

Editor's Note

Lately, I've been thinking quite a bit about change. Social. Organizational. Political, obviously. In 2008, we had Aaron Sinift's *Glitter Obama*¹ as our cover image. There was a sense of hope for positive change. Depending on your position on the political spectrum, you can argue the effectiveness of changes Obama implemented: hopes fulfilled (Affordable Care Act, legalization of same-sex marriage) and hopes unrealized (drone wars, eroding civil liberties). With police shootings, terror attacks, Syria, Trump/Clinton, climate change, etc., 2016 feels more like hoping things don't get worse.

Earlier this year, the *Fence* editorial staff had several lengthy and intense discussions sparked by Rebecca's insensitive Facebook comments on the Purdey Lord Kreiden/Michael Taren video and a poem with a racial slur in the title she wrote and read in public². The longest thread ran 56 emails deep. We were hurt and angry and disappointed in various degrees. As a person of color, as a friend, it felt shitty. As a colleague, it felt deflating knowing people would associate and attribute the words and actions of the public face (Rebecca) with the other 15 editors.

Fourteen years ago, as a first year MFA student, I took a course on Small Press Literature—Literary Landscape 101. We read many unremarkable journals; *Sulfur*, *Fence*, and *McSweeney's* are the only three journals that I can even recall. With further research, I found myself feeling certain affinities to the *Fence* manifesto:

There is nothing radical about this magazine. We do not see the erection of such a *Fence* as a combative or exclusionary measure, but as a gesture of cultivation. *Fence* stands against the false obfuscation of the fruits of our culture's labor, that which has been framed and sentenced to inaccessibility. We seek, above all, to increase the reader's pleasure.

Fence intentionally blurs the distinction between 'difficulty' and 'accessibility,' preferring instead to address a continuum of utterance.

I recall reading various arguments against *Fence* (its liberal pluralism, its role as establishment, its nepotism, its kitsch) as well as Rebecca's spirited defenses and wondering: What the fuck is *Fence*? When I emailed Rebecca

¹ At left: *Glitter Obama*, Aaron Sinift, 2008.

² Thank you, MCAF (Mongrel Coalition Against Gringpo), for your invaluable labors.

and inquired about internship opportunities, I had a cursory understanding of small press publishing—organizational structures, logistics, infrastructures, production workflows.

Rebecca responded surprisingly quickly. After selling some records and CDs, I flew to New York to interview. On the day of the interview, not being familiar with subways, I took the A train the wrong direction—realizing my mistake somewhere in Bed-Stuy. I arrived at Rebecca’s apartment 30 minutes late. That she offered an internship to a tardy, brown, sweaty, and undoubtedly out-of-breath MFA student probably raises more questions about Rebecca’s character—though, who knows, I might’ve killed that interview. What I do know is that I killed the internship. In the Spring of 2003, I became *Fence*’s first ever Managing Editor—complete with a meager salary and an opportunity to sublet Rebecca’s sweet apartment for the summer: a Poetry MFA wet dream, or so I thought.

The *Fence* office was a musty basement space that served primarily as the warehouse for Roof Books, secondarily as an office for the cool kids at CUP (Center for Urban Pedagogy), and then there was *Fence*. We had two old iMacs, boxes of books and back issues, and a shit ton of mail. On many occasions we drew the ire of the upstairs co-op tenants (and the postal workers) with bags of submissions filling the foyer.

When I said meager earlier, what I meant was unlivable. Like \$600/mo in Manhattan unlivable. After her Viennese landlords decided to evict/buy-out Rebecca, the good times ended and I had to get a “real job” to pay for rent and food. I began to temp for an educational publisher. From 2003 to 2007, I worked in midtown editing children’s textbooks with multimillion-dollar budgets and at night (and most weekends) I would work in the East Village basement office, opening envelopes, stuffing envelopes, mailing envelopes, answering emails, laying out issues, cracking the whip on editors, etc. The work was by turns laborious, thankless, glorious, and both literally and figuratively fulfilling—from collecting slush, to organizing slush, to clearing slush, to sending out acceptances, to laying out the issue, sending the issue to the printer, receiving proofs, receiving boxes, sending out issues, meeting contributors, throwing a party, meeting new writers, meeting other publishers. The work was real. The relationships with the writers and community are real.

When *Fence* moved to Albany I was relieved to have my nights and weekends free. I accepted a new role as one of the Poetry Editors and started a different relationship with *Fence* and the imagined community.

The current editorial staff is both demographically and geographically

diverse. For us Poetry Editors, it means we can have asynchronous discussions—which is both good and bad. I’m sure some of our discussions would be more efficient and fun over a few bottles of wine.

Things seem so different from the days of reading proofs on a bench in Tompkins Square Park. My current day job is for another large corporation. My focus is on “learning and development” in the context of “change management” within HR. Within my space, I hear a lot of talk about diversity and inclusion at the corporate level. For my company, diversity is about acknowledging and valuing differences and understanding that everyone brings unique experiences, perspectives, and ideas. This articulation of diversity tries to manifest itself in high performing teams. As in, without diversity you cannot possibly realize the full potential of your team and, in turn, you cannot create or deliver the best possible product for your consumer. I keep thinking about how this concept of diversity and inclusion could apply to *Fence*—the constant negotiation between my day job and night job.

Earlier in the year when we were reeling from Rebecca’s insensitivities and gross articulations of white privilege, we discussed several actions and proposals. Some of the actions were prescriptive and could be easily and quickly implemented. Others were more radical in scope.

The consensus is that we do not want any tokenizing gestures. We want action and we want our actions to be intentional and transparent. We want to publish majority POC, majority Queer.

We recognize a structural problem. We are in the process of a rethinking, a paradigm shift, a self-administered kick in the ass. In the next couple years, *Fence* will continue to evolve and iterate. We will take risks. We will make mistakes. We will learn. We will refine. We are committed to making *Fence* a place that writers of color care about. We need you, dear reader, to hold us accountable.