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**Amateurs,
Pamphleteers
and Indie Rock:
An Interview
with Matthew Engelke
by Noel King**

Noel King: How did you come to be involved with Prickly Paradigm Press? I gather that an earlier version of Prickly Paradigm Press, called Prickly Pear, emerged from new research in Anthropology, and I know you have a PhD in Anthropology. What was your field of research and how did that lead you to assisting with this publishing venture?

Matthew Engelke: My PhD thesis in anthropology looked at issues of textual authority in Christian religious movements in Zimbabwe. And one of the reasons I was interested in studying this particular group called the Masowe Apostolic Church is because they reject the Bible. One of the critiques that they level against the Bible is

that it functions as a material impediment to the relationship with God. So they take a kind of radical Protestant line about having an immediate relationship with the divine at the individual level which is not mediated by any religious forms, whether that be the Bible or the Church hierarchy. And this is interesting because it ties in to the history of Protestantism in a very interesting way in the sense that the critique that came out of the Protestant Reformation, in Germany at least, was that Luther had essentially made the Bible the Lutheran Pope, so that it was still about the objectification of authority, either in a person or an object, and the apostolics that I worked with are trying to get away from that. It's very difficult to get away from processes of objectification of authority, and they do it in other ways. But one of the reasons they reject the Bible is precisely because they see it as a kind of false path that can get you too caught up in the Bible for the Bible's sake and you miss the message behind the Bible, the truth behind the Bible. And this was certainly important in colonial Africa, because of the extent to which missionaries emphasized the Bible as really being synonymous with Christianity. I mean, the Bible and Christianity went hand in hand, it was part of the evangelizing process to say, we're bringing you this book, we're bringing you literacy, and this is a path to spiritual liberation, but also a path to modernization, that kind of idea of pulling the savage out of the jungle and giving them an education through this book. And if you

read missionary accounts from the 19th century in southern Africa, not surprisingly they really do treat the Bible as an agent in and of itself. The British and Foreign Bible Society really casts the Bible as an object that could do things, as an object that was a subject. So, all of this is to say that my research in anthropology is very much tied to my interest in books, and in books as physical objects. It's not always easy to bring my interests in publishing together with my interest in the apostolic church, but certainly behind both of those interests is an idea of what is it that books signify, how they signify.

NK: When did you become involved, at the Prickly Pear or Prickly Paradigm stage?

ME: I came in at a later stage. Prickly Pear was founded in 1993, by Keith Hart and Anna Grimshaw, two anthropologists here in the UK. Anna was at Manchester and Keith was at Cambridge but Anna had been at Cambridge prior to going to Manchester. And they had this idea of bringing out pamphlets primarily on anthropology—almost all of theirs are on anthropology—that were meant to revitalize a series of debates about the history of the discipline, its theoretical positionings. It was meant to kind of jump start what they saw as a stagnant situation in the early 1990s, to get some debates going, which they did very well, in part with their flagship pamphlet, *Anthropology and the Crisis of the*

Intellectuals, which was a re-reading of the history of anthropology, levelling critiques at Malinowski, talking a lot about W.H.R. Rivers and his influence at Cambridge, but also saying how anthropologists could use anthropology to speak to broader issues that were happening in the world at the time. One of the early pamphlets that they published was by a student on the first Gulf War, the media and intellectuals talking about the first Gulf War in the popular press. So it was about a classic interest, really—“how can academics engage with the so-called real world?”—and this was their particular way of doing that. So a lot of the credit has to go to them for the whole fire behind this enterprise. By modeling it on the 17th and 18th century pamphleteers, Keith and Anna were trying to capitalize on this image of people who are passionate about their ideas, who wanted to make prickly arguments, not necessarily the most careful arguments all the time, but that’s part of what a pamphlet is supposed to do, right, be polemical and ideally get the ideas out in a timely fashion. As we’ve become more institutionalized, I think we’re not as timely as we used to be but I think we’re still fairly timely. I mean, if you look at how long it takes to publish an article or a book, I think we’re a lot faster in terms of the time that elapses between when you get us the manuscript and the time we can put it out. We can do it in five months, depending on the time of year that you get us something. But when

Keith and Anna were doing it, it was even more flexible and they really did get things out very quickly. They published ten pamphlets in three years. And Keith in particular, who I know better, personally, is a real prophet-like character. He’s a very charismatic guy who gets in the mix and wants to talk to everyone, and is as interested in a student as he is in a chaired professor, and what each has to say. And he and Anna were it, they were Prickly Pear. And Keith in particular loved to go to conferences and proselytize, to engage with people, bring the pamphlets and set them out on the table and say, ‘hey, take a look at these.’ So he was the publisher, editor and marketing manager all in one. And because the UK anthropology world is not very big, and because he is a very vibrant personality, he was able to be pretty effective in getting the word out on these pamphlets.

NK: How large were those first print runs?

ME: I think they were 1000, and they did it at a copy shop in Cambridge, nothing fancy, they’re pretty bare bones.

NK: One of the early pamphlets focuses on the work of Jimmy Durham. It’s hard to find now and when I last checked on abebooks it was very expensive, so some of the early pamphlets are becoming very collectible!

ME: Yeah, I know, it's very hard to get those now. There are probably two or three boxes of them in existence in Charlottesville. So, from the outset, it was a very purposefully amateur operation, and that's one of the other things that Keith and Anna had in mind, the idea of the amateur who has a love of something rather than necessarily a professional or bureaucratic-style investment in something. So the image of the pamphleteer and of the amateur are really the kind of key images to explain what they were doing.

NK: There were some other examples of pamphleteering at that time. I remember the "Field Day" pamphlets series which published pieces by Fredric Jameson, Edward Said and Terry Eagleton, and they were later re-issued as a book.

ME: Yeah, and I think more and more, it would be very difficult to defend Prickly Pear/ Paradigm texts as pamphlets because they have spines, and they're getting longer. We still like to cling to that term in a very fast and loose sense, but also I think the idea of the little book has certainly taken off in the past five years. I mean, if you look at Open Media, it had some predecessors like Semio-texte, which has been around for a long time. But Penguin and Verso and a lot of presses now are doing these tiny books. The Penguins are actually very nice little books, and they're purposefully old-looking, with very nice matte, embossed covers, with old fonts and curlicues and

things, from writers like John Ruskin, and George Orwell. So I think this format has really taken off, and they're very attractive to people because they're fairly cheap. So this kind of format is something that certainly has been around. But Keith and Anna, within the field of anthropology, capitalized on something that wasn't really a going concern at the time. They did these pamphlets for three years, roughly from 1993 to 1996. I first encountered the pamphlets in 1994, as an undergraduate at the University of Chicago, long before I met Keith or Anna. I would read these pamphlets in the Seminary Co-op Bookstore, which is probably the best academic bookstore in the world, and what some of my friends and I loved about the pamphlets was that you could stand in there and read the whole thing and not have to buy it. Which I don't think Keith and Anna would necessarily be upset to hear. I mean, this is part of their whole thing, do whatever with these things. So the first one I read was Simon Schaffer's, and at that time I was becoming very interested in the history of anthropology, and then I went on to read Keith and Anna's and Marshall's. And I just thought these things were great. I was 20 years old, and very interested in indie rock music and small labels in the rock business. I wasn't involved in any of them but I listened to lots of bands that were on these small labels and had the same kind of ethos, the same kind of do it yourself, get the stuff out, ethos. And it was exciting to me that the profession that I was

moving into could do that. And I think Keith and Anna gave me the idea that we could bring a kind of indie rock mentality to academic publishing. I don't know if we've done that but in any case just the idea of small presses and small music labels has always been interesting to me. So I did end up buying a few and didn't really think much about it, and then a friend of mine went to Cambridge to work with Simon Schaffer. And he and I had read these pamphlets as undergraduates, and he got to know Keith because Keith and Simon were friendly and Keith became close to this friend of mine, John Tresch, who became a student of Schaffer's. And I came over to Cambridge on my way to Zimbabwe in June of 1996 and met with John and he said he, I've met this guy Keith, he's the guy who does Prickly Pear, why don't we have lunch? So I said sure, that sounds great. Keith is an Africanist so it was kind of two-birds-with-one-stone. I enjoyed his pamphlets and he was someone who knew about the area of the world I was going to, and so we had lunch and Keith turned on his charm and I told him how great I thought his pamphlets were. And he said, well why don't you distribute them in the United States? Keith has always had this image of the United States as a kind of panacea, as holding the answers to his questions. He's taught quite a bit in the United States, at Yale and Chicago and Michigan in the late 1970s and early 1980s, so he had a real knowledge of the anthropology world there but hadn't really gained a foothold in the

US markets. They were distributed at the Seminary Co-op Bookstore, but probably not a lot of other bookstores carried them. So I said sure. At this time I was a 2nd year graduate student in a PhD program and had continued an interest in small rock labels and also had developed an interest in small poetry presses, and knew about small press distributors based in Berkeley, SPD, and often bought books from them. Most of their stuff is poetry but they had a few other presses that didn't necessarily do poetry. They distributed *The Baffler* for example, and Green Integer and other small presses that were doing really neat things.

NK: I loved Nick Hornby's *The Polysyllabic Spree*, his collection of pieces from *The Baffler*; and I have enjoyed some of the Green Integer books, like Herve Guibert's *Ghost Images*.

ME: So I told Keith yeah, I'll distribute these for you, something that probably only a 24-year-old would say with confidence, and then went off to Zimbabwe for the summer. Keith gave me a set of the 10 pamphlets, and when I came back he pursued it. He emailed me and said we're really going to do this. He was coming to the States, driving from New York to New Orleans, and he brought with him a suitcase of these pamphlets, probably about 400, so roughly 40 of each, and he came through Charlottesville in a rented Cadillac, with a friend of his who ran the CLR James

archives in New York. They were on their way to the conference, and they blew into town, took me out to lunch, left me with 400 pamphlets and then drove off. And this is Keith, this is what Keith does, he's like this. So I then got in touch with SPD and they agreed to distribute these pamphlets. And I also printed up fliers that I sent to all of the anthropology departments in the US and I would get a few orders from here and there. I set up a PO Box in Charlottesville and basically ran the distribution out of my bedroom closet. This was in the Fall of 1996, and I would say between the Fall of 1996 and the Summer of 1997 I managed to sell a couple of hundred pamphlets, and Keith thought this was marvellous, he thought this was absolutely incredible. The next summer I came back to the UK to do some research and I spent the summer here. Keith invited me to stay at his house. I arrived and he wasn't here, he had left the key with a neighbor. So, someone I had met twice, for a total of five hours and with whom I had corresponded over email, said stay in my house in Cambridge. And over the course of that summer we spent about three weeks together and became good friends, really connected. At that point in time, Keith and Anna wanted to pass the torch. They had kind of done what they wanted to do. Keith was thinking about leaving Cambridge, moving to Paris to be with his partner, and was just going to shift gears. And so he and Anna turned it over to me and Mark Harris. Mark Harris, like myself, was someone who had gotten

to know Keith and Anna. Mark got his PhD here at the London School of Economics and did a post-doc at Manchester and so got to know Anna fairly well, and also got to know Keith. And so his trajectory was kind of parallel to mine, but based in the UK. He began to take over more of distribution and the day-to-day stuff in the UK. So he set it up in the UK, and I set it up in the US, and we started this joint operation, which was in a sense absurd, because Mark and I didn't really know each other either, but we managed to spend a few weekends together here and there over the course of 1997 to 1998, because I was coming through the UK and also I was in Central Europe at the time so I would pop over to London and Manchester for conferences. And Mark would have me up to Manchester to stay with him and his wife and kids, and so we did get to know one another and developed a very nice relationship and a kind of plan for going forward. I was a graduate student, he was a post doc, we weren't like Keith or Anna who were well established. But we had the passion and we managed to continue selling the existing stock of the first ten pamphlets and also to do a reprint of Marshall's, which had sold out.

NK: I liked the interview with Richard Rorty. How did that pamphlet come about, given that Rorty was by then in his Professor of Humanities role, his moving across the disciplines of philosophy and literary-studies?

ME: I commissioned some friends of mine at Virginia to do an interview with Richard Rorty. They were students of his, and I thought, well this is the most famous person in my immediate vicinity and while I don't really know him I have some friends who do. And so they sat down and did what I think is an absolutely fantastic interview with him, and we published that. And then Mark did a pamphlet with a series of colleagues and students at Manchester called *The Child in the City*, looking at the techniques for anthropologists on how to work with children in the field, and particularly in the urban environment. So there's a kind of methodological, how-to manual. So between 1999 and 2000, 2001, Mark and I managed to put out these three things, two of which were new, one of which was a reprint. We updated the format a bit, and I worked with some friends in Charlottesville who ran a record label and had access to design, had someone who knew Quark, and I worked with a local printer in Charlottesville. And the Rorty and the Sahlins reprint were printed in Charlottesville. So that's what we managed to do. It wasn't much over two or three years. But, you know, I was in Zimbabwe for all of 1999, and my wife—at that point my girlfriend—was in Prague. And Mark was finishing his book and he had two kids and another on the way. So obviously this has always been a part time venture. When I got back to Charlottesville after my field work and after being in Prague, I started writing up my PhD. This was in the autumn of

2000, and Mark and I were getting frustrated that we just didn't have the time for it, and we thought about giving up the ship. Then in the early winter of 2001, Marshall got in touch with me and said that he had another piece that maybe would be good for a pamphlet. So he sent it to me, I agreed with him, it was great, but told him it would be a while before we could print it because we didn't have the money.

NK: What were the size of the print-runs and how much was each pamphlet costing?

ME: Those print runs were 1000 and they cost about \$1.80 per pamphlet to print. We did 1000, so it was more expensive than I would have liked, but that was the only option in Charlottesville, with the printers. So basically we needed US \$1200 or \$1300 before we could do something new. We ended up doing two print runs of the Rorty, so that took a chunk out of our money. So I told Marshall he would have to wait for a while, and he said, let me get back to you. He came back to me a few days later and said, what if I can get \$30000 and some backers on this, what would you be interested in doing? And I said, well frankly it was fun for a while but I don't like walking into the post office every Friday with three or four jiffy packs full of pamphlets and cashing \$5 checks at the local bank, I don't really want to do the dirty work, I want to do the ideas work, so I would love to have someone take over the marketing and

distribution. And he said okay, let me get back to you. And he came back to me a few days later, and said, right, well I've got x amount of money, x number of backers and the University of Chicago Press would be interested in distributing this. This was like manna from Heaven, I mean I couldn't believe it. In the world of anthropology Marshall is one of the big guns and so it was exciting not only to be talking and beginning to work more closely with such an eminent figure, but for him to be able to set up this arrangement was absolutely fantastic. So Mark and I talked it over, and decided that we would split things off, which was the direction that we had been moving in anyway. All along, Prickly Pear had a very informal relationship with a journal called *Critique of Anthropology*, and Mark serves on the editorial board of that journal. And basically what we decided to do is split Prickly Pear into two operations, one of which I would run in the US with Marshall, which would involve continuing to do pamphlets, and Mark would publish essays called Prickly Pear Polemics in *Critique of Anthropology*.

NK: Could you tell me how Prickly Pear morphed into Prickly Paradigm?

ME: In the United States, when we started interacting more with the University of Chicago Press, when Marshall and I started interacting, it quickly became much more of a formal operation. And the University of Chicago Press was concerned about

the fact that there was a poetry press in Texas called Prickly Pear, I think run out of Texas Christian University, out of the Library Publishers' Poets from Texas, and they've been around since about 1970 or 1971, so the higher-ups at Chicago were saying, we might run into issues with this name, so we'd really like you to change it. So that's why we changed it to Prickly Paradigm. Mark changed "Prickly Pear Polemics" to just "Prickly Polemics," and thus Prickly Paradigm was launched, and it was the summer of 2001 when we got all the contacts in place with the Press. They were going to do all of the distribution and marketing, Marshall and I would do the editing and the commissioning of pieces. There is a so-called board of publishers, which basically consists of Marshall as the executive publisher, his son Peter, his daughter-in-law Ramona Naddaff, his brother Bernie Sahlins and one of his good friends, Jack Cella, who runs the Seminary Co-op Bookstore. So it's kind of a family business now, but it's really Marshall and me. The publishers weigh in occasionally, but they really let Marshall and me run the show, which is how we've done it since the beginning.

NK: How did you come to commission the pamphlets by Clifford, Chris Lehman, and Tom Frank?

ME: They were in Marshall's network. More generally, we knew that we needed to start with a

bang, so we were going to re-issue Marshall's pamphlet in a revised and expanded edition. We would re-issue the Rorty because he was Richard Rorty. And we would try to get a few other pamphlets. We wanted to do five in the first offering, so that there was a kind of critical mass of stuff that people could pick up on. And the other three pamphlet writers—Tom Frank, Deirdre McCloskey, and Bruno Latour, were the others in the first five—were Marshall's mates. This was an inside biz, but it's since opened up a bit. Marshall went to people that he knew, and said, I want you to do this. And Bruno Latour, as you probably well know, is a big name so we were every excited to get him in on it, Deirdre is a kind of renegade economist, and Tom Frank is also a big name in the subcultures area that we were interested in tapping into. It was really Marshall who did all this. I had known Tom Frank very casually as an undergraduate because he was a graduate student at Chicago when I was an undergraduate and I would go to parties at his house. He had this huge mansion at Hyde Park, that a few of my friends lived in, so I knew him a little but not really well. So it was really Marshall tapping people to do these things. And that's how it worked, I would say through the first ten pamphlets, apart from the Rorty, which was my connection. But the others were all Marshall. So we decide to go with those five in the first offering and that academic year 2001-2002, I was Visiting Assistant Professor at Kenyon College in

Ohio, and so I was based in Ohio, Marshall was in Chicago, and I continued working with the designer who had done the Prickly Pears that I had put out in Charlottesville. This guy, Darius van Arman, runs two record labels, now based in Bloomington, Indiana, and he also runs a designing business, acting as an intermediary between small record labels and CD producers, not producers, but people who don't print CDs, but burn CDs. So he had this operation set up in Bloomington, and one of his guys, Daniel Murphy, has continued to do all the design and layout. So Marshall and I just got going, and it was pretty fly-by-night and pretty unprofessional from the start. I'm not trained as an editor, I've kind of picked up a few editing skills, not a lot, frankly.

NK: What is the percentage of commissioned to "outside submission" pamphlets, people you don't know at all sending you things?

ME: The first ten, again, were largely things that we had commissioned. Since then, we have tried increasingly and continually to work with submissions and we have published a few. A few of the pamphlets have been submissions that neither of us actively sought out. People have sent us things, including our best seller, James Elkins' pamphlet, *What Happened to Art Criticism?* I think he knew Jack Cella of the Seminary Co-op Bookstore, and he sent us something but it was more or less a

cold submission. It has sold about 4500, I think. Our best sellers are the Elkins, Donna Haraway, the Sahlins, and the David Graeber. But all of the titles have sold at least 1000. I think Marshall's has sold about 2200 or 2300, but that's not including the first three print runs, that were Prickly Pear print runs. Keith and Anna did two prints, and then Mark and I did a further run, so the Sahlins has sold very well. But it was really kind of trial by fire. I don't think we've necessarily done everything by the book, we commission things and they might go in the University of Chicago Press catalogue before we've actually seen the press version, which is probably not always the best way to do things. But again it's part of our rough and tumble unprofessional ethos, which we try to maintain to a certain extent. Working with the University of Chicago Press obviously has forced us to become a bit more professional because they need information on what they're going to publish eight months before, because it's going to appear in the catalogue. So we need to really think ahead, we no longer have the option of getting something out of the blue one day and saying okay it'll be published in three months, because we need to work through the University of Chicago Press distribution and marketing system, so it's become a bit more kind of routinized and institutionalized in that sense. And they've been wonderful, but I know we've tried their patience on several occasions with last minute switches, saying no we're not going to do that one, we're going to do this

one, or can we pull that one and do it next spring? We've tried to maintain a bit of flexibility. But we started with these five, and it was a great start in the sense that we garnered some attention right off the bat in August 2001. We had a write up in the *New York Times*, an article by Emily Aiken about Open Media and us, and about pamphleteering or small book publishing, little book publishing. The *Times* runs a kind of Saturday "Ideas" section, and they gave us a very nice plug. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* also did a plug. The *University of Chicago Chronicle*, which is kind of in-house propaganda, it's a thing for Chicago faculty, but if you google "Prickly Paradigm," it comes up very quickly so the fact that it's been made more readily available is great for us. So we got a lot of good press in that first autumn. In the beginning we were getting about 300-350 pre-orders, and now we get anywhere between 450 and 600, so that's been a nice increase. A lot of those are obviously libraries, but we have some kind of devoted fans who will order things before they come out. So in that first year, when I was making the transition to London, we did five pamphlets in the autumn of 2001, then four in the spring 2002, and once again those were all Marshall contacts, with the exception of Eliot Weinberger. Jim Clifford put us on to Eliot Weinberger, we hadn't known Eliot before that, but Jim, who we had been working with to do a series of interviews, said, hey this guy does some interesting stuff, so that was a kind of new face to us. Chris Lehmann was at the *Washington*

Post Book World, and Marshall had done a review for him, for the *Book World*. Donna knew Marshall, Marshall asked Donna. Michael Silverstein was a colleague of Marshall's, and someone I had taken a class with as an undergraduate, but I didn't really know him until that point. Tom Frank was part of the first five, and Tom Frank and Marshall knew one another fairly well.

NK: How closely do you work with the authors on their manuscripts?

ME: Basically, how it works is Marshall and I go through the first round of editing together and give the author some comments and then Marshall usually turns it over to me, and I do further editing with the authors and work with the designers and the printers. The way I work with a manuscript after Marshall and I have accepted it is to try to give the authors some substantive feedback and we usually go through two rounds of editing in Word and then put it into Quark, and go through three rounds of copy editing in Quark. I'll do one, the author does one, and my wife does one. And then I'll work with the designer to get all those edits entered. And then we send it off to the printer. Most of our print runs started at 2000, a few we did initially at 3000, and now we are beginning to start at 3000 because we have that kind of demand. So we're starting to do more at 3000.

NK: Do you have any individual or institutional financial support acting as a safety-net for your enterprise, or are you totally dependent on selling copies to continue?

ME: I don't think there's a rolling line of credit; Marshall would have to tell you more about that, because he does all of the finances. It's basically a self-sustaining operation. I think Marshall has had to put in a bit more money at a few points, but we've scaled back, first of all, we no longer do five a season or even four, we're now doing two or three. Partly that's for financial and partly for time considerations, constraints on my time. The pamphlets cost roughly \$1.30 for us to print, so have come down from \$1.80, because we got a printer through the University of Chicago, we used one of their printers so they cut us a special deal. And I think the cost should come down a bit more, maybe 4 or 5 cents, since we're moving up to print runs of 3000. Obviously, the more you print the cheaper it is. So, financially it's a leaky ship but it's still afloat and it basically makes enough to turn over, but we don't make any money. I think we keep sailing in part because we're a bit cheaper than we were. Almost all of our pamphlets have sold at least 1500 copies, and if you look at the average monograph sales now, it's something like 400, it's absolutely abysmal, so because we're a different thing we're a bit more financially stable. I think that has a lot to do with it. In his pamphlet on publishing, Lindsay

Waters, the Humanities editor at Harvard University Press, looks at some of these issues and looks at the terrible state that university presses are in, and how they're being forced to function more like trade presses. And you can see that. Because of *Prickly Paradigm*, Chicago sends me the full University of Chicago Press catalogue, which most people don't necessarily see, it goes to bookstores. And if you look at some of the books that they publish, they really are having to branch out and publish more popular books about Chicago or about the Midwest, that I don't think they've always done. Some presses have always done that, especially presses in the Midwest, who will publish books that might be of interest to people who live in the Midwest for example, but that's becoming more and more emphasized from what I've been able to tell, because they need those sales to support books on witchcraft in Africa which of course people aren't going to be as likely to buy. But we've been able to escape some of the issues that university presses have had to deal with because of our hybrid form. And I think also we have an advantage in that one of the things that's great about small presses is that they tend to attract a certain sub-culture of interested readers who treat these as fetish objects. And so there are people, probably like you and I, who are interested in small presses who will pick these things up and know where to pick them up. I think that's part of why say David Graeber's pamphlet has been successful because it is about

anarchism, and anarchists are the kinds of people who look for things on anarchism and who write blogs and who exchange things over email. So I think we have markets that we can tap into. I think that's also why Jim Elkins has been such a great seller, because people who are interested in art criticism and art history love shiny little books. All the major museums in London stock Jim's pamphlet. So I think we have more of a kind of a ready-made market than even a university press might have. This is a completely unscientific evaluation of the situation but I think it's an advantage to being small, and to trying to build up a "line," a sense of who you are, which we've slowly been able to do.

NK: How would you characterize that 'line,' that brand?

ME: As a press that publishes things from people who really know what they're talking about, but who are willing to shoot from the hip on this occasion, who have a real love for what they're writing about but want to speak to a broader audience. That's really how we try to position ourselves. Again, a lot of the people that we've published have been big names in whatever it is that they do, but we're also trying to get people who are not big names, or who we think might become big names, who are incredible scholars but are younger, people like David Graeber, Magnus Fiskesjö, and Rick Perlstein and some

other younger people who are making a name for themselves, and who have something to say about whatever it is they do that might be of interest to a broader audience.

NK: Can you say something about some of your immediately forthcoming titles?

ME: There are three coming up in the next month or two, one by Rick Perlstein. Rick and I went to college together as well, although we didn't know each other well, but he's part of the Tom Frank crew. He wrote a book on Barry Goldwater and worked for a long time for the *Village Voice* as a political correspondent. He's a political journalist and historian of American politics, and he's publishing a pamphlet on the future of the Democratic Party, making an argument about how the Democrats need to develop a long-term strategy rather than these stop gap measures of winning the swing voters. This was a pamphlet that was originally published in the *Boston Review*, which has published books in the past, based on these debates that they publish in the *Boston Review*. And that's what Rick did, and then he came to us and said, would you be interested in doing this, and so we're doing that. I'm really excited about that one, because I think it's the one that's connected to the most current events, and is widely accessible. That was the silver lining in Bush's re-election for us, more reason for a pamphlet. So Rick is doing one. There's a labor

lawyer in Chicago named Tom Geoghegan who's doing one on the collapse of the rule of the law in the United States, and I think that also could have fairly broad appeal. And then Keith Hart is doing one for us, which is fantastic. His thing has always been money and economics, he's doing it on business and money, and it's called *The Hit Man's Dilemma, Or Business Personal or Impersonal*. He starts with this phrase, that the mafia hit man always uses, "don't take this personal, it's just business," so he's looking at how business casts itself as both personal and impersonal, and like everything Keith writes, it offers an incredibly insightful, wide-ranging, unique perspective on issues relating to money and the economy. So those are all coming up in a matter of months. In fact the Perlstein is being printed, I just sent off the galleys, and I have the galleys here for Tom Geoghegan's pamphlet. And Keith just sent us his final manuscript.

We have two coming up in the Fall, one by Susan McKinnon who is a professor at the University of Virginia who was a student of Marshall's and a professor of mine. So, more incest there, more of the closed circle. She has worked on the Tanimbar Islands on kinship in Indonesia, but she's more recently done a lot of work on new kinship theory, on incest in the United States, and she's very interested in classic debates within anthropology about nature vs nurture. And what she's looking at in this pamphlet is the rise of evolutionary psychology

and how they take absolutely no regard of culture and history in their explanations. People like Steven Pinker give these explanations for the way the world works which have complete disregard for the ethnographic record, and so it's an absolutely brilliant pamphlet that critiques the evolutionary psychologists point for point. It's called *Neo-Liberal Genetics*, and it's looking at how people like Pinker and Dawkins basically assume everyone is kind of programmed to be a capitalist, everyone has this neo-liberal ideology within them that is just dying to get out, so we're very excited about that one. The other we have one coming out in the Fall is a great example of what we want the press to do more of. A guy named Paul Werner who runs a small press in New York called Orange and lectures at NYU and has lectured for the Guggenheim in the past, is an art historian and art critic in New York. He wrote an absolutely scathing review of Jim Elkins' pamphlet, said it was wrong on every count. And Marshall and I read it and wrote to him and said, hey, sounds like you're pretty feisty, why don't you submit something to us? And he did, and it was great, and we accepted it. So this is what we want to do more of.

NK: Well, among other things, it shows you have started up a cultural debate and cultural conversation, intervened in an area that has provoked a controversial response to your initial controversial publication.

ME: Yeah, a kind of dialogue is going on there, exactly, and we want to build more of these new connections. So Paul is doing something called *Museum, Inc.*, based on an ethnographic look at the Guggenheim and Tom Krens' tenure at the Guggenheim, from the perspective of someone who worked as a tour guide and lecturer in the Guggenheim, who was a foot soldier in Tom Krens' war to bring the art of the motorcycle and the Guggenheim to the world, or the world to the Guggenheim. So those are two that are coming out in the Fall. And we're working on some for next year, those are kind of still in process, but hopefully we'll have six or seven coming out in 2006.

NK: What are some analogous cultural activities/presses that you either admire or see as doing similar cultural work to yourselves? You have already mentioned Open Media and Semio-texte.

ME: Yeah, I think we certainly see presses like Open Media and Semio-texte as analogous to our press, although we've never been in contact with either of them. Both Semio-texte and Open Media are in a way kind of person-based. Semio-texte does a lot of Foucault and post structuralist stuff, and I think we, Marshall certainly wouldn't see himself as a post-structuralist, but Semio-texte is a thematic press really. They look at certain issues within critical theory. The same with Open Media, which seems kind of Chomsky-driven, and

obviously their Chomsky pamphlet is the one that absolutely exploded. So I see them as analogous. Within anthropology, I don't know of any other outfits like us. And it's a bit frustrating in some of the reviews I've seen—most of the reviews are online, kind of blogs, and we've actually had a lot of support which I appreciate—because they have not known what to make of us. They see it as a bit weird, and say this is a bit of a weird thing, it's not a very careful argument. To my horror and dismay a few have even said this obviously wasn't very carefully edited, and editors don't usually get mentioned in reviews, so to be mentioned in a negative way is kind of like, oh my God! Of course they don't know it was me, but it was in fact me. But of course, again, that's part of the point, to not be a tight editor. For me, Open Media and Semio-texte have been models. I've seen a pamphlet, I think it's published by Berghahn Books, I think they have a new series, actually Keith Hart showed me one of them, by Bruce Kapferer, who's actually doing a pamphlet for us as well. And I haven't seen them anywhere, but I have seen Keith with a copy and it was similar in format and design to ours. But as I was mentioning earlier, this format is something that people seem to be going into more and more. I mentioned Penguin publishing essays by John Ruskin and George Orwell and whoever else very cheaply, and God I wish we could do that. And there are other presses, I think Verso is doing something similar, and Oxford University Press

does very short introductions, which are absolutely ubiquitous, and Oxford has done a brilliant job of putting their stamp on these little books. So more and more presses are doing this kind of thing, and it's the kind of thing you see at the checkout counter, whether it's something by Verso or, you know, I've seen something by the Dalai Lama, this pretty little book, which makes you think, oh maybe I'll just buy this for £4 or £5.

NK: In Australia your pamphlets go for around \$25, which is a lot for 50 pages or so. I realize you have no control over this, since in part it reflects differences in currencies. The BFI had a similar problem with its "Film Classics" and "Modern Classics" series, which are often very good books, but run to 70 or 80 pages and cost \$25 to \$30.

ME: I think one of our regrets is the kind of price that we have to charge and if you look at the pamphlets over the course of time, there are now, as of this print round, 20 pamphlets. They started out at 48, 50, 58 pages, and Tom Geoghegan's is 143 pages, so the length has tripled in some cases, and we've done that in part because we've felt kind of guilty about value for money. Bruno Latour's is 48 pages or something, and we charged \$10 for it, or £7, and we weren't happy with that but that was something where the University of Chicago Press marketing team really said, you have to charge this, based on your

costs. Some academic presses are very expensive, I think Cambridge University paperbacks are now pushing into \$30 plus, so we feel a little bit better, you know. But it is something that we've taken to heart. We wanted to beef up the length in order for them to be more attractive as value for money. In the past year, we have gone into not partnership but allegiance with Creative Commons, the web-based, anti-copyright organization about the dissemination of texts for free. And we've put several of our pamphlets online in pdf form, for free, and we will continue to do that. So the first six are all available online and Eliot Weinberger's is also available, and we're going to start putting more on. We haven't put a few of the earlier ones online, and one of the reasons for that is because they're still selling really well, and we still need to sell some. But the others are still selling.

Unfortunately our website isn't sophisticated enough such that we can track downloads but I do know anecdotally that a lot of the pamphlets that we put online have been downloaded quite frequently and yet they're still selling as hard copies. And this is some weird paradox of offering things for free, yet for some reason they still also sell. But we're not in it for the money, we're in it for the dissemination of ideas and if we can get these things out, then we're very happy to do that.

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