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n+1: The Temple University Libraries Interview

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COMMENTARY

n+1: The Temple University Libraries Interview

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Marco Roth, *a founding editor of n + 1*
Keith Gessen, *a founding editor of n + 1*
Andrew Lopez *Research Support and Instruction Librarian, Connecticut College*

Editor's Note

As library-based publishing services expand, much of the attention is focused on open access digital publishing and online platforms, metrics, and peer review models. However, the publishing ecosystem as a whole is much more diverse. Particularly beyond the bounds of STEM publishing—in which much of the spirited debate and innovation regarding open access publishing is taking place—there are publishing sectors in which subscription models make sense (and work!), and in which print (both for books and journals/magazines) still has a certain cachet. If libraries want to offer publishing services to their whole communities, it is important to understand and to experiment within this broader publishing continuum. And as libraries begin to explore different publishing models and services, it is helpful to remember that there are many editors and publishers outside of libraries whose work can—and should—inform our own initiatives. This interview, conducted in 2010 but not previously transcribed, provides interesting and relevant insights from the editors of *n+1*, a subscription, print "magazine of politics, literature, and culture"—and we are pleased to welcome these "non-librarian voices" (as Andrew Lopez notes below) to the pages of *JLSC*.

INTRODUCTION

At Temple University Libraries (TUL), librarian Fred Rowland began conducting interviews and sharing them as streaming audio through TUL's website around the year 2007. Content includes interviews with students and scholars working in a wide range of areas from archaeology, the classics, digital humanities, and physics, to religious studies, tuna in America, and urban planning. Rowland's interviews offer valuable insights into the latest chapters of the human record. This interview, with two of the founding editors of the noteworthy journal *n+1* (Couch, 2008), provides a unique perspective into a growing area of involvement for libraries: publishing.

Although libraries, such as those at the University of Michigan, Purdue University, and the California Digital Library, have been involved in publishing for over a decade, the discussion of libraries as publishers has garnered increased attention in recent years. As interest in open access initiatives and altmetrics reach new heights (see *Nature*'s special issue on the future of publishing in March 2013), libraries and librarians are actively engaged in experimenting with and developing these models. The range of library publishing activities is varied—from producing and providing access to knowledge in the form of interviews (i.e. Rowland's work at Temple); to developing "new form[s] of publishing" for data (Monastersky, 2013, p. 431); to creating formal

publishing structures like the newly-founded Amherst College Press; and to building a professional community of practice—the Library Publishing Coalition.

In this context, it is important for libraries that are becoming publishers to hear non-librarian voices. Some of the thinking that went into the creation of the journal *n+1* offers constructive insight into the uncertain world of publishing in a digital age (Habash, 2013, p. 5). What follows is an edited transcript of Rowland's interview organized into the following topical sections, with narrative interludes in between each section:

- About *n+1*
- Economics and Distribution
- Print vs Online
- Effect of Format on Authors and Readers

The full, un-edited transcript is appended to this edited version, and links to the original audio files, which can be streamed or downloaded, are also provided at the end.

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ABOUT *n+1*

Fred Rowland (FR): On October 27, 2010, *n+1* editors Marco Roth and Keith Gessen spoke at Paley Library about what it takes to start a print literary journal, survive the battle of ideas with other magazines and the internet, and even get some writing done on the side. *n+1* is a thrice yearly print journal of politics, literature, and culture that was begun in 2004. For the event, Gessen and Roth sat down to speak with me about *n+1* and the future of publishing.

First I'd like to ask you guys if you would talk about your reasons for creating *n+1*. What were you trying to accomplish?

Marco Roth (MR): Well it was 2004, which if people will remember was a dark time in the history of this country. We had just gone to war with Iraq. And for those of us who had been in college in the 1990s, in the early 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, we were told it was the end of history, that there were no new ideas, and we either had to get on board or jump off. And a bunch of us had been thinking, well is this it, really? Is pre-professionalism the future for everyone? And we finally got mad as hell, and decided not take it anymore, and do something about it.

FR: In your first issue of *n+1*, which was in 2004, you published two editorials discussing other literary journals. One was *The New Republic* and the other was Dave Eggers literary projects, *McSweeny's* and *The Believer*. It seemed to me something old and something new. They were mainly negative appraisals, and it seems like you were staking out your position in the intellectual culture by describing what you didn't like.

So I'd like for you to talk about the journals that you like and the traditions to which you consider yourselves heirs.

Keith Gessen (KG): Certainly. In the decade immediately preceding us, in the 1990s, there were two journals we really liked. One is *Baffler*, which is based in Chicago, which is a cultural studies journal. They were mad about what had happened to punk rock as it turned into indie rock. They wrote a lot about the way that rebel culture became consumer culture. They described over and over again this sort of dialectical turn whereby every rebellious moment in American culture was immediately commodified and sold. Early in the last decade it slowed down a bit around 2001. In 2002 it actually burned down. So *The Baffler* sort of disappeared.

Another magazine that we really admired was called *Hermenaut*, which was based in Boston. The goal of *Hermenaut* was to apply philosophy to popular culture. In a way this was fitting because they were in Boston, which is kind of the center of the academy, and they really wanted to get out of the academy and engage popular culture, mostly movies. They produced a lot of movie critics, *Hermenaut*. It was edited by a guy named Joshua Glenn. And two of the people that worked with him were A.S. Hamrah and Christopher Fujiwara, who are now film critics. And again that was a magazine that took the things that were going on around it, in the same way that *The Baffler* did, things that were going on in the culture, things that were on the radio, things that were on TV, the things that were in the movie theaters, took them very seriously.

And *Hermenaut* explicitly said we are going to use philosophy to understand these things. *The Baffler* didn't have a particular approach, but it was recognizable as a Marxist approach to what was going on in music. I think we were very inspired by what was going on in those two magazines.

MR: And our third long-standing hero was the *Partisan Review*. This was the *Partisan Review* of the 1950s and 1960s. And when you picked up an old issue you saw that there was Hannah Arendt, there was Saul Bellow. There was a mixture of academics writing non-academically, philosophers [...] great fiction writers. And we also wondered what had happened to this kind of magazine.

And I think part of the reason that we attacked *The New Republic* and *The Believer* is because we felt that they had in a way split off the tendencies of the *Partisan Review*, and so the *New Republic* had become only a critique of a particular negative kind, in which there was no hope for culture, there are no more good novels, we have passed the age of culture. And the *Partisan Review* had in fact been attempting to consistently bring new ideas into American culture, although with a critical perspective.

And then *The Believer* had become the place where fiction writers go to write fiction and be approved of. And what we were reacting against was that these had become separate worlds. There had been a time in the not so recent past when these were the same world. And you could encounter these in the same place, and there is no reason that academics can't read fiction in a journal, and that fiction writers might decide that they want to read an essay with philosophical bent and maybe learn something from it that can help them in their work that isn't just about patting themselves on the back.

And so that was another major influence that fed into deciding to start *n+1* and create the kind of magazine that we created. The other thing that happened in 2003 was the *Partisan Review* had finally stopped printing, although they had made a neoconservative turn in the 1980s, so in a way they had been over for a long time, but this was sort of the official death knell of the *Partisan Review*. And we decided that the time was right for its successor.

FR: This might be a good time then to ask one or both of you if you could give us a quick description of your journal. How would you describe your journal?

MR: Hmm..."Publishing the unpublishable..."

KG: It's about 200 pages. In the front we have a section called the intellectual situation, where we try to say what is going on in intellectual life. Mostly that's critical. We talk about technology, politics, we talk about literary trends. That's the front section. Then there's a section of politics. Then there's what's known as the well, which is the long middle section. There you have essays, fiction, one translation in every issue, and we have probably one memoir per issue, and one essay that's more in the critical tradition.

A perfect example is Marco's essay, two issues ago, on the neuronovel, which is where he diagnosed, so to speak, a new trend in American fiction, or Anglo-American fiction, where character is replaced by some sort of mental disorder. So you don't really have characters who are created by their environment, they're created by whatever particular, and often very obscure, mental disorder they happen to have. And then in the back we have reviews.

MR: Just to complicate this slightly, when you go back and read the history of *n+1*, you'll see that the one thing we've also managed to do is combine genres. So as much as the essays in the well can be split up into the memoiristic and the more analytical, we also have this funny way of blending them, so in our second issue we publish this great essay by Elif Batuman, our senior writer, called "Babel in California," which is an account of an Isaac Babel conference, which sounds like it might be the driest, most boring thing in the world, but it's this incredible memoir of academic life, written in this amazing style which has a lot of the zip of Babel, and then also contains great insights into the work of Babel.

So you're reading a critical essay, an account of an academic conference, and a memoir of what it's like to be a graduate student in 2003. This essay does all of these things. That kind of piece is the sort of piece that really couldn't be published anywhere else, because, if you put that in an academic magazine, they would take out all the memoir stuff and just want your insights about Babel. If you were doing a conference report and that genre doesn't really exist, you couldn't really do that. And a memoir of academic life, well, you take that to a publisher in 2003, and they would say a memoir should be about pain and suffering and addiction.

In a way what happened, Elif was finally able to publish a book of her essays at Farrar, Straus and Giroux, that was essentially a memoir of academic life. Which was a genre that I think we helped create.

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It is noteworthy that Roth points to the role of *n+1* in helping to create a new genre—memoir of academic life. Monica McCormick from the Office of Digital Scholarly Publishing at New York University (NYU) has also emphasized the important role "publishers can have in creating new fields of scholarship," which she addressed in an interview with Adeline Koh for the 'Digital Challenges to Academic Publishing' series in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Koh & McCormick, 2012).

n+1's ability to create a new discursive space grew out of its editors' take on the best and worst of periodical publishing. With a recent cover story on "Dead White Magazines" in their Winter 2013 issue, which calls out the publishing program of *The Atlantic*, *Harper's*, *The New Yorker*, and the *Paris Review*, we can see they continue to distinguish themselves from other leading periodicals of record after almost ten years in the business.

As the interview turns from the creation of the *n+1* identity to the question of economics and distribution, "the most important question of all," as Gessen jokes, we come to an issue that has been at the core of the library's foray into the world of publishing: subscription costs. In the 2013 Periodical Price Survey in *Library Journal*, "The Winds of Change," Stephen Bosch observes that 2012 brought "renewed emphasis on open access as diminished academic library budgets and the steady increase in the cost of journal literature converged" (Bosch & Henderson, 2013, p. 32). This emphasis was seen clearly in the Harvard University Library System's memo to faculty, which encouraged participation in open-access journals and repositories. Robert Darnton, Harvard University Librarian, remarking on the unsustainable cost of institutional periodical subscriptions, stated "the whole system is fundamentally flawed" (Hoffman & Darnton, 2013, p. 447).

However, while large commercial publishers may give the subscription model a bad name through unsustainable pricing models and large profit margins, smaller journals and publishers like *n+1* still depend on individual and institutional subscriptions to fund their basic operations. And as libraries explore sustainable models for their own publishing programs, it is possible that subscriptions or other means of revenue (e.g. print-on-demand) may be necessary to at least cover costs. **~A.L.**

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ECONOMICS AND DISTRIBUTION

FR: What is the economics of publishing a small literary journal, and what did it take to put *n+1* together, and how did you get the word out to the potential community of readers?

KG: That's the most important question of all. [Laughter]. There were four of us. We each chipped in $2,000, for a total of $8,000. That was enough to print the first issue and distribute it. And at the end of six months, six months after we printed it, we had sold out, and we had somehow made our money back. We still had $8,000. And at that point, I decided that I was a business genius. [Laughter].

Amazingly, we had published this thing that supposedly nobody wanted, and we'd made our money back. But as it turned out, we'd all been working for free.

FR: You place the journals in academic communities, in bookstores, in academic environments, that kind of thing, how does that work?

MR: Initially we relied on word of mouth. In addition to the $2,000 that we brought to it, we did bring connections at various institutions in the writing world, in the world of New York journalism, and the academic world. But you know, that only takes you so far. So we got our foot in the door. People subscribed. Which surprised us. We also had a very strong, but small subscriber base. And we've maintained a strong, small subscriber base.

And then we initially did a lot of distribution on consignment. Keith was distribution czar for a long time, so maybe he would want to tell the history of distribution of *n+1*.

KG: I would love to tell it for hours! It's hard to get into Barnes and Noble. There's a particular magazine distributor called Ingram that gets you into Barnes and Noble. And it takes a while to develop a relationship with Ingram. Initially, there were two competing distributors. One was in Brooklyn, called Ubiquity, and the other was in New Jersey, called DeBoer. And DeBoer had a reputation for paying late, or not paying at all.

But DeBoer was also the historic distributor of the *Partisan Review*. So they had this sort of historic force, and they were in a lot of good independent bookstores.

And indeed, as we found out, they were not very good about paying. You would have to negotiate with them. They would say 'Oh we have no money.' And you'd say 'No, come on, you have the money. We won't send you the next issue.' We actually withheld an issue from them until they paid. And then they did pay.

And then DeBoer, it turned out, a couple years later, about 2008 or 2007, they did in fact go bankrupt. So they weren't lying when they said that they had no money.

In a way, we are much more established than we were. So, you know, we have a good relationship with Ingram. It's not a problem to get into Barnes and Noble. But there are still various little things that come up and you have to be very vigilant. It's problematic because a lot of the other magazines in our category are funded by universities. So they, for whatever reason, aren't very frugal. So they don't keep an eye on Ingram, for example.

So we have found that Ingram finds it puzzling when we say 'No, you know, we want to send you fifty fewer issues, or a hundred fewer issues.' And they say, 'We don't usually have to negotiate with these little magazines like this.' And we say 'Look, it means something to us.' It means money, it means a hundred issues, anyway...

But the independent bookstores are actually disappearing. And that is a real problem for us.

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The disappearance of bookstores, independent or otherwise, has been a big story in the news for years. Publisher and author Andre Schiffrin documented this trend in his books *The Business of Books* (2000) and *Words and Money* (2010), as did John B. Thompson (*Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century* (2010)) and Jason Epstein (*Book Business* (2001)). Obviously, the loss of bookstores is taking a toll on the periodical publications that were sold through them, and on a new generation of readers that may be finding access to periodical literature more confusing in an electronic environment. In academic libraries, there seems to be increasing confusion among students about the significance of periodical literature. In fact, for many students the difference between a scholarly journal and a popular article found online is often nonexistent.

Questions about the appropriate/best medium and format for information resources are important and wide-ranging. It is crucial that librarians—particularly those involved in publishing initiatives—objectively explore these questions and understand the benefits of both online and print, just as any publisher must. For example, although the *Los Angeles Review of Books* was originally launched as an online publication, they recently decided to 'return' to print, stating: "Print is not only alive and well, but thriving, as readers continue to have a profound appetite to not only read curated, edited, smart and fun opinion written by the best writers and thinkers of our time, but to hold it in hand" (Los Angeles Review of Books, 2013). **~A.L.**

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PRINT vs ONLINE

FR: I'm interested, I'm curious about when you were first creating the journal, as the founders and editors, you have both online presence and a print journal, and I'm just wondering, were you unanimous in going with both formats, online and print, what kind of discussion was there about that decision?

KG: Well, we had a big fight, and we continue to have it to this day. Initially, people would ask us, you know, in about 2005, 2006, 'Why didn't you guys just go online?' To be honest, that had never occurred to us. When we were sort of starting out, it was 2003. There were online zines, but there wasn't what there is now. So it was obvious to us if we wanted to be serious, and be taken seriously, and publish long things, we had to be in print. Then the big question was 'Do we also have a website that publishes independent content?'

FR: Right, right, or just what's in the print journal?

MR: Well, initially, as I was reminding Keith earlier, that Mark [Greif] and I had opposed having any content on the website. We just wanted the website to basically be a kind of portal for people to buy the print issue. And you know just kind of be the tombstone on the web that says 'If you dig under this, we'll send you a print issue.' And then there was a debate about whether we put the actual issue content online, and then why would anybody buy the print issue? And instead, Keith, you devised the *n+1* mag...

KG: Oh, well, you know, most literary magazines,

McSweeney's being the exception, had a tombstone page basically where they would say 'Here you've come to *The Paris Review* website, here's how you order *The Paris Review*.' Right? 'And here's the history of *The Paris Review*.' Same with *Granta*, same with *Ploughshares*, basically everybody had this, *The Baffler* also.

I thought it would be fun if, we would come up very seldom, so we should have regular content on the website. So as a result we have since 2004 been publishing regularly on the website, essays, some fiction, mostly sort of short, although increasingly long, essays that are not in the print magazine. Some of the best of them have been written by Marco. Marco is our most prolific web author.

In fact, the volume of work that has been on the website is greater than the volume of work in the print issues. Whether this has been a good idea or not...

FR: No one knows... [Laughter]

MR: At a certain point, we would have to remind people that we were a print magazine. They would refer to us as a blog, they would refer to us as an online zine. And these were people that had never seen the print magazine or bothered to click through the web pages to the point where it says here's an issue. And, you know, this confusion is something that I think shows that people come to *n+1* in different ways.

KG: Some web pieces have been tremendously popular. They'll get, I don't know, 50,000 readers, maybe a 100,000 readers every time. It's enormous. And it's more than any piece in the print magazine gets. However, whether those people then, whether those readers, become loyal *n+1* readers, uhm, probably, well, we have no idea.

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Corresponding to the question of whether a publication should be made available in print or electronic format is the question of the effect each medium has on its users and creators. Not a month goes by anymore, it seems, without news that electronic reading is different than old-fashioned print reading. Take the example of a recent *Time* magazine article which reported students have a better memory of information when they read it in print rather than on screen (Szalavitz, 2012), or a recent *Scientific American* article which reviewed the growing body of literature on this topic, and which found that "many people approach computers and tablets with a state of mind less conducive to learning than the one they bring to paper" (Jabr, 2013).

The idea that readers take print more seriously than text on screens happens to be one of the hallmarks of *n+1*, which came into existence roughly a decade ago at a time when readers were turning increasingly to electronic information. It is interesting to read in the following section of some of the deliberations they engaged in while navigating this turning point. Yet well into the information age *n+1* remains dedicated to its publication in print format. In the following section they say publishing in print is part of their "historical position." But it is also part of how they imagine themselves and their readers to be. Such considerations play no small role in their undertaking as publishers. **~A.L.**

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EFFECT OF FORMAT ON AUTHORS & READERS

FR: I'm really curious about how you think these different forms of media—the print media, the print journal, and the online presence—how do you think that affects the writer and the audience expectations? For instance, you two write an awful lot; when you're thinking about your writing do you think about whether you're in print or online, does that affect you in any way and how you write?

MR: Well I will step into this as the prolific *n+1* web writer claimed-to-be. At the time, the reason I started writing for the *n+1* website is because I was a very slow, blocked writer at the time. And there was something about writing things into one's computer that felt less serious. I think it allowed me to loosen up and experiment, or maybe even just find myself saying things that I might have before censored.

And that was a great use of the web, I think, in its kind of provisional status. You weren't condemned by your words forever. It seemed like they could just disappear. But of course, then, oddly...

FR: They never disappear...

MR: Yes, and once you realize that, then it becomes a different style of writing. Where I think you realize that the way people quote you on the web is different. In some ways, the rules become stricter. Your argument better

be in your first paragraph, there better be something for the reader to hang onto. You really put something, 'blam!' right up there. You feel like you're fighting for attention. And then that becomes very draining. And you're saying 'I wish I could just have the time in print, because somebody will at least give me until the end of the first page.'

FR: Right, to develop an argument...

MR: I think we have seen web writing become shorter and shorter. And then Twitter. [Laughter]. It's a kind of art of compression. Great journalism has always been an art of compression. But how compressed can you be?

FR: Keith, do you have anything to add?… In your ninth issue, the most recent issue, entitled 'Bad Money' of the print journal, you had an editorial, I think it was in the intellectual situation part of the journal, and it was called 'internet as social movement.' And at the end of the article, the editor said this: 'At this point the best thing the web and the book could do for one another would be to admit their essential difference. This would allow the web to develop as it wishes with a clear conscience. And for literature to do what it's always done in periods of crisis: keep its eyes and its ears open, take notes, and bide its time.' What's the essential difference between the web and the book, in your opinion, and what's the period of crisis we're living in?

KG: The essential difference...I think it's the way that you read the situation that you're in. I think we're all learning this together. When Marco was talking about what it's like to write for the web versus what it's like to write for print, he was imagining a reader of both media. But that reader is himself. We know there's all these sort of conjectures about what people read like. But we know what we ourselves read like.

I know that I read on the web more quickly, I am more liable to start scanning for things, and I am more liable to click away. So it's not the...It feels like an ereader, where you can't click away, is much closer to the book, than the computer, the Mozilla browser, where you can always open a new tab and start checking your email. So the kind of point of that editorial, in large part, because you see these publishers, and magazines saying, 'Oh my god, everything's going to hell.'

And the people who are supporters of the web, or are on the web, or who like the web, they say 'No, don't worry, the web will help you. You will use the web. We will help you use the web to get the word out about your product. Or, publish your product, just publish your product on the web.' And, you know, some of these are in perfectly good faith. Right, they say, 'We can help you.' Some of them, there's always a condition, 'You should make all of your content available for free on the web,' right, 'and then we'll figure something out.' [Laughter]

It seems like supporters of the web, which we clearly are not, we're the publishers of a print magazine, that's our historical position, that we happened to have found ourselves in, but I think people who love the web need to start, I would like for them to start thinking a little bit differently about the web, as something that has its own rules, that has its own politics, and its own way of being. And it's not just going to become a conduit for these other things, right, especially not for print. So, you know, it's differences of economics, but it's mostly differences in the way that people experience it.

MR: But also it's not clear how good the intentions of web futurists are. In some cases, some web people regard print as a discarded stage that has been superseded. So there's a continuity that goes, you know, the Greeks before the invention of writing, recited their epics, epic is a form that was good only for oral culture. Then they invented writing so you go on to poetry, novels, and those were made available en masse through the printing press. And now we have the web, and the web is going to create a new form, a new genre, which is not the novel, and all you people who had the misfortune of being born at this turning point, and educated prior to the turning point, have now been liquidated.

And you are a cast out of history. And I think when we said we were against the end of history, we were not for the return of a kind of Marxist historicism without the utopian aspect that would just say 'Oh you have been liquidated by technology. Your subject position is no longer valid. You either must learn to write for the web, or you must cease to exist.' And I think what we were really trying to say is that, you know, Hey, people still recite poetry, oral culture still survives, the novel will still survive, literature will still survive, in print, even, because there is a quality of experience that you get

just as people go to the theater sometimes even though we've had the movies now for a hundred years.

Culture isn't a zero sum game, and I think we often debate cultural forms as though it is a zero sum game. And we actually are fortunate enough to live in a time in which we have all of these cultural modes available to us and one constantly gets involved in these debates where they're like you must choose one or the other. And no, you just have to develop.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Fred Rowland's interview with Keith Gessen and Marco Roth was transcribed from audio, edited, and introduced by Andrew Lopez.

AUDIO RECORDING OF INTERVIEW

The original audio recording of this interview is available for streaming or download from the Temple University Libraries website:

http://sites.temple.edu/librarynews/2011/01/06/n1_interview_ge/

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APPENDIX

Complete Interview Transcript

PART I

Fred Rowland (FR): On October 27, 2010, *n+1* editors Marco Roth and Keith Gessen spoke at Paley Library about what it takes to start a print literary journal, survive the battle of ideas with other magazines and the internet, and even get some writing done on the side. *n+1* is a thrice yearly print journal of politics, literature, and culture that was begun in 2004. For the event, Gessen and Roth sat down to speak with me about *n+1* and the future of publishing. I am Fred Rowland.

I am talking with Marco Roth and Keith Gessen who are here with me at Temple University to speak about their journal *n+1*. First I'd like to ask you guys if you would talk about your reasons for creating *n+1*. What were you trying to accomplish?

Marco Roth (MR): Well it was 2004, which if people will remember was a dark time in the history of this country. We had just gone to war with Iraq. And for those of us who had been in college in the 1990s, in the early 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, we were told it was the end of history, that there were no new ideas, and we either had to get on board or jump off. And a bunch of us had been thinking, well is this it, really? Is pre-professionalism the future for everyone?

And we had been muttering discontentedly into our beers at various universities, like Yale, Keith was up in Syracuse doing his MFA, and Ben [Kunkel] was trying to make it as a writer in NY. And we finally got mad as hell, and decided not take it anymore, and do something about it.

FR: In your first issue of *n+1*, which was in 2004, you published two editorials discussing other literary journals. One was *The New Republic* and the other was Dave Eggers' literary projects, *McSweeny's* and *The Believer.* It seemed to me something old and something new. They were mainly negative appraisals, and it seems like you were staking out your position in the intellectual culture by describing what you didn't like.

So I'd like for you to talk about the journals that you like and the traditions which you consider yourselves heirs to.

Keith Gessen (KG): Certainly. In the decade immediately preceding us, in the 1990s, there were two journals we really liked. One is *Baffler*, which is based in Chicago, which is a cultural studies journal. They were mad about what had happened to punk rock as it turned into indie rock. They wrote a lot about the way that rebel culture became consumer culture. They described over and over again this sort of dialectical turn whereby every rebellious moment, instance, in American culture was immediately commodified and sold. They were based in Chicago and they had a real emphasis on music. And that was a great magazine, which had, by the time we started, it was sort of slowed down a bit. Early in the last decade it slowed down a bit around 2001. In 2002 it actually burned down. So *The Baffler* sort of disappeared.

Another magazine that we really admired was called *Hermenaut*. Which was based in Boston. The goal of *Hermenaut* was to apply philosophy to popular culture. In a way this was fitting because they were in Boston, which is kind of the center of the academy, and they really wanted to get out of the academy and engage popular culture, mostly movies. They produced a lot of movie critics, *Hermenaut*. It was edited by a guy named Joshua Glenn. And two of the people that worked with him were A.S. Hamrah and Christopher Fujiwara, who are now film critics. And again that was a magazine that took the things that were going on around it, in the same way

that *The Baffler* did, things that were going on in the culture, things that were on the radio, things that were on TV, the things that were in the movie theaters, took them very seriously.

And *Hermenaut* explicitly said we are going to use philosophy to understand these things. *The Baffler* didn't have a particular approach, but it was recognizable as a Marxist approach to what was going on in music. I think we were very inspired by what was going on in those two magazines.

MR: And our third long standing hero was the *Partisan Review*. This was the *Partisan Review* of the 1950s and 1960s. And when you picked up an old issue you saw that there was Hannah Arendt, there was Saul Bellow. There was a mixture of academics writing non-academically, philosophers [...] great fiction writers. And we also wondered what had happened to this kind of magazine.

And I think part of the reason that we attacked *The New Republic* and *The Believer* is because we felt that they had in a way split off the tendencies of the *Partisan Review*, and so the *New Republic* had become only a critique of a particular negative kind, in which there was no hope for culture, there are no more good novels, we have passed the age of culture. And the *Partisan Review* had in fact been attempting to consistently bring new ideas into American culture, although with a critical perspective.

And then *The Believer* had become the place where fiction writers go to write fiction and be approved of. And what we were reacting against was that these had become separate worlds. There had been a time in the not so recent past when these were the same world. And you could encounter these in the same place, and there is no reason that academics can't read fiction in a journal, and that fiction writers might decide that they want to read an essay with philosophical bent and maybe learn something from it that can help them in their work that isn't just about patting themselves on the back.

And so that was another major influence that fed into deciding to start *n+1* and create the kind of magazine that we created. The other thing that happened in 2003 was the *Partisan Review* had finally stopped printing, although they had made a neoconservative turn in the 1980s, so in a way they had been over for a long time, but this was sort of the official death knell of the *Partisan Review*. And we decided that the time was right for its successor.

FR: This might be a good time then to ask one or both of you if you could give us a quick description of your journal. How would you describe your journal?

MR: Hmm... "Publishing the unpublishable..."

KG: It's about 200 pages. In the front we have a section called the intellectual situation, where we try to say what is going on in intellectual life. Mostly that's critical. We talk about technology, politics, we talk about literary trends. That's the front section. Then there's a section of politics. Then there's what's known as the well, which is the long middle section. There you have essays, fiction, one translation in every issue, and one, the essays tend to split, there are, we have probably one memoir per issue, and one essay that's more in the critical tradition.

A perfect example is Marco's essay, two issues ago, on the neuronovel, which is where he diagnosed, so to speak, a new trend in American fiction, or Anglo-American fiction, where character is replaced by some sort of mental disorder. So you don't really have characters who are created by their environment, they're created by whatever particular, and often very obscure, mental disorder they happen to have. And then in the back we have reviews. [8:55]

MR: Just to complicate this slightly, when you go back and read the history of n+1, you'll see that the one thing we've also managed to do is combine genres. So as much as the essays in the well can be split up into the

memoiristic and the more analytical, we also have this funny way of blending them, so in our second issue we publish this great essay by Elif Batuman, our senior writer, called "Babel in California," which is an account of an Isaac Babel conference, which sounds like it might be the driest, most boring thing in the world, but it's this incredible memoir of academic life, written in this amazing style which has a lot of the zip of Babel, and then also contains great insights into the work of Babel.

So you're reading a critical essay, an account of an academic conference, and a memoir of what it's like to be a graduate student in 2003. This essay does all of these things. That kind of piece is the sort of piece that really couldn't be published anywhere else, because, if you put that in an academic magazine, they would take out all the memoir stuff and just want your insights about Babel. If you were doing a conference report and that genre doesn't really exist, you couldn't really do that. And a memoir of academic life, well, you take that to a publisher in 2003, and they would say a memoir should be about pain and suffering and addiction.

In a way what happened, Elif was finally able to publish a book of her essays at Farrar, Straus and Giroux, that was essentially a memoir of academic life. Which was a genre that I think we helped create.

FR: So you're opening up spaces, essentially?

MR: Yes.

FR: What is the economics of publishing a small literary journal, and what did it take to put *n+1* together, and how did you get the word out to the potential community of readers?

KG: That's the most important question of all. [Laughter]. There were four of us. We each chipped in $2,000, for a total of $8,000. That was enough to print the first issue and distribute it. And at the end of six months, six months after we printed it, we had sold out, and we had somehow made our money back. We still had $8,000. And at that point, I decided that I was a business genius. [Laughter].

Amazingly, we had published this thing that supposedly nobody wanted, and we'd made our money back. But as it turned out, we'd all been working for free. For six months. It turns out if you do that, you can actually... And we've continued to do that pretty much; work for free. Even as we've expanded - we now have one and a half employees, but the editors still are...

FR: You place the journals in academic communities, in bookstores, in academic environments, that kind of thing, how does that work?

MR: Initially we relied on word of mouth. In addition to the $2,000 that we brought to it, we did bring connections at various institutions in the writing world, in the world of New York journalism, and the academic world. But you know, that only takes you so far. So we got our foot in the door. People subscribed. Which surprised us. We also had a very strong, but small subscriber base. And we've maintained a strong, small subscriber base.

Whether or not they're the same people. And in fact, we were lamenting the fact that many of our friends who may be listening, many of the friends who subscribed initially, decided not to renew at a certain point. Maybe they were thinking they had done their duty by us. But they really sustained us. And then we initially did a lot of distribution on consignment. Keith was distribution czar for a long time, so maybe he would want to tell the history of distribution of *n+1*. [13:30]

KG: I would love to tell it for hours! It's hard to get into Barnes and Noble. There's a particular magazine distributor called Ingram that gets you into Barnes and Noble. And it takes a while to develop a relationship with

Ingram. Initially, there were two competing distributors. One was in Brooklyn, called Ubiquity, and the other was in New Jersey, called DeBoer. And DeBoer had a reputation for paying late, or not paying at all.

But DeBoer was also the historic distributor of the *Partisan Review*. So they had this sort of historic force, and they were in a lot of good independent bookstores. And indeed, as we found out, they were not very good about paying. You would have to negotiate with them. They would say 'Oh we have no money.' And you'd say 'No, come on, you have the money. We won't send you the next issue.' We actually withheld an issue from them until they paid. And then they did pay.

MR: Tell them the Saint Mark's story.

KG: Uhm, well, hold on. And then DeBoer, it turned out, a couple years later, about 2008 or 2007, they did in fact go bankrupt. So they weren't lying when they said that they had no money.

In a way, we are much more established than we were. So, you know, we have a good relationship with Ingram. It's not a problem to get into Barnes and Noble. But there are still various little things that come up and you have to be very vigilant. It's problematic because a lot of the other magazines in our category are funded by universities. So they, for whatever reason, aren't very frugal. So they don't keep an eye on Ingram, for example.

So we have found that Ingram finds it puzzling when we say 'No, you know, we want to send you fifty fewer issues, or a hundred fewer issues.' And they say, 'We don't usually have to negotiate with these little magazines like this.' And we say 'Look, it means something to us.' It means money, it means a hundred issues, anyway...

But the independent bookstores are actually disappearing. And that is a real problem for us.

MR: And now is the time for a Philadelphia shout out to Avril 50 on Sansom street, which is I believe now the only independent magazine shop in Philadelphia which carries *n+1*.

FR: Avril 50, on Sansom. Where on Sansom?

MR: On Sansom between 34th and 35th by Penn [the University of Pennsylvania]. [15:56]

KG: What's the Saint Mark's story?

MR: The Saint Mark's story. Remember we were on consignment with Saint Mark's? Saint Mark's was one of our biggest sources of independent bookstore revenue. And we were dealing directly with them, and then at a certain point we gave them up to the distributor in exchange for getting paid, from the distributor. Do you remember that story?

KG: That's not quite right...There are many stories...It's an adventure...

FR: I'm interested, I'm curious about when you were first creating the journal, and the founders and editors, you have both online presence and a print journal, and I'm just wondering, were you unanimous in going with both formats, online and print, what kind of discussion was there about that decision? [16:57]

KG: Well, we had a big fight, and we continue to have it to this day. Initially, people would ask us, you know, in about 2005, 2006, 'Why didn't you guys just go online?' To be honest, that had never occurred to us. When we were sort of starting out, it was 2003. There were online zines, but there wasn't what there is now. So it was obvious to us if we wanted to be serious, and be taken seriously, and publish long things, we had to be in print. Then the

big question was 'Do we also have a website that publishes independent content?'

FR: Right, right, or just what's in the print journal?

MR: Well, initially, as I was reminding Keith earlier, that Mark and I had opposed having any content on the website. We just wanted the website to basically be a kind of portal for people to buy the print issue. And you know just kind of be the tombstone on the web that says 'If you dig under this, we'll send you a print issue.' And then there was a debate about whether we put the actual issue content online, and then why would anybody buy the print issue? And instead, Keith, you devised the *n+1* mag...

KG: Oh, well, you know, most literary magazines, *McSweeney's* being the exception, had a tombstone page basically where they would say 'Here you've come to *The Paris Review* website, here's how you order *The Paris Review*.' Right? 'And here's the history of *The Paris Review*.' Same with *Granta*, same with *Ploughshares*, basically everybody had this, *The Baffler* also. [18:40]

I thought it would be fun if, we would come up very seldom, so we should have regular content on the website. So as a result we have since 2004 been publishing regularly on the website, essays, some fiction, mostly sort of short, although increasingly long, essays that are not in the print magazine. Some of the best of them have been written by Marco. Marco is our most prolific web author.

MR: Thank you.

KG: In fact, the volume of work that has been on the website is greater than the volume of work in the print issues. Whether this has been a good idea or not... [19:26]

FR: No one knows... [Laughter]

MR: At a certain point, we would have to remind people that we were a print magazine. They would refer to us as a blog, they would refer to us as an online zine. And these were people that had never seen the print magazine or bothered to click through the web pages to the point where it says here's an issue. And, you know, this confusion is something that I think shows that people come to *n+1* in different ways.

We have an online readership that's actually oddly all over the world. Occasionally, we'll get a subscription request from Germany or Australia. And so there has been some crossover. The idea is really that you can get your fix between issues by reading the website. [20:17]

KG: And yet, and yet... Every publisher is struggling with this. Every magazine, every publisher is wrackig their heads over this. And we haven't figured out whether we did the right thing or the wrong thing. Some web pieces have been, a lot of them by Marco, we also have a very popular web writer named Christian Lorentzen, who has attacked various filmmakers, there's a pile of young filmmakers, Wes Anderson, Judd Apatow, and those pieces are tremendously popular.

They'll get, I don't know, 50,000 readers, maybe a 100,000 readers every time. It's enormous. And it's more than any piece in the print magazine gets. However, whether those people then, whether those readers, become loyal *n+1* readers, uhm, probably, well, we have no idea. We hope they do. But the idea is for us, we're an ongoing... [21:26]

END PART I

PART II

FR: I'm really curious about how you think these different forms of media—the print media, the print journal, and the online presence—how do you think that affects the writer and the audience expectations? For instance, you two write an awful lot; when you're thinking about your writing do you think about whether you're in print or online, does that affect you in any way and how you write?

MR: Well I will step into this as the prolific *n+1* web writer claimed-to-be. At the time, the reason I started writing for the *n+1* website is because I was a very slow, blocked writer at the time. And there was something about writing things into one's computer that felt less serious. I think it allowed me to loosen up and experiment, or maybe even just find myself saying things that I might have before censored.

And that was a great use of the web, I think, in its kind of provisional status. You weren't condemned by your words forever. It seemed like they could just disappear. But of course, then, oddly...

FR: They never disappear...

MR: Yes, and once you realize that, then it becomes a different style of writing. Where I think you realize that the way people quote you on the web is different. In some ways, the rules become stricter. Your argument better be in your first paragraph, there better be something for the reader to hang onto. You really put something, 'blam!' right up there. You feel like you're fighting for attention. And then that becomes very draining. And you're saying 'I wish I could just have the time in print, because somebody will at least give me until the end of the first page.'

FR: Right, to develop an argument...

MR: I think we have seen web writing become shorter and shorter. And then Twitter. [Laughter]. It's a kind of art of compression. Great journalism has always been an art of compression. But how compressed can you be?

FR: Keith, do you have anything to add?…In your ninth issue, the most recent issue, entitled 'Bad Money' of the print journal, you had an editorial, I think it was in the intellectual situation part of the journal, and it was called 'internet as social movement.' And at the end of the article, the editor said this: 'At this point the best thing the web and the book could do for one another would be to admit their essential difference. This would allow the web to develop as it wishes with a clear conscience. And for literature to do what it's always done in periods of crisis: keep its eyes and its ears open, take notes, and bide its time.' What's the essential difference between the web and the book, in your opinion, and what's the period of crisis we're living in? [4:03]

KG: The essential difference... I think it's the way that you read the situation that you're in. I think we're all learning this together. When Marco was talking about what it's like to write for the web versus what it's like to write for print, he was imagining a reader of both media. But that reader is himself. We know, there's all these sort of conjectures about what people read like. But we know what we ourselves read like.

I know that I read on the web more quickly, I am more liable to start scanning for things, and I am more liable to click away. So it's not the...It feels like an ereader, where you can't click away, is much closer to the book, than the computer, the Mozilla browser, where you can always open a new tab and start checking your email. So the kind of point of that editorial, in large part, because you see these publishers, and magazines saying, 'Oh my god, everything's going to hell.'

And the people who are supporters of the web, or are on the web, or who like the web, they say 'No, don't worry, the web will help you. You will use the web. We will help you use the web to get the word out about your product.

Or, publish your product, just publish your product on the web.' And, you know, some of these are in perfectly good faith. Right, they say, 'We can help you.' Some of them, there's always a condition, 'You should make all of your content available for free on the web,' right, 'and then we'll figure something out.' [Laughter]

It seems like supporters of the web, which we clearly are not, we're the publishers of a print magazine, that's our historical position, that we happened to have found ourselves in, but I think people who love the web need to start, I would like for them to start thinking a little bit differently about the web, as something that has its own rules, that has its own politics, and its own way of being. And it's not just going to become a conduit for these other things, right, especially not for print. So, you know, it's differences of economics, but it's mostly differences in the way that people experience it.

So we were trying to make a point about, you know, let's be a little bit clearer about what's happening. And you know, your good intentions for helping print, we need to think those through. [7:15]

MR: But also it's not clear how good the intentions of web futurists are. In some cases, some web people regard print as a discarded stage that has been superceded. So there's a continuity that goes, you know, the Greeks before the invention of writing, recited their epics, epic is a form that was good only for oral culture. Then they invented writing so you go on to poetry, novels, and those were made available en masse through the printing press. And now we have the web, and the web is going to create a new form, a new genre, which is not the novel, and all you people who had the misfortune of being born at this turning point, and educated prior to the turning point, have now been liquidated.

And you are a cast out of history. And I think when we said we were against the end of history, we were not for the return of a kind of Marxist historicism without the utopian aspect that would just say 'Oh you have been liquidated by technology. Your subject position is no longer valid. You either must learn to write for the web, or you must cease to exist.' And I think what we were really trying to say is that, you know, Hey, people still recite poetry, oral culture still survives, the novel will still survive, literature will still survive, in print, even, because there is a quality of experience that you get just as people go to the theater sometimes even though we've had the movies now for a hundred years.

Culture isn't a zero sum game, and I think we often debate cultural forms as though it is a zero sum game. And we actually are fortunate enough to live in a time in which we have all of these cultural modes available to us and one constantly gets involved in these debates where they're like you must choose one or the other. And no, you just have to develop. I think that's what that line about the separate coexistence... [9:21]

FR: What about the period of crisis, you already talked a little bit about that right in the beginning. And it might be the same thing you were talking about, the journal initially appeared in 2004 with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, etc., etc., but what else do you want to say about the period of crisis we're living in?

MR: Well that was about the economic crisis.

FR: Oh, when you said 'period of crisis,' is that what you were referring to?

KG: Oh, no, I really meant the very narrow publishing crisis.

FR: Oh, okay, the publishing crisis.

MR: But the publishing crisis is an aspect of the economic crisis. Some publishers are suddenly going 'Oh my god, we're all losing money, the book is dead.' And in some ways this is a way around looking at certain strange

practices in publishing like giving exorbitant advances to certain people who are not really writers, they shall remain unnamed. What is it that publishers do? Are they there to publish books, or are they in entertainment? A conglomerate, certain publishers have crises of identity...

FR: I was a bookseller from the late 1980s until I became a librarian in the early 2000s. And so I saw the whole transition from the smaller publishers, there were still some left that were very dedicated to actually publishing real good literature and history and soon, more and more they just got gobbled up as the '90s proceeded. It was sort of depressing to watch.

Do either of you own an ebook reader? You know, a Kindle, or a Sony ebook reader, or an iPad, or anything like that?

MR: Where was I when they were giving them out for free? Do you remember when there was this period when suddenly everybody in publishing and magazines in New York was given like a free ebook reader? Or a free kindle reader? Where they were all getting them for free. Did you get in on that?

FR: Okay, so neither of you have one. Okay, well let me ask you then...

KG: I have a computer. That's my ebook reader.

FR: That's about where I am at the moment. What do you think the book is going to look like in ten years? If you had to project or become a futurist for a moment, what would you guess?

MR: Books in general?

FR: Novels. Pretty much like they do now?

MR: I would like to see a turn away from this trend that has people putting photos in and making the novel into a kind of multimedia presentation. But hey, the multimedia options are much better on a computer. So if you want a novel, you're still going to want, you know, what you're opting for, it's going to become clearer, is a continuous streaming print experience that is uninterrupted by multimedia. So you get to come up with the pictures in your head, you get to experience the flow of the words, it'll be about pace. You'll also be able to indulge the pleasures of the imagination such as they still exist among people who haven't been overexposed to multimedia presentations. [12:54] [Laughter]

So it's possible that the novel could just kind of regress into a classic form, in which it maintains its shape as we've known it more or less stably from the middle of the 19th century up through the middle of the 20th century. Or you know, one might see some higher production values. Like, there might be some nice illustrations, or else you might see a return to a kind of victorian era, the novel as a boutique collectors item. That could be interesting.

FR: How about you, Keith? Any ideas?

KG: Nope. That sounds nice. Although, cheaper.

MR: Cheaper might also be, cheap paper, recycled paper. If they could bring down the prices of print books, somehow, that would be great. Because they are kind of spiralling. You know, the moment you have to pay $20 for a vintage paperback, something is wrong.

FR: Yes, hardback costs like $39.95. Okay, I also noticed that recently you have a book publishing venture. That

you recently published *What Was the Hipster?* And I think its by one of your editors, Mark Greif. Correct?

MR: That's a book that fits in your pocket; old school.

FR: Okay, and I was reading about *What Was the Hipster?*, read a few articles about it, even went back and read Norman Mailer's piece in *Dissent* magazine, called...

MR: You are the kind of reader we've been waiting for...

FR: ...called 'the white negro,' and then there was something in *Partisan Review* that was very interesting about the hipster, and one of the things I kept wondering about as I was reading your work in *n+1* and reading some book reviews you've done in various outlets, I was wondering what is the editorial attitude at *n+1* towards pop-culture? In general, what's your take on it, how do you move it into your journal?

MR: It's divided. One thing about *n+1* is that we realized in our fights as we were starting the magazine is that there are certain things that we agree about and certain things we will never agree about. And after a period of trying to annihilate each other, we've reached a sort of, we allow those things that we disagree about to be pursued by different editors. So I have a peculiar history in which...people think we're elitist. This is a term that gets thrown at us, that we're addressing actually in our next issue, issue 10. Brief issue 10 promotion, which is coming out in two weeks! So if you get issue 10 of n+1 you will understand why we are not elitist!

KG: Can people preorder that now on the website? [Laughter]

MR: I believe they can! So I had this strange upbringing in which I was sort of not really allowed that much access to pop-culture. My parents were very anti-TV, both of them were, my mother was a classical musician, my father was a great fan of classical music. So I had this moment where, some people who grow up this way rebel totally, and then I would have been a punk rocker, and I would have thought punk rock was the best thing in the world. But because I kind of missed it, I kind of take what I can from it. But I feel that there is often, that we're in this weird moment where culturally there's a lot of pressure put on people to become aficionados of pop-culture. It's reverse snobbery. So just as my parents put a lot of pressure on me to be into classical music, now the media puts a lot of pressure on me to be interested in the latest TV show or the newest hit band. And at this point, my tastes are pretty much set. I've seceded. I listen around. So I'm probably in this sense the most removed, esoteric *n+1* editor along with Ben. But that's just partly circumstances.

KG: I grew up in the suburbs of Boston. And I later learned to my surprise that there were people who were listening to various punk music at the time. This was in the late 1980s. I had no access to this at all. Or at least I didn't think I did. Although I remember reading a biography of Nirvana, where I think, it was the bassist, who's from a Croatian family. And he went at some point in the 1980s he went to visit family in Croatia, and it was a cousin of his who gave him, I don't know if it was The Clash, or something that was now very well know, but at the time if you were an American, you had to go to Eastern Europe to get it. So, yeah, I grew up in pop-culture. I played football in high school.

FR: And at Harvard also?

KG: I did, yep. So I still feel like, for example, I would like our magazine to have a circulation of a million.

MR: And a sports section!

FR: Are you a Boston or a Yankees fan?

KG: Oh I am still a Boston fan. Although they've disappointed me with their drug use... But you know it's a constant argument within the magazine, whether we want to remain a small magazine. We always want to be slightly bigger than we are. I think we could be a lot bigger. I think the magazine is very accessible. I think a million people really could read the magazine. So that's a bit of a tension that's a pretty good tension... [19:13]

MR: I think we agree that we want to become pop-culture. And there's no reason that we couldn't be popular culture! [Laughter] So we're in favor of pop culture... as long as it includes us!

FR: Speaking of esoteric, I'm curious if you have any thoughts about, you know this sort of romantic constellation of ideas that we associate with the author, you know, this sort of genius, this sort of person that's plopped down among us, this sort of aberration that creates everything by himself, do you think our idea of the author is changing at all? You guys write a lot of book reviews, and write fiction and stuff. Do you have any sense of that? I'm thinking also in terms of just the internet. Is it changing how...? [20:16]

MR: This is a great question, which I am going to channel an *n+1* contributor, and friend of the magazine, Astra Taylor, who is a documentary filmmaker who was recently complaining to me. Because she said, you know, the author was supposed to be dead. In the 1960s and all there was…and you know the author as a construct, the author is dead, there is no author. And you know, this wasn't that literally of course, but the idea was that you just read a book because, not because of who wrote it, the book isn't really about the life of the person who wrote it, you don't need a key to the life of the person who wrote it, you don't need to know how they wrote it, you just read their book.

And the book has text and ideas and you take those ideas and you make what you want out of them. And that seemed to be, and you know authors took this kind of personally, and were staging their own death in various ways, like Philip Roth in *The Counterlife*. The idea of the death of the author seemed to have a greater whole than authors. And now, according to Astra, we live in this age which she calls the zombie author.

Which is that after the death of the author, you would think the author having been killed off in the 1960s and 1970s, has now come back to life in this way in which if you write a book, and maybe Keith can talk about this, you have to go on tour, you have to be the face of your own book. They publish author photos of you. So the author has kind of come back with a vengeance, but as this kind of, according to Astra, zombie figure. People aren't weirdly interested in the work, they're just interested in the author. So now the zombie author is kind of like the celebrity author. And in that case, if you go on a book tour, people will meet you, but will they read your book?

KG: For me, growing up, and thinking I wanted to become a writer, this was something I thought about a lot. Especially the way writers tended to depict themselves, as being very lonely, very alienated, there's this whole world that doesn't understand me, and I alone have decided to...

FR: Part Freudian, part Romantic...

KG: Yes, and once you get to college and you start actually reading up on some of these things, you learn that just about every writer that you could name, even Kafka, the loneliest, most alienated writer, refused to be published, had a warm circle of admirers...

FR: ...a group of friends, they wrote the works, and talked about them, and laughed about them...

KG: ...he would read to them out loud, and was actually quite admired in Prague, in the German language literary community. So you learn that, and you realize, 'Oh, actually a lot of this is collaboration, it's being part of a community, that's what being an author is.' But now, boy, things have been taken a little bit too far. [Laughter]

The idea that you are going to compose your book in real time, online, with comment, and people coming in. The idea that you as an author need to be perpetually present for your audience. It's hard to know whether we've just grown a little bit older, we're in our mid-thirties, we were educated at a certain time, we got our notions at a certain time. Uhm, I can't work like that.

FR: Well it's sort of the writer spectacle, essentially. Online, and everybody sort of waiting and watching.

KG: And yet I can imagine that there would be certain people for whom this would be nourishing. I mean, I see these people. So we'll see.

MR: It's almost as though the performance art turn among the fine arts is kind of slowly creeping into literature. This is something that we've also noticed. It's become more of a stunt oriented field.

FR: Okay, well finally, could you just tell me how you came up with the name *n+1*? Is it just sort of infinity, you can always add one to the next number?

MR: Well, Chad Harbach, now one of our senior editors, came up with the name. Keith, you were there. [24:52]

KG: Oh, I think we were just, this was during of one of our long conversations many years before we started the magazine, where we would dream of starting a magazine. And we thought, Oh, and I said, 'but you know there are so many other magazines already.' And Chad said, 'Oh *n+1*.'

FR: Oh, there you go.

KG: But we've since gone through a process of reinterpretation.

FR: Mythicizing! [Laughter]

KG: We would say, 'Yes, well we were worried that history was over.' And we wanted to say, 'No, there's still progress that's possible.' And it's also been incredibly a sort of Rorschach reading test, where people will periodically write us and they'll say, I was reading the fifth volume of Proust, and there, staring at, me was *n+1*, and that's where you must have gotten it!

FR: That's great! [Laughter] [25:36]

KG: And other people will read some sort of arcane Marxist text, they'll be like was it not [!] the third volume of Ernest Mandel's book on late capitalism...

END INTERVIEW