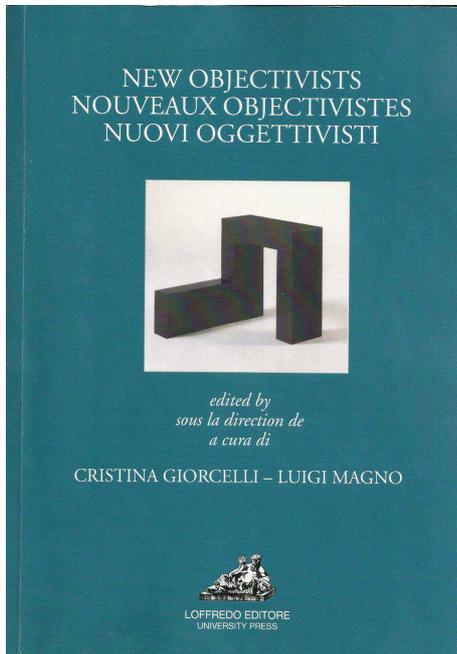




New Objectivists. Nouveaux Objectivistes. Nuovi Oggettivisti.

Edited by / Sous la direction de / A cura di Cristina Giorcelli - Luigi Magno

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Reviewed by Marina Morbiducci¹

The singularity of this book lies in its threefold nature, or rather, in the three different perspectives which it offers: it does, in fact, portray the US poetry movement of Objectivism in its new forms and outcomes as it has developed and articulated in three different cultures and languages - USA, France, and Italy - from its beginnings in the Thirties to contemporary times. Its unique feature is that in all the three linguacultural systems, and corresponding poetic universes, the movement appears to have taken shape through convergent differences, as well as different convergences, if the chiasmus is allowed. The convergence is provided by the shared core features of the movement which, inspired by that memorable pronouncement by W. C. Williams, “no ideas but in things,” launched and adopted the new “objectivist” approach to poetry, starting from the thing - the object - up to its poetic reification. By contrast, the differences rely on the diverse guises of the basic theoretical assumptions as they were elaborated by the various authors in their respective countries and in later times. As Cristina Giorcelli remarks in her introduction to the study, these voices *clamantes in deserto* seem to have finally reached a larger and definitely appreciative audience, capable of responding to the provocative innovations in the Objectivists’ ground-breaking agenda.

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In 1976-78 she was a Fulbright-Hays bursar at SUNY Binghamton, where she got her MA in English, and was on the editorial board of the journal of post-modern literature *boundary 2*. In 2003 she received her Ph.D. from Chieti-Pescara University, with a dissertation titled *Gertrude Stein in T/tempo. The Notion of Time in Gertrude Stein’s Works and Poetics*. She is translator and editor of first Italian bilingual editions of Gertrude Stein’s works, among which *Tender Buttons* (1989, 2006), *Last Operas and Plays* (2010), and *Lifting Belly* (2011). She has contributed articles on American innovative poetry in the journal *HOW2* since 2000. She coedited an anthology on *Black Mountain Poets’ poetry and poetics* (1987) and published a monograph entitled *Stein Quartet* (2006). Her present research is addressed to varieties of English in the world. She was TESOL-Italy’s president in 2008-2010 and is presently national secretary of AISNA.



The book consists of three different sections, as the trilingual title explicitly states, and it presents the proceedings of the second conference on Objectivism - *New Objectivists* - which took place at Università di Roma Tre in 2012. The event had had an illustrious precedent in the previous 1998 conference also held at Roma Tre, named *The Idea and the Thing in Modernist American Poetry*, which actually was the first of the kind in Italy.

According to Giorcelli, nowadays Objectivist poets are being rediscovered, and studied again or, in some cases, for the first time, and their works disseminated not just in the United States – with poets such as Rachel Blau Du Plessis, Bob Perelman, Charles Bernstein, Lyn Hejinian, etc.: the so-called L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets), but also in France and Italy. This new season for Objectivist poetry has produced a significant number of outstanding followers.

The collection of essays contained in the book by authors representative of each of the three countries (see for the American section: Bob Perelman, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Noura Wedell, Maria Anita Stefanelli, and Cristina Giorcelli; for the French section: Luigi Magno, Geneviève Cohen-Cheminet, Benoît Auclerc, Jean-Marie Gleize, Annalisa Bertoni, Suzanne Doppelt, and Jean-Jacques Poucel; and for the Italian section: Cecilia Bello Minciocchi, Antonio Loreto, Marco Giovenale, Michele Zaffarano, Massimiliano Manganelli, Alessandro De Francesco, and Giulio Marzaioli) are proof enough that (the) Objectivist poets, “niche poets” as they might have initially been viewed and received, are now enjoying a growing notoriety, reaching out from their originally elitist stand to a wider and wider audience, assuming a long overdue role as pioneers and prophets of innovative forms of poetry.

Probably, Giorcelli adds, the time is ripe for the revolutionary import of poets such as Zukofsky, Oppen, Rakosi, Niendecker, and so on, to be fully recognized. In his poem *A Guide to Homage to Sextus Propertius*, included in this volume, Bob Perelman writes: “Now if ever it is time to translate modernism into a contemporary idiom / into ‘something to read in normal circumstances,’” (31) pointing out the contemporary resonance of the Objectivist movement and its temporal circularity:

in *Propertius* Pound was able to write as though / the present had a past and that past had a future / which wasn't a reproduction of the original present / because he was changing it with the very words of the poem / finally breathing the actual air of modernity / first sniffed in Baudelaire, temporary-and-eternal modernity. (31)

But what does the Objectivist poetics rely on? Undoubtedly on the fact that words are seen primarily as “material objects,” that is – as Giorcelli puts it - “sensory objects made of letters and sounds emitted by breath: objects in space, particles of matter in motion, material artifacts to be torn apart and recomposed for the sake of punning and self-reflexivity as well as for the sake of revealing their roots, their etymology, that is, their entire history.” (13).

Certainly, if we consider the etymology of the term “object”, which is “ob-iectum” - as both M. Anita Stefanelli and Cecilia Bello Minciocchi point out in their essay *Bargaining with the American Language: Lina Angioletti's Translation* (Stefanelli) and *L'oggetto appeso, la parola incollata, il sasso. Su alcuni montaggi di Nanni Balestrini* (Bello Minciocchi) – we find, respectively, “things put before” (90) and “Parole sbalzate, esposte, e scagliate contro, opposte: etimologicamente *objecta*.” (233)

As the movement, in a sense, is observed as a *continuum*, the book invites the reader to try and establish a sort of “objectivist nexus,” as Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Peter Quartermain defined it in their 1999 book *The Objectivist Nexus: Essays in Cultural Poetics*. DuPlessis remarks:

Though there were and are objectivist poets, there was no -ism, no “movement.” The “objectivist nexus,” as Peter Quartermain and I proposed, was conjoined and set in motion by these poets' individuated and interested readings and reconsiderations through time of two compelling terms for poetics put forth by Zukosfky in essays from 1930 and 1931. The terms are sincerity and objectification. (45)

The notion of “thinking with the things as they exist,” initially formulated by Louis Zukofsky, can actually achieve that “sincerity,” “objectification,” and “rested totality” that the author postulated, inspiring future poets



to achieve these aims as well. Words, having shed their “predatorily referential” function, could free themselves from their traditionally subordinate position and surge into a renewed, totalizing form of energy: “For Zukofsky, thought is created and propelled by the philological quirks and syntactic twists of language as felt physiologically, in the body, as sound and sight and thought,” as Du Plessis explains. (48)

If we refer specifically to the five essays on American Objectivist Poets contained in the book, we can perceive that sense of “intense circularity” which pervades the Objectivist movement. It is noticeable not only in its chronological development in the US, but also in its dissemination abroad in other countries and different times. We could call this a “ripple effect,” where the core assumption of “no ideas but in things” is echoed, as an example, in Charles Olson’s “Projective Verse” of 1950 (cfr. the poem considered as a “field of energy:” “A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it [...] by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader. Okay. Then the poem itself must, at all points, be a high energy-construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge”); or else in Robert Creeley’s pronouncement that “form is never more than an extension of content;” or even in Bob Perelman’s view – reported by DuPlessis - according to which “In poetry [...] method is always part of meaning, perhaps close to the whole of meaning. One cannot separate how something is constructed from what is meant” (50), in this way echoing Louis Zukofsky.

This Objectivist stance and its influence are also seen in the reception and dissemination of the Objectivist credo in France. This occurred thanks to critics such as Serge Faucherau, in his *Lecture de la poésie américaine* (1968), or through works by Jacques Roubaud, in the period 1973-1980. Another contribution came through the journal *Action poétique* in 1973, where the Objectivist mode creates the notion “d’une poésie déroutante,” (126) as Luigi Magno points out in his essay titled *Objectivistes américains et nouveaux objectivismes dans la littérature française. Un parcours*:

En effet, la lecture et la diffusion de la poésie des Objectivists ont été non seulement des éléments fondants la formulation de théories poétiques sous forme d’actes concrets (comme la traduction) mais aussi, en dernière analyse, les catalyseurs d’une réaction susceptible de faire repenser le fonctionnement de l’écriture poétique à partir de formats et avec une incidence jusque là différemment ou rarement exploités, voire totalement inexplorés. Cette poésie américaine, pendant longtemps oubliée ou méconnue, a donc très fortement alimenté ce large mouvement critique déjà en acte dans la poésie au moins depuis les poèmes en prose de Baudelaire et qui semble continuer encore aujourd’hui. (124)

In our opinion, a third kind of “intense circularity,” in addition to the temporal and spatial forms mentioned above, is also, we might say, a typological one: that is, the juxtaposition of the critical discourse together with the making of poems by the same author. Thinking about poetry and making poems, according to the Objectivist procedure, is thus a binary outcome of the same activity. As Bob Perelman points out, “Zukofsky folded poetry and poetics into a single genre” (18) creating, just like a virtual “Moebius strip,” “a stratum where inventiveness is perpetual” (18). On the other hand DuPlessis, returning to the “Objectivist nexus” she locates in her poetry, declares : “I am part of this on-going Objectivist nexus in two ways, one as critic [...] and the other as poet.” (51)

In its ideological conception and textual organization, this study encompasses both the theories and practices of some of the authors who, under the Objectivist banner, contributed to it. So, just as we find both genres, poetry and poetics, conjoined in the American poets, we also find poems by Marco Giovenale and Michele Zaffarano, whose poetic compositions comment on or respond to Objectivist ideas.

Just to quote another example, in her essay titled *Objectivist Poetics and the Work of Drafts*, DuPlessis openly acknowledges her debt to the Objectivists: “My work in poetry draws on the central objectivist goal: in language to investigate the ‘real world, the real real world’ as Carl Rakosi said once, with a moving double emphasis”(45) and goes on to say that “*Drafts* – my long poem – is situated in the space created between George Oppen and Louis Zukofsky, and draws on the poetics of sincerity and objectification in the ‘objectivist’ senses.” (45). Discussing her own compositional process as a poet, she also introduces a few excerpts from her poetry which support this kind of “intense circularity:” “*A door is a hinge. A book is another,*” she says in *Draft 104: The Book* (61), and adds “*A book is, however, an acceleration, or causes one*” (60).



“Everything is under control” is the seemingly ironical reply of Italian poet Marco Giovenale in the first of his *five prose pieces* (266), adding: “Everything is under control and /more complicated...”
Luckily enough, in DuPlessis’ own terms, “*A book in time saves nine. But rarely*” (61), and we couldn’t agree more, especially thinking of this volume on the New Objectivists which really fills the long standing gap: “*A is for aura, B is for book*” (61).