most cynical or least discerning publisher who seems to publish absolutely anything, their choices still read as a kind of editorial style. Some awareness of this is good I think.

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 If a Leaf Falls Press?

The press is not financially orientated, which is kind of guaranteed by the extremely small print runs—it supports itself. There is some kind of an experiment with value going on, in that the press has published over 40 publications which are now unavailable, so it is involved in 'manufacturing scarcity'. This has a different meaning against our backdrop of over-abundance and free content than it would have had pre-internet, obviously. What meaning, exactly? I feel like trying to work this out is part of the point. I'm not concerned with the commercial side of publishing at all, other than something to evoke aesthetically—if anything, I'm more interested in a business as a kind of entity or intelligence. What if you could introduce an element of obscurity, or privacy, into a commercially-determined body such as a publisher—if its decision-making processes weren't transparent or predictable—would it start to behave more like a person?

Recent releases from If a Leaf Falls Press: