

Welcoming Space: Susana Gardner and *Dusie* Books

Dusie is a concept germinated and nourished by Susana Gardner in her Swiss home. It is an on-line poetry journal, a small press, a website, a series of collective poetics projects, a community - most of which floats about in the immaterial space of the www, but remains rooted in paper books and letters and artful objects. Its vortex is Dusie.org, a site containing archived poetry e-chapbooks, information on the press, links to a wide poetic community, and the home of its newest endeavor, *Dusie's* first trade paperbacks by Elizabeth Treadwell and Logan Ryan Smith. But primarily, the site functions as an on-line journal that regularly showcases fresh poetry by dozens of poets, all of which can be viewed and printed by anybody accessing the site: *Issue Four* contains full chapbook projects in free, downloadable PDF file formats.

Dusie began to sprout several years ago when Gardner moved from the United States to Schaffhausen and found the space and time she needed to get things going. Europe's notoriously centralized and neutral country, wedged snugly in the mountainous ranges of the Western continent's affluent players, provides the journal with an international tone and supports connection between European and North American-based poets (*Dusie* also publishes and is always seeking translated works, so far including German, Swedish, Spanish, and Italian poetries in English incarnations). Gardner's arrival initially had her in a jobless predicament, and, while at home as a soon-to-be mother, she set out to act on the concepts of giving and sharing poetry that she'd had brewing for a while.

Dusie (Mina Loy's nickname as a student in Germany) "means many things," Gardner explains, "but was particularly resonant for me living in Europe, learning German, screwing up pronouns *du / sie*: meaning, *you*(informal), and *she/he/it/they/you*(formal)...thus [defining] this aggregate space of many for many by many." This linguistic ambiguity, incidentally, emphasizes *Dusie's* origins in an actual physical location, regardless of how much its distribution depends on the technology of the world-wide-web.

Like many small (and/or on-line) presses, *Dusie* is run from home, sharing Gardner's space with her partner and young daughter. But although *Dusie* first hatched out of one small room in the house, its actual base whirrs within the guts of a computer Gardner hauled with her when leaving the United States. "A room of one's own is simply not enough," Gardner states, and, adding to that a lack of money and materials for a paper-based press, she had to rely heavily on her DSL "hook-up to the outside world." It's the usual sparking point for DIY projects: not having cash, but having a strong desire to manufacture and produce culture, instead of being forced to accept and participate in that which is already provided for you. Gardner's appropriation of the positive elements of the www (such as free and wide distribution) have allowed her to carry on and expand a long tradition of DIY production, with the added component of technological gloss that digital technology provides.

While it is probably fair to say there are problems here with an unexamined www utopianism, we can still say that the perks of the www are well-known and heavily indulged-in by anyone who wishes to escape the tyranny of profit-driven publishing. Gardner has made extensive use of freeware for *Dusie's* website development and is enchanted with the "liberating idea" of on-line publishing as a democratic ideal, a means of creating and distributing works to a massive number of potential readers. Gardner admits that electronic correspondence is somehow less-personal, and perhaps more "sad", than the traditional paper letter, but surely she is right to be thrilled with the prospect of letters and books and words getting around to readers far and wide for free, and with what she contends is a reduced amount of ecological impact.

Resources used in the owning and running of a computer aside, the advantage of *Dusie's* on-line format and its PDF e-chaps is that they can be read on-screen and then printed only if the reader really loves the work, and is also a lover of the tangible on-paper "chapchap". In theory, this saves a whole lot of paper. And because the nature of the PDF is to standardize the appearance and format of basic page layouts for viewing and printing, the relative visual bookness of each e-chap can be preserved.

A further advantage of *Dusie's* on-line format that Gardner cites is that the flexibility of hypertext linking is "simply not possible in a paper journal." It seems obvious, as we've already come to take for granted the ease with which we can whiz about and gather information on anything while on-line, but it can be extremely helpful and enlightening when one is discovering new writers and their works. Gardner is keen to introduce readers to new poets and new works, and to encourage further reading elsewhere via links and biographical details to poets' blogs, websites, and presses.

On paper or on-line, the most important kind of space *Dusie* aims for is a space *for* poetry, the "of many by many for many" that is open to and for experiment. "As a woman and poet," Gardner says, "I had long wished to establish a space where poetry might thrive in a more open and conducive spirit, encouraging writers to take risks." She implies that there is often not enough space available in poetry journals for longer or more playful works, both in terms of physical page and stylistic constraints. While the average paper-based journal typically presents a small selection of poems or a few pages per issue by a given author, it is not unusual to find anything from a few poems to a dozen pages by any of the poets featured in a single issue of *Dusie*: the space is flexible and variable. Gardner takes on what she personally considers to be compelling work, from handfuls of in-progress or in-*play* poems, to extended chapbook features.

This is not to suggest that *Dusie* becomes a sort of catchall for work that has been filtered out of a poet or publisher's idea of publishable or polished work. Rather, it means that *Dusie* is to function as the arena we so often claim we *want* our work to exist in; a flexible, playful, risk-ridden space for actual experiment, "versus any ready-made poetic dogma," as Gardner puts it. She recognizes that what gets labeled as experimental is still prone to division and segregation within itself, that the "serial, long poems, hybrid and multi-genre works" she is obsessed with and intrigued by still get left out as the various other when they don't quite fit a given style.

Gardner relishes the freshness and possibility of new works that aim for what she believes is "a totally different outcome or achievement," works that are "completely other alongside their contemporaries. Such works might not be

finished per se, but ...[have] an accompanying rawness I find compelling as well as somewhat challenging and expressive in the desire to separately navigate the terrain of language and the page. Perhaps this difference might lead to a more succinct attempt [to experiment]." Just what this "different outcome" might be is contingent on Gardner's subjective view, which to her great credit embraces a wide range of styles and does not limit itself to any policed mainstream, be it the popularly-feared realm of emotive lyricism, the grinding teeth of constraint-based writing, or the long drones of conservative (post-)langpo poetries.

Gardner's own notion of what constitutes the experimental is grounded in writing and visual art that she considers to be "self-made and conceived, following a perhaps different path than...[one's] contemporaries." This includes both a variety of Modernist and some early avant-garde figures, suggesting that what she considers to be experimental is not necessarily radical, though it may contain such elements. As an editor, Gardner considers her role in facilitating the *Dusie* space to be that of a curator, gathering and presenting a wide range of related practices, rather than functioning as a gatekeeper. Her focus on maintaining *openness* to experimentation is cut only by a sensitivity to ensuring equal gender representation among the poets she chooses to feature in each issue - the "others" assemble at *Dusie* with the goal of growth and expansion, not further exclusion.

Dusie has been an organic process all along, Gardner asserts, incubated as an "obsessive hobby" but ultimately pursued out of a sense of obligation. "It feels like my duty as a poet and thinker to give back to community that gives so much poetically my way," she says, noting in this a self-consciously philanthropic sentiment, literally demonstrated by the fact that *Dusie*, like many small presses, operates on a completely voluntary basis. While Gardner as an editor does not "aim toward any specific ethos or audience apart from readers of poetry," her editorial/curatorial role nevertheless makes her a hub for a fairly broad network of poets and poetic interests, thus creating and maintaining a community simply by uniting stylistically and geographically disparate poets under the *Dusie* banner. The *Dusie* tentacles reach across space and time to entangle the works of Jon Leon with kari edwards, Jill Magi with Elisabeth Workman. Each consecutive

issue of *Dusie* features a fresh selection of works and poets, constantly forging, expanding, and interconnecting within/out of its own poetic community. The only key thing lacking in the *Dusie* community is the necessary undercurrent of critique, though again, the space is open and indeed welcomes reviews and discussion at the *Dusie* [blog](#) area of the site.

A further admirable example of how Gardner enacts her curatorial role, beyond each issue of the *Dusie* journal, is in her initiation of the **dusi/e-chap kollektiv*. The *kollektiv* is a congregation of willing poets (previously accepted and published in the journal) who create limited edition chapbooks under the auspices of *Dusie*, and send a copy to each other member of the *kollektiv*, as well as keeping a run for themselves to distribute locally. The first round of *kollektiv* chaps involved over forty poets (including Gardner herself), and the work is available online at *Dusie* [Issue Four](#).

Because it's *Dusie* and in PDF, anyone can download and print their own version of the *kollektiv's* chapbooks. Unfortunately for non-participants, "the physical aspect of those particular chaps is more for the participatory poets than the on-line readers, as these chaps vary in composition and materials, the various [types] of binding and sizes." In pieces such as Jen Hofer's *Laws*, however, the reader can still experience the relative effect of the original hand-typed, hand-sewn object that has been scanned-in for on-line viewing, whereas most others are in a digital word processed form. While Gardner - who has a background in visual art, crafting, and bookmaking - exhibits a love for things hand-made, she focuses her *Dusie* energy on digital projects:

"I don't ever imagine having a paper journal for *Dusie*," she says, "as it simply would not compare to the amount I can do and hope to do utilizing the on-line space...[it's] the affordability as well as the eco-friendly aspects and availability to all," that are behind this decision. Gardner personally finds paper worthy and enjoys the physical process of creating individual chaps alongside her on-line work, but cites the lack of hours in a day (as well as space) to accomplish it all. She hopes to facilitate the *kollektiv* project every year, noting the pleasure of receiving dozens of unique chapbooks from around the world and, inversely,

spreading her own work outwards to a broader audience. It is also, she says, an excellent motivating force for her own work.

Gardner's own contribution to the inaugural *kollektiv* series is *SCRAWL*, featured at the end of this article alongside a number of other *kollektiv* chaps as featured in *Dusie Issue Four*. Another project, *to stand to sea*, has recently been published in the United States by [Tangent Press](#). Gardner claims massive support and guidance from her matriarchs - her mother and a great-grandmother - as well as from formative teachers such as Carolyn Forché, whose openness and tendency towards hybridity in writing has deeply influenced not only Gardner's poetry but her mission with *Dusie*. She draws on a long and varied tradition of small press and zine activity in North America, especially that of contemporaries such as Elizabeth Treadwell, Kaia Sand and Jules Boykoff. And when she isn't writing, word-processing, web-designing, or with her family, Gardner continues to craft and makes her hand-made *Dusie*-affiliated items available at [Etsy](#), a site devoted to "all things handmade".

Formed through a close relationship with/in linguistic, artistic, physical and virtual space, Gardner's *Dusie* celebrates a continued expansion of the collective power of poetry. Though Gardner claims a lack of space and of time, her extensive accomplishments with *Dusie* to-date have shown otherwise: *Dusie* is not just something squeezed-in on the side, it is an all-consuming project - and not only for Gardner as its creator, but for anyone who stops to engage with it.

Below are some sample projects from the **dusi/e-chap kollektiv* (also available at [dusie.org](#), Issue Four):

Kaia Sand's *Heart on a Tripod*

kari edwards' *Bharat Jiva*

Jen Hofer's *Laws*

Jill Stengel's *Late May*

Betsy Fagin's *Rosemary Stretch*

Elisabeth Workman's *A city a cloud*

Nicole Mauro and Marci Nelligan's *Dispatch*

Susana Gardner's *SCRAWL: Or, - (from the markings of) the sm aller(o)*

Frances Kruk (the_dill_pickle_licker@yahoo.ca) lives in London.