poetry project

NEWSLETTER

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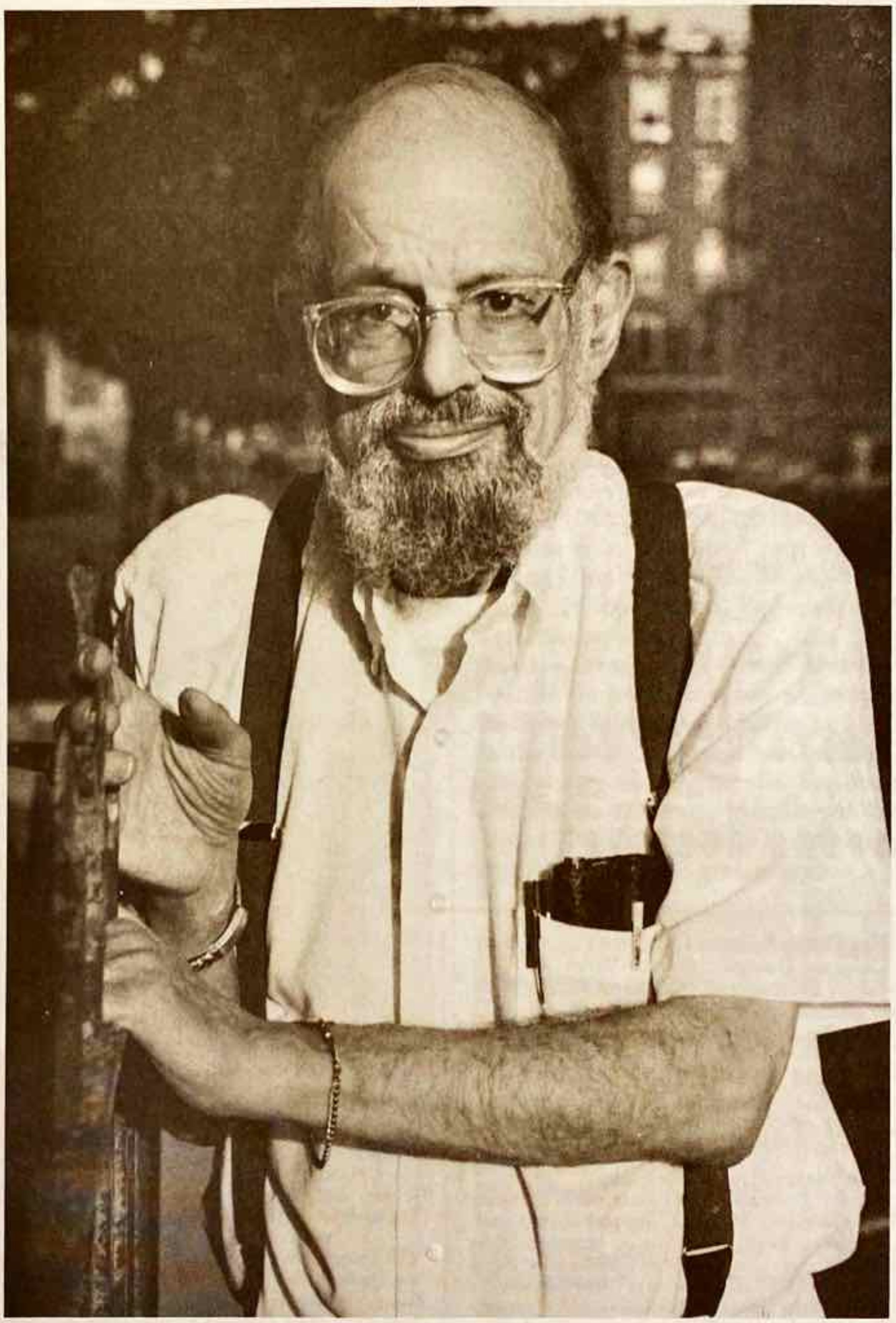

Allen Ginsberg: 1926-1997

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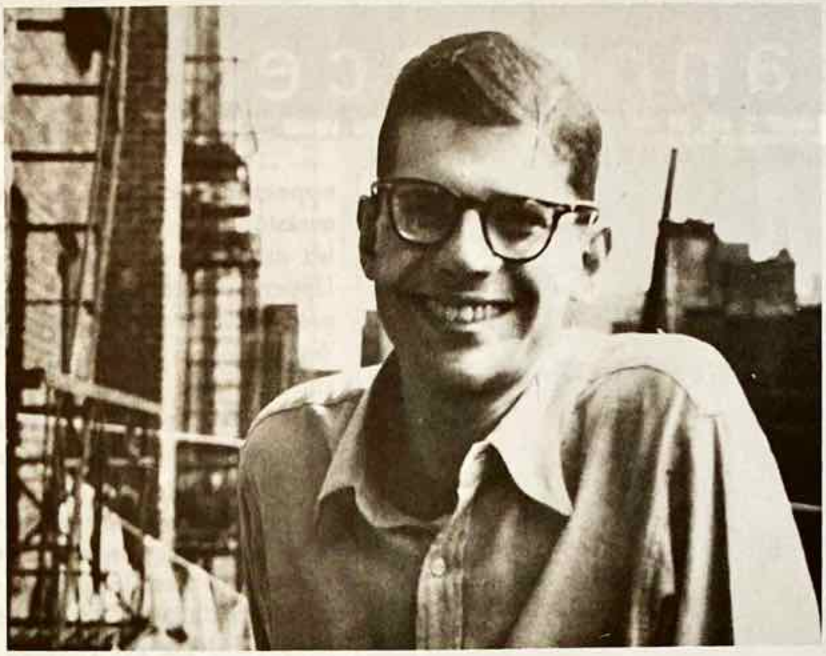
Allen Ginsberg
1926-1997

Allen Ginsberg died on April 5, 1997 in his home on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Throughout the years Allen supported the Poetry Project as an institution, and also as a community of individuals who often turned to him for his generosity and warmth. He last performed at the Poetry Project in a celebration of his **Selected Poems** (Harper Collins) during October of 1996. Over the last several months, homages and poems have poured into the Poetry Project offices. We regret not being able to publish them all here. Allen was a great inspiration and a great liberator. His was a voice of conscience and clarity. This issue of the newsletter is dedicated to him.



©Allen Ginsberg Trust. Courtesy Fahey/Klein Gallery

William Burroughs
1914-1997

William Burroughs died of a heart attack on August 2, 1997 in Lawrence, Kansas at the age of 83. Like Allen Ginsberg, he was central to the Beat Generation, as well as to avant-garde writing and progressive politics worldwide. Throughout his career his influence was felt among writers, musicians, and artists. In 1983 he was inducted into the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters and he was the author of over fifty volumes of work, including **Naked Lunch**, **Junkie**, **Port of Saints**, **Cities of the Red Night**, and **Queer**. Burroughs last read at the Poetry Project in 1981. Grove Press will release a a volume of his selected works in 1998.

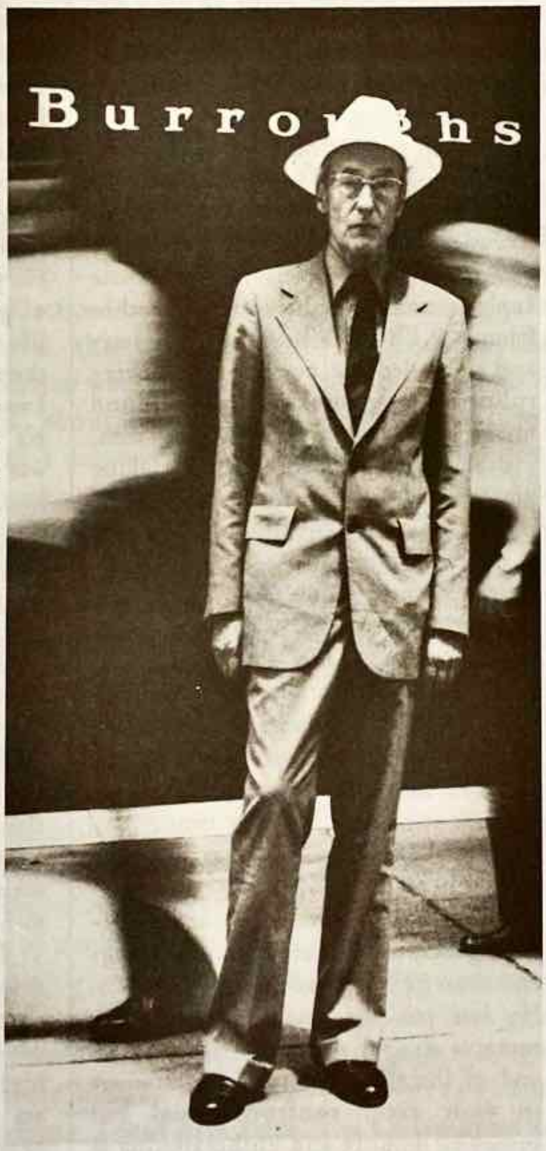


photo by Gerard Malanga

Lisa Brannan

Former Poetry Project editorial intern Lisa Brannan died suddenly and unexpectedly on June 3rd. She worked at the Project during the 1995-96 season while she was a creative writing student at Hunter College. During her internship, Lisa worked diligently on many projects and was of instrumental help in producing Issue #52 of **The World** magazine. In addition to her contributions to the Poetry Project, Lisa provided assistance to poet Hannah Weiner in preparing her collection **We Speak Silent** for publication, and in the Spring of 1996, Lisa gave her first poetry reading at the Ear Inn. Lisa was an energetic member of the Project's community and a promising young poet. She is greatly missed.

Jeff Buckley 1966-1997

Jeff Buckley, a musician and poet, died on May 29th in Memphis, Tennessee. Buckley was a friend to the Poetry Project, performing in various events including the New Year's Marathon readings. Buckley was active in New York's pop and avant-garde music scenes, recording two albums for Columbia Records. In addition to being a mainstay of East Village music venues, he and his band recently toured Europe and Asia. His absence from the Poetry Project is a loss for the community.

announcements

photo by Nikolai B. Katz

Elio Schneeman: 1961-1997

Elio and I were friends. I knew him when he was a kid growing up on the Lower East Side, and then casually over the years, but in the early 90s we graduated from being people who chatted on the street or at poetry readings to people who talked on the phone and had coffee together. The big subtext with Elio was whether he was taking drugs or not—we began getting close shortly after he emerged from a lengthy rehab—but he gave me the impression that he was looking at the world in a new way, with renewed interest in what was possible, and that he was determined not to go under again.

This is the time I want to remember. I'm sure there were a lot of things he never told me. When drugs were mentioned it didn't feel like a problem, like we had to avoid the subject. But I assumed there was a residue of despair behind the nonchalant facade and wondered how he dealt with it, how strong the defenses, and whether he could withstand the pressures of living in New York. Eventually we began working on a book together—his first book, **In February, I Think**, had been published by Ted Berrigan's C Press when he was 17—and this provided the opportunities for numerous social occasions. Mostly I remember the lavish dinners, at his apartment on the Upper West Side or mine in Park Slope, presided over by Pamela Lawton and Wang Ping, a late night poker game, and the great book party—when the book, **Along The Rails**, finally appeared—at his parents' apartment on St. Mark's Place.

I admit that I was worried, when I proposed doing his book, that it might spark some place in him I didn't know about, that he would sabotage (as many people do) the good things that happen, that he would take refuge in drugs again to avoid some situation he couldn't deal with, that he might be disappointed by it all. But there was never a moment during these years—immediately before the book came out—when he seemed to be slipping out of orbit. He was anxious for feedback about the manuscript: which poems he should include, what order, not only from me but from John Godfrey (who wrote copious notes on the text) and other friends. Elio was lucid about poetry and defended his poems, often overruling my suggestions. I often found myself watching myself watching him, with caution, and then ultimately taking pleasure in his pleasure at seeing his poems enter the world.

I'm sure there were a lot of things he never told me. I don't know why I feel like saying this again. You say something, someone says something else, and sometimes you hear or don't want to hear. You get lulled into thinking one thing when something else is true but you don't want to think it's true because you don't have the time. You want to accept the words as meaning what they say.

Reading Elio's poems is like navigating a precipice; he lures you to the edge and then pulls you back to safe ground. He lets you get under his skin but remains elusive, a shadowy figure at the end of the alley who suddenly appears in your face, confrontational but somehow demure and unthreatening at the same time. There's something soulful about his sense of restraint, as if he's ambivalent about giving away too much at once (I was always prodding him to write longer poems). What impresses me most is that he had a place he could go to where he could make all the right choices and that he included in his poems the struggle to get to that place and stay there. Wit and giddiness are part of it, an intuitive wisdom with which he could deal sanely with problems of loss, of being torn asunder. He assumed privilege without being spoiled. And he knew when to stop.

The last two years of Elio's life involved a lot of talk, especially when it became clear that drugs had taken over. He was working in the library at Columbia University and taking classes in Italian at night. He started a novel, worked on his Ungaretti translations, and wrote some brilliant short prose pieces. He put together a second collection of poems. He was living a double life, and till the end he always showed me his optimistic side, and I wanted to be fooled because I didn't want to believe that everything was falling apart. All I could give him were words of encouragement and warnings which circled like riderless horses around the real unspoken issues. After months of turmoil, he was admitted in the Fall of 1996 to a rehab center in France, where he stayed until June 1997. A few days after he returned to New York we met for coffee at the Orlin and went to a reading at the Zinc Bar. Later that night I spoke to Pamela and told her that Elio seemed fine, which is what I wanted to believe, but she knew better.

Elio's poetry and his relationship with Pamela were his best sides and I'm grateful to him for letting me into his world during the years his life was thriving. I only wish that art and love and friendship had been enough to sustain him.

LEWIS WARSH

An Interview
with
ED SANDERS

by

Lisa Jarnot

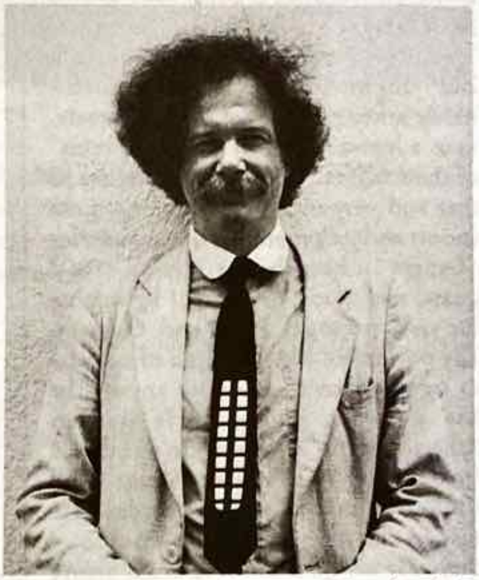


photo by Christopher Felver

Ed Sanders is a poet, musician, editor, historian, and activist. His most recent publication, 1968: **A History in Verse**, was published this year by Black Sparrow Press. This interview was conducted at the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado on July 12, 1997 and at the Cedar Bar in New York City on July 23, 1997.

Jarnot: I want to talk to you about Allen Ginsberg. Partly, what was your relationship with Allen like?

Sanders: I was a senior in high school and read **Howl** and I bought **Howl** actually at the University of Missouri Bookstore on a fraternity weekend. And it seemed like, as a young man, about everything I'd been looking for in terms of a model for writing poetry and combining poetry with your personal life in a way I thought would be appropriate, although I was living in the midwest, in a 50s type all-American environment. Then I moved to New York later and saw him from afar. I attended poetry readings at places like the Gaslight on MacDougal Street or the Living Theater on 14th Street. I saw him read as I did other poets—Edward Dahlberg, Kerouac, Corso; I saw Frank O'Hara read. So wherever I could go to find poets that I admired to watch them read I went, but I never considered introducing myself or trying to be part of it; I was just a witness. And I was going to New York University trying to study languages so I didn't really meet Allen until 1963 when he came back from a long stay in India and Japan and Cambodia, Viet Nam, and other places—he went to the Vancouver Poetry Festival—and then he came back. And before that I had corresponded with him. I sent him **Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts** in India and he liked it and sent me this really important poem, "The Change" where he kind of changed spiritual directions and came to terms with his body on a train in Japan after visiting Joanne Kyger and Gary Snyder on the way back to Vancouver. So anyway, from 1963 on, when I formally met him, and he took me to a party at Robert and Mary Frank's house, I began hanging out with him any time we were around in the same area until he died 34 years later. We had many many capers and adventures and he called all the time and we saw each other now and then. A number of people could say the same thing. He was part of my life, and part of my family's life. He was part of the household. He gave us advice, a lot of advice. And you know, he'd give advice on what kind of furniture to have in your kitchen; he was very much a teacher.

Jarnot: What do you think his significance is historically?

Sanders: Well I think he's left behind a body of a lot of wonderful poetry going back to his early days, like a Byron or an Emily Dickinson or a Shelley. There are poems that are quite on the Whitman/Poe level of skill. Another way is as an educator. Someone told me his Blake lectures alone are 3000 typed pages—his analysis of Blake is quite bright and brilliant. And I think that's one of the reason some of the academics were so hostile to him, because he was like a walking Encyclopedia Britannica of Western poetry, and also Eastern poetry and Chinese poetry, so he knew very much. He's a scholar is all I'm saying, and this scholarliness is a legacy. And then his politics are a legacy. He was originally to be a labor lawyer. His mother was a Communist and his father was a Social Democrat and out of that came Allen, always hungering to celebrate the regular people, but with a sense that not that many poets are "great" or that there is a winnowing out and judgement that occurs unfortunately among those people that create, as to a hierarchy of "value" or "genius" of their labors. So he was very active in that and very capable of looking quite snooty and judgmental, and he had a lot of anger in him that he, like all men I guess, was trying to control by writing his own personal **Iliad** and **Odyssey**. His poems are like this epic of coming to terms with violence. But anyway, he has a lasting legacy. He was an American genius. They didn't put Lord Byron into Westminster Abbey until 1968, so it may take some decades. He may go through what I call a "Poe job"—they may savage him for a while before he can re-emerge.

Jarnot: Do you think that poets have to take on more responsibility now that Allen's gone?

Sanders: Allen had a natural metabolism that was very very elevated. He's such a difficult role model to emulate because of his enormous psychic and actual energy, and he was not, in ways that he would let on, having the cycles of manic depression that other famous poets did, going all the way back to William Cowper, and forward to Robert Lowell, or Anne Sexton, or other poets. His energy cycle was always above the Y axis, so it's difficult. In my own feeble way I try to emulate his political activity with my vow to go out in a blaze of leaflets. Not only do you have to tend to the current stages, you have to set the stage, the soil, the ground—to use an agricultural metaphor—for the future. Every thirty or forty years a big social attempt is made to make things better for working people. You can go back to 1825, 1848, 1870, 1905, 1917, the 30s and 40s, and then later the 60s. Personally, now that I'm middle aged, I think that part of my goal is to help set the soil for the next period of stress where there is an attempt to make an improvement for working people, a genre that I think includes poets.

Jarnot: Do you think there are particular things that poets need to know or to put forward into the world?

Sanders: Two different things, right? "Need to know" and "need to put forward". What was that Ezra Pound thing as to what a poet should do? It's like get a dictionary and learn the meaning of words. And again, that's a metaphor for the curiosity that a poet should have. And if you don't have the curiosity, you should train yourself to have that level of curiosity where you are always researching the world, and if we're talking about Allen, that's a great example of what he was like. He was the first Jack the Clipper I ever met—always handing me swatches of clippings, and making clippings and systematic filings on issues and subjects part of his life. In my own archives I have some of his files that he would give to me so I could do some work on them too. I have these manilla folders with his handwriting and then the various subjects. So you have to prepare yourself and always study many different things. And therefore it makes the planning of personal time very important. Poets tend to be bacchic sometimes. They can don the foxskin masks of the bassarids and go dancing off into partying. So the idea is—since poets tend to travel a lot—to travel with portable research systems. Gary Snyder does that. I'm always impressed with the way he studies while he travels, studies books and his ecological studies. And so, I think poets, without being preachy, without succumbing to doggerel, should present issues and opinions, revving up the culture for the next "cycle of improvement" I call it, or revolutionary period, hopefully without violence.

Jarnot: How much does research overlap what Allen did? I know he did a lot of research on the CIA.

Sanders: I'm not as overt. I do a lot of almost secret research into cases. I've done a lot of research helping elected officials in investigating things, such as illegal dumping by organized crime. And with respect to the CIA I've done a lot of gathering of files and information for the last 27 years on certain cases, quietly, because I believe that there is a class of killers, and I would say serial killers, that were attracted to clandestine government work. These guys—many of them from the post-World War II era are retired and old—some of them I think may still be in place. Allen's thing began in 1965 when the federal narcotics agents tried to get a bunch of people to set Allen up, and get him busted, and Allen started looking into the connection between the CIA and the government and illegal drug dealing, and came to kind of realize that a portion of the people trying to control it and to make arrests were selling it. So it became like a scene out of Brecht's **Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny**. You know, it turned out that a portion of the CIA were selling drugs and doing illegal things to raise money. So Allen, with his "CIA Calypso Blues" and his speaking out in public are emblems of deportment for a poet. I don't know if any of us can do it with his verve. That's why it's too bad on one level that he didn't become a labor lawyer. He knew how to work the bureaucracy to get something done. There are examples in his life that, hundreds of examples, where he used his uncanny ability to analyze a bureaucracy to find out whom to call. I've come to his house in the 60s and 70s and seen him on the phone, say, to somebody in the governor's office. You know, most of us would say, well I better write a letter to the paper, but Allen would try to call Governor Rockefeller and speak to him directly. So he would try to call Clinton for instance, and maybe get right through. So the idea is to overcome shyness. You have to beg your psyche to emulate some of the better aspects of Ginsberg's public deportment.

Jarnot: When you were writing **1968: A History In Verse** was there information that you left out of it because you felt like you shouldn't publish it?

Sanders: Well, if you write about a year and there are many many things—there's not room. When you create a book-length poem and then you have files and boxes of things that possibly you could use, but you have to make choices. Sometimes you leave things out because they're too similar to other things you write about that are more emblematic. Mine is a kind of allegory for American civilization, the 1968 book, it speaks to the best aspects of America, of which there are plenty, but also horrible aspects, of which there are a number. It's almost an allegorical thing, archetypal, so I had to make some decisions. Yeah, but it's true, because I knew many things that I left out, and there were some things that I left out for reasons of privacy, but I didn't put in a lot of material that would be deemed controversial, but you know, personal information about other people that would just be like trash. You know like the section "Greta Garbo's Mouth" where I was going to do this gossip sheet. Janis Joplin sometimes told me about her erotic life—she would fill me in, in great detail. I left that out of the book. Why tell all just because Tell tells

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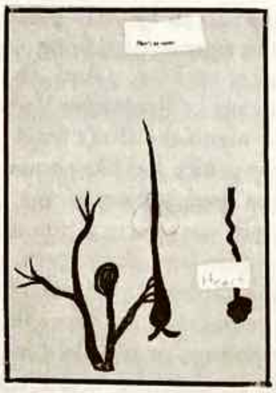

ENDOCRINOLOGY MEI-MEI BERSSENBRUGGE, poem KIKI SMITH, prints

In this collaborative work, the immaterial is examined in physical and mental sensations taken back to their material source in the endocrine system. These poems continue Berssenbrugge's brilliant explorations of language and perception in light of changes in the body's chemistry.

The human body—its interior and exterior organizations (tissues), functions and surfaces—has been Kiki Smith's artistic subject for many years.

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REBECCA LETTERS LAYNIE BROWNE, prose-poems

This collection of prose-poems is the dazzling work of a young writer exploring the grammars of ancestral history and language. There is an old voice here retrieved from epic narrative and family documents. It shapes a poetry of shattered continuities, broken objects, and bright shifts between thought and dream, wonder and tart humor, disjunct and lyric tones. The desire to bring the past through present time into the future gives Rebecca Letters immediate significance as a peculiarly late twentieth century project.

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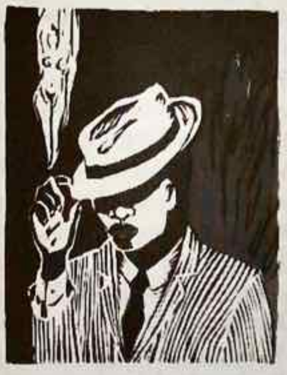

ARCADE ERICA HUNT, poems ALISON SAAR, woodcuts

"Through subway misadventures and interruptive phone calls, the poet is always present as a woman in and of the world. Saar, whose work appeared in the 1993 Whitney Biennial, focuses this collaboration between two African-American women with 12 stark, haunting drawings (six on vellum) of black women and men in seemingly allegorical poses."

—Publishers Weekly

56pp., $15, ISBN 0-932716-39-3

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STRIPPED TALES BARBARA GUEST, poems ANNE DUNN, drawings

"Poet Barbara Guest and painter Anne Dunn, who have long been friends, collaborate for the first time in Stripped Tales*....Guest's series of highly reduced poetic narratives is interspersed with duotone drawings (six on vellum) by Dunn."*

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you to tell? I did leave things out that didn't make sense to put in.

Jarnot: Do you think that you learned a lot about yourself from that project? I mean you learned what the FBI knew about you, right?

Sanders: Yes. I was always too shy to read my FBI files and I finally read through them. Well, you live your own life. You have your own time track and your little portable zone—your body and ten-feet around your body that you travel in life with—and through that year you go interact with the people that come into that ten foot zone by phone calls, by vision, by conversations, whatever—that's your experience of that year. So if you want to make a year more living—that's why I use the image of creating a living structure—if you start bringing in other things, and other strands of information about what other people were doing at the same time, it does help you to fill in to understand the broader picture. So doing that kind of research is like a three-dimensional sculpture. It's a sculptural thing where the year becomes like a living sculpture and the other aspects of the sculpture are outside your zone, and it helps you to understand. So yes, if you're asking did it help me understand what I did or my own experiences the answer is a resounding yes, for sure. I tracked a bunch of people—I call them time tracks, where you track—the analogy would be like a multi-track recording studio where you have 24 tracks and each one is going along in time with an instrument or something happening on it, and for a whole book of poetry—a multi-track book—yeah, you have parallel tracking and every once in a while you bring information from these parallel tracks into the book, into the flow of the book where it makes sense. So then it's like a 24-track mix, and you bring some things to the foreground and submerge other things at different points in the flow of time. So you're like a maestro, or to use that metaphor, you're like a recording engineer that's mixing and bringing some things out at one point and pulling them back at other points.

Jarnot: How much of that comes out of Olson?

Sanders: Well, Olson was kind of pre-electronic, but he had some good ideas. He was the first guy I knew that cared about wetlands. In the 60s there was this thing called urban renewal where they were determined to do away with poverty, and one of the things the anti-poverty program did was tear down buildings and build new buildings. And doing that does a couple of things. It gives jobs to the construction business, and to the paving business, and it creates jobs. But in the town where Olson lived, Gloucester, they were attempting to fill in some of these tidal wetlands which he would walk by—he was a walker. He loved to walk in the town he was writing about, so he didn't want these beautiful tidal oceanic wetlands to be destroyed, and the same way with the interesting old houses, the federal or greek revival from the 19th century that they would tear down to put up a parking lot. And he would fight against that. But his techniques I followed a lot, and some of his writing techniques such as the shamanic rev-up method of writing, where he would study things, study his files and get kind of revved up, and then a transmission occurs and you write this stuff down. That's a definite possible method for writing certain sections of a work that contains history—where you have a bunch of files and notes and you study them carefully, and then you get what Robert Duncan called your "body tones"—you get your muscularity and your bìos revved up like a drag racer, and then out comes this poetry. That can be useful in historic poetry; it can distill the essence of a thing. So I owe something to him. And also all his observations in **Projective Verse**, which is now a manifesto that's from 1950, so it's 47 years old, but like good writing it often has useful material for the present, and his perception that one insight must lead directly to another, and his metaphor of the poem as a high energy construct, where the mind receives energy, or it's like a high energy grid, so that the mind reading it receives this energy as it proceeds down the page. So what that's saying is to charge your language with energy, to work on it so that it doesn't have any points where it doesn't discharge that energy, or that élan, or dare we use the word beauty. It's kind of a macho image really. Why not have part of your poems without any energy at all and just sort of like a tidal pool? Of course a tidal pool's full of life forms—crustaceans and sea urchins and pieces of kelp, and eaten claws of lobsters. Anyway Olson wrote this poem called "Maximus from Dogtown I" which completely revised my thinking on how poetry could be written because I'd been influenced a lot by the long lined "Howl" and Olson was much more systematically mythological than Ginsberg. He had Egyptian elements and all kinds of mythic elements in his story about this guy who wrestles a bull in Dogtown Meadow and the bull's like this symbol of the universe. And finally the bull kills this guy because it grows up. Anyway, you'd have to read the poem. So, I read that, and then I started putting out **Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts** and I started writing to Olson, sending issues. And he wrote back. And he had read "Poem from Jail" which is a mythopoetic thing. The basic structure of it is a re-creation of the Demeter/Persephone myth in the nuclear era, against the background of a doomsday machine. Olson's the only one who ever picked up on that. He understood its mythology, that a lot of it was borrowed from Hesiod's **Theogony** which we both loved, and I knew by heart because I'd just taken a course at NYU in Hesiod's **Theogony**, so I had that thing memorized, almost. So Olson wrote me letters. He wrote me about 50 or 60 letters treating me like an equal. I was a 22-year-old kid. I didn't even know Ginsberg yet. I knew nobody. I was afraid of becoming intimate with these heroes.

Jarnot: How much does New York School writing influence your work? I mean we're talking about Olson and Ginsberg, but you were also a major part of the New York School, being on the Lower East Side, and hanging out with Ted Berrigan…

Sanders: And Frank O'Hara. I didn't see O'Hara very much, but he was very supportive. And Ashbery was very supportive when I was a young man. We would have some conversations. He wanted me to put together a book of poetry and he encouraged me, that he would help get it published under that foundation that was set up after Frank died. And when I was arrested for **Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts**, Ashbery appeared in court, as did Kenneth Koch, to be expert witnesses. They weren't called on to testify, but they were there, Kenneth Koch holding a tennis racket and John Ashbery in the front row of the state supreme court in lower Manhattan in the summer of 1967. So, how much was the influence? Quite a bit, O'Hara particularly—those city walking poems—of which Ron Padgett is also a master—of the gazing around while you're walking—it's a variety of the buddhist pacing meditation type of thing that Gary Snyder picked up on in **Mountains and Rivers Without End**, the idea of walking through an environment and observing, and Apollinaire walking through Paris. And picking up information as you're walking and buying your Gauloises and checking out the new **Art Forum** and saying hello to a friend, that idea of using your body where your body and your heartbeat is part of it. That was an important lesson to me—that it wasn't just zen monks that could pace their white sand gardens in Kyoto—but it was also Frank O'Hara on the way to work at the Museum of Modern Art. That was an incident where you could create poetry. And then of course Ted Berrigan and I were close friends for a number of years, and his writing was an influence. I often thought I sounded just like Ted, I often emulated his speech patterns and the way he looked at things.

Jarnot: So how did you manage to end up on the Lower East Eide, from the Midwest?

Sanders: Well New York University was in Washington Square Park and there were all these interesting types that hung out in Washington Square Park, especially early in the morning in the summertime. I was living at the Hotel Colburne off Washington Square in a little 17-dollar-a-week room there in the summer of 1959. I'd go to Washington Square while all the street sweepers were there and all these bohemians were hanging out, guys with names like Billy Budd, stuff I've written about in Volume 1 of **Tales of Beatnik Glory**– "Vulture Egg Matzoh Brei" is the story that deals with that. But they kept talking about this thing called "the East Side." So one day I took a walk with some people to get some peyote and there was the East Side and the West Side and there was this no man's/no woman's land there that they literally sprinted through, just between Broadway and 1st Avenue—and then you were at this other place called the East Side where I quickly learned there were all these cheap apartments, and all these painters with things in the storefronts.

Jarnot: So you were studying Classics at that point. Did you go to NYU to do that?

Sander: No. I went there because it had a good graduate program in rocket science and I wanted to be a rocket scientist or physicist at one point because 1958 when I first went to NYU was the time that Alan Shepard went overhead, the Mercury Program. For a lonely young insecure poet boy from the Midwest it seemed like a kind of nice loner thing to do, go up in a rocket and orbit the earth. So that was the reason I went to NYU. But my mother had passed away in 1957 and my mother had always said that a gentleman knew Greek and Latin. So in high school I took Latin, and I wasn't very skilled at it, but it helped me. So in honor of my mother who passed away when I was in high school I decided to take Greek. I had thought I should take Russian, because obviously they were the competitors and they were going into space also, but anyway I decided to take Greek. It's a difficult language to get going in but I quickly started to study Greek poetry. Almost immediately they make you take an **Iliad** and **Odyssey** course, which really changed my life. And then I had some really good teachers at NYU—Dr. Bluma Trell was one of them. I took a Greek lyric poetry class with her where she was able to explain these meters. We're not talking iambic pentameter—but very complicated and variegated meters. So I was able to, through her, jump right into Sappho and Simonides and Anacreon and Stesichorus—a lot of Greek poets that opened me up to meter. So after a while I decided to change my major to Classics and that's what I graduated in ultimately in 1964. I took a lot of mathematics but I really wasn't cut out to be a rocket scientist.

Jarnot: What about the origins of your political consciousness?

Sanders: My parents were like Stevensonian Democrats in a very conservative area and they were always volunteering for things. Like in the 50s there was a big drive in America to do away with one-room school houses and have consolidated school districts on the grounds you could get a better education. My parents were involved in that and reorganizing school districts. When Roosevelt died my parents went out on the front steps of our house and we all wept. So Roosevelt was like a hero to my parents' generation. My parents would sneer at Joseph McCarthy and the McCarthy hearings. I knew about people like Norman Thomas and I knew a little bit about the 30s, because even in the 40s where I was raised in a rural area of Missouri, hobos would come because we were a quarter mile from the train tracks. The rule was that they weren't allowed in the house, but we were to feed them. So it was a knowledge of the 30s and memories of the horror of the 30s were very ingrained in the consciousness of my family. So then when I got to New York I picked up issues of a great publication of the time called **I.F. Stone's Weekly** which taught me that there's a sub-surface to everything; you can't believe what you see on television or what you hear on the radio or read in the newspapers. There's always a subtext, there's always a reason, there's always an underlying set of muscles and sinews that are really explaining what's going on. Then I got exposed to things like the **Monthly Review** which was a socialist publication and I began to follow the Cuban Revolution through the **Monthly Review** and there were other left wing publications I began to read and I slowly began to read and study things. Now I had no idea—they didn't talk about Buchenwald back in Missouri, so when in the late 50s the

[continued on page 28]

"HURRY UP. IT'S TIME.": ON ALLEN GINSBERG & WILLIAM BURROUGHS

by

Anne Waldman

Allen Ginsberg and I travelled to what mercifully was to become the Czech Republic right after the Velvet Revolution, April 1990. Minutes before landing Allen was composing his "Return of Kral Majales" (his return and echo of celebrated King of May poem commemorating time he'd been paper-crowned 25 years earlier to much fanfare and political fuss and intrusion): "And I am King of May with high blood pressure, diabetes, gout, Bell's palsy, kidney stones and calm eyeglasses." I glanced at him sideways on the plane as he scribbled in his notebook with the elegant Mont Blanc pen, not wanting to distract him. He was fiercely intent on composing this poem for such a major occasion. He wanted to make a ritual offering. It was a real homecoming. We were ceremoniously welcomed at the airport by a warm crowd of friends, reporters, photographers. As we settled into a modest apartment, messages were coming in from friends and wellwishers all over Prague. A lot of media attention. Allen was accorded the singular role of Ambassador of Sanity from the West. Vaclav Havel, visibly admiring and touched by Allen's presence, sat in the front row at the small crowded smoky rock club where we performed. We had several private interviews with him. Havel told us he was pleased and charmed to have hosted the Dalai Lama who'd given him mantras for meetings with difficult heads of state (he kept them handy on a little piece of crumpled paper in his wallet!). Friends showed us samizdat carbon copies of "Howl" (along with warped Bob Dylan records) they'd kept under their floorboards that kept them going during the endless long repressive years under Soviet block rule. Allen's example, his political activism on behalf of silenced folk everywhere, his fiery compassionate poetry inspired hope and conjured the possibilities of freedom, both artistic and personal. What love people had for him, what delight on seeing him again (some of these folks had been children 25 years before but remembered Allen vividly.) He crowned the new King of May in a huge gathering in the main plaza, thousands of cheerful locals milling about. Other friends had arrived from Germany, from Hungary, from Italy, from New York. We travelled with poet Nanao Sakai of Japan and the Plastic People rock band in a big tour bus around the country. We were given medals (as poets) at the prestigious university. All the guys got out of the bus to pee on the grounds of the ghostly Timorin nuclear plant, a disastrous bane of the land. We read poetry and performed to thousands and thousands of beer-guzzling cigarette-smoking dungareed kids, where Allen would introduce me as his "spiritual wife."

Allen was modest, humble, curious about everyone else, asking as many questions as he was being asked in a long string of interviews and conversations. He was concerned about Havel and kept saying to me "What a job he's got! Do you think he can hold it together?" A main concern was how to deal with all the petty criminals and snitchers. Amnesty for everyone? One night back in Prague Allen and I gave meditation instruction to a young woman in the middle of a loud disco club. Allen suggested she ask three times, the traditional way to request Dharma teaching and she did and he was pleased. "This will help, meditation can help here," he said, his voice rising over the insistent beat of the empty-hearted drum machines.

***

William Seward Burroughs left his body behind August 2, 1997 in Lawrence, Kansas. The undertaker did a fine job for the open casket ceremony held the evening of the 6th at the Liberty Hall in Lawrence. William looked luminous, peaceful, his forehead somehow lifting toward the future, if such a thing is possible. He wore a tawny-colored velvet Moroccan vest dear old friend Brion Gysin, departed some years back now, had given him. His honorific florets from the French and American academies were pinned to his left jacket (an elegant one) lapel. His hat and signature cane rested on the fine cherrywood coffin. Schubert's "Fantasie" from Sonata Opus no. 78 played as over a hundred folk–mostly friends from William's 16 years in Lawrence entered the Hall. The ceremony began as James Grauerholtz's mother Selda sang "For All The Saints Who From Their Labours Rest" to piano accompaniment. David Ohle read aloud "Ulysses" by Alfred Lord Tennyson, one of William's favorite poems, and Tim Miller of the University of Kansas's religion department officiated, reminding us that we too had to "pick up the torch" since the passing of William and Allen Ginsberg to maintain our basic human (and artistic) freedoms of lifestyle, independence, self-expression, and how precious they are and how precious these men were and their examples still are. Joujouka music, Ry Cooder's "Paris, Texas", Louis Armstrong's "St. Louis Blues" (with Bessie Smith), and other recordings were piped in. Various personal items–including a gun, and a "joint"–were added into the casket before it was closed, presumed accoutrements for the difficult journey into the Western Lands–the place of the dead in Egyptian mythology that held such fascination for William (see his book **The Western Lands** which describes this afterlife). The next morning close friends accompanied the elegant white hearse in a motorcade five hours to Belle Florette cemetary in St. Louis, Missouri to the Burroughs' family plot presided over by a monument to William Seward Burroughs Senior of Adding Machine fame, a monument erected to "his genius" by his loyal workers and colleagues. Friends said farwell, making little speeches and personal statements at the gravesite. John Giorno gave a rousing invocation, James Grauerholtz a humble, respectful eulogy. Patti Smith sang "Oh Dear What Can the Matter Be (Johnny's So Long At The Fair)." I read the last lines from **The Western Lands**:

> The old writer couldn't write anymore because he had reached the end of words, the end of what can be done with words. And then? "British we are, British we stay." How long can one hang on in Gilbralter, with the tapestries where mustached riders with scimitars hunt tigers, the ivory balls one inside the other, bare seams showing, the long tearoom with mirrors on both sides and the tired fuschia and rubber plants, the shops selling English marmelade and Fortnum & Mason's tea...clinging to their Rock like the rock apes, clinging always to less and less.
>
> In Tangier the Parade Bar is closed. Shadows are falling on the Mountain.
>
> "Hurry up, please. It's time."

The casket was placed in large metal outercasing by efficient men in hard hats, earth moving machines standing by, and was lowered into the good Missouri sod. But looking at the imposing box we knew he'd already escaped. Steven Lowe had said it a few moments before, paraphrasing William, "the point is not to live but to travel."

POEM FOR ALLEN GINSBERG

Wherever you hover, Spirit, mind-deep in space
Where God signs his name in hydrogen italics
Among Oort cloud comets that brought water to Earth
For our throats' thirsts and tears for our eyes;
Where you touch ethereal fingers to wingtips of eagles;
Or under the world's oceans admonishing sharks
To clamp their teeth into little fish more thoughtfully;
Or lounging among Cherry Valley ferns, watching with daisies' eyes
Through a lattice of tree twigs a red sun sliver
Slide below the horizon's rim; nightfall crickets chirp
The compact epics of their lives; or sitting with us
Invisible in the 13th Street Fifth floor eyrie
As church bells toll the heartbeat of time into song,
Now you know all, Allen, while earthbound our senses fail.
You can see time gone and time to come, how the Cosmos started and ends,
How the rose builds its lovely carbon body out of photons and rain.
You watch the girl in her bedroom cursing the face in the mirror,
You watch the long legged stripling toss
Basketballs through hoops – move on, you're past all sex.

Well, hardline Capitalism triumphed in your time,
It had to, crushing your outcries in a torrent of plastic,
Toyotas, color TV, computers, digital disks;
The doe-eyed, the misfits still cram jails and bughouses,
The Statue of David shines in the Academy
While Europe and Africa pile up their corpse mountains.

So shower your pity on the nation you scolded;
Pity our soldier dragged in Mogadishu dust,
Pity the homeless in their cardboard chapels,
Pity the neck-slashed girl and the death cell halfwit,
Pity our midnight soul fears and dark dream tremors;
Pity our workplace gouging of each other
That our children not fall under the spiked wheel of poverty,
Pity the comrades you wordlessly deserted,
Pity your brother's self-pity, the vanity of his grief.
Pity the human race and its illusion of permanence.

Eugene Brooks
April 1997

"Maximize Information: Pay Attention to the Particulars"

by

Steven Taylor

I knew Allen for exactly twenty-one years, which is half of my life, and with the exception of Peter Orlovsky and Bob Rosenthal, perhaps nobody spent more time with him than I did. Allen was vast and particular, like a haiku. I will relate a few of the facts of our meeting and parting.

My family came to the US in 1965. School in America was an unrelieved nightmare. College was slightly better because anything was better than high school, but I hadn't a clue where to go from there. I had read Kerouac, but of Allen's work I only knew "Howl, Part II," which was in an anthology my father had given me. "What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination?" Wow.

One afternoon in the spring of 1976 I went to the student center at my college and settled into a big easy chair to wait for Allen's poetry reading. I dozed off. In my dream Allen needed a guitarist and I was it and everything changed.

Allen was to talk and take questions for a while, then there'd be a break, then he'd do a reading. At the break the host professor, whom I knew, introduced me to Allen who asked if I would sit in. I went home for my guitar.

We began with music. I copped the changes from listening and watching Allen's right hand on the harmonium. It wasn't hard. Allen played everything with three chords in the keys of C, G, and A. At some point we did Blake's "Nurse's Song" from **the Songs of Innocence** and I made a vocal round of the last line of the verse. Allen had had lots of guitarists sit in, but he'd never had one who sang harmony. He went ecstatic and repeated the refrain far too many times. After the show he said he was about to make a record and that the musicians had already been hired, but I should come and check out the rehearsal. Soon after that, I drove my father's car to Paterson to Louis and Edith Ginsberg's apartment. There I met Allen's brother Eugene and their stepmother Edith and father Louie, who shook my hand and asked, "So, Taylor, what do you do?" I remember the humor and generous attentiveness of those elderly people. I had never met anyone like them.

At the rehearsal I met John Scholl, David Mansfield, and Arthur Russell who suggested that I play the recording session. Next day I found myself at CBS with John Hammond. He was very patient with my out-of-sync vocals, advising me to shift my position in order to watch Allen's lips and match his enunciation. After the session Allen invited me downtown to his apartment. I declined, saying I had to get back to my parents' house in Jersey. Next day he phoned and said he'd run into John and Yoko and had dinner with them. I knew Lennon's songs inside out, all the changes, every phoneme. After the week's events, meeting John and Yoko would have been too much. But things were changing, life was getting interesting.

Allen and I played together occasionally through the fall, winter, and spring of 1977. I'd spend occasional weekends with him in New York and we'd take long, late night walks and talk about everything under the sun. We made a deal early on that we'd tell each other all our secrets. What did we talk about? It's a secret. Allen asked if I would be interested in apartment-sitting and collecting his mail during July. It turned out there was more to house-sitting than collecting the mail. For one thing, there were the bank accounts, which I managed to royally screw up, for another, there was the Committee on Poetry which was then collecting and distributing contributions for various writers in need. That I didn't screw up. There were files on pet issues like CIA dope, Leary's legal woes, FBI cointelpro, police state misinformation, and there was the vast correspondence. There were Rolodexes that required periodic updating and junk mail to sort through for good lines for poems. There was archive material to be boxed up and shipped off to be expertly misappropriated. It was overwhelming. Somewhere in there it was decided that I wouldn't be going back to college.

Then in the spring of 1978 Allen, Peter, and I went to Europe for twelve weeks. We were a great team. Allen handled the star chores, I handled the phone calls, and Peter handled logistics. We traveled light: three duffel bags, a small harmonium, two guitars, and a banjo. Each venue would give us a fee and a rail ticket to the next town. If we didn't like a place or were restless, after the show we'd get a train to the next venue. Mornings we'd go shopping for lunch supplies. We'd split up and search the delicatessens and town markets for the foulest cheeses we could find and then unveil them at lunch in our train compartment.

Peter: "OK what you got, Stevie?" I unwrap my cheese. The aroma of old sneakers and swamp gas drifts aloft. "Not bad, not bad, but that ain't nothing compared to this!" He shoves a wad of multicolored glop under our noses to a collective "woah!" Allen's next, he unwraps his contestant "Jesus! That's disgusting! Hahaha!!!" Then we'd eat it with heavy-grained bread and apples.

We toured once or twice a year for a few years. Allen's capacity for work was staggering. I used to plead with him: "People will line up day and night to talk to you if you let them. You have to get more sleep." Sometimes I'd get really furious because he'd say "Call Vienna today and tell them we're arriving on Monday at noon." And I'd say, "I will." And he'd hound me until I got up from breakfast and made the call. Then the guy in Vienna would say, "You're the third person that's called about this, what's the problem?" Allen would gum up the works with redundant information, and then when something went wrong he'd hop up and down, "I told you they'd get it all wrong! I knew it!" Once in London on a particularly grueling tour there was to be a day off. "What you going to do on our day off?" "I don't know." I did know, I knew there wouldn't be a day off. When the supposed day off arrived I stayed in bed later than usual. I could feel him getting anxious in the next room. Finally, about 10 o'clock he burst in, "We have shopping to do and calls to make, so GET UP!" He was terrified of down time. He'd spend a morning off furiously making calls to guarantee the afternoon would be overbooked.

Allen was endlessly patient with me. We used to joke that I was his teacher, but really he was mine. There can be great benefits from friendships between older and younger people. If every young person could have such a friend as I had, the world would be a much better place.

In the mid-80s, the big marathon tours were eliminated. Allen was going into his 60s, and it was time to slow down. I went back to college and finished my degree. I toured with other bands. Later I went to graduate school. We spent summers at Naropa in Boulder, Colorado and took occasional short trips to play colleges and art centers. The last round of such gigs took place in the spring of '96. Allen's energy was flagging some. He'd calmed down a lot over the twenty years I'd known him. He got kinder, wiser, and more generous all the time. On one of our last trips he told me, "I'm 70 now, and I'm finally having fun. I just hope I'm around a bit longer to enjoy it."

Allen called on December 2, '96 to check in. I said "I'll have to call you back. We're in labor." "Ho ho!" he said. We named the boy after our fathers and Allen. In February of this year we took the baby with us to New York. Allen was in bed in Massachusetts recovering from a bad reaction to a new medication. He flew home to see us. On the evening of his arrival I cooked a big pot of chicken soup. Allen had taught me to make chicken soup twenty years before. Now I was giving him a really good low-salt meal. He was delighted. Next morning George Condo came over and played Dowland songs on his lute and made charcoal drawings of Allen sitting up in his bed. Allen had a picture of our son in his bedroom. Now they met and spent some time playing together on the big captain's bed where we'd talked all night occasionally for two decades. After a few hours with him, we flew back to Colorado.

On Easter Saturday, March 29, I woke up feeling some huge change had taken place and thought, inexplicably, "maybe he's gone." He had called a few days before to say he had decided to stop traveling to Boston to see the cardiologist, that he would develop a team of doctors close to home. There had been problems with overdosing on blood pressure medicine and the diabetes was making the heart medicine doses hard to stabilize. The New York doctors took him off all medication and had him in the hospital to watch what would happen. He said, "I haven't felt this good in years."

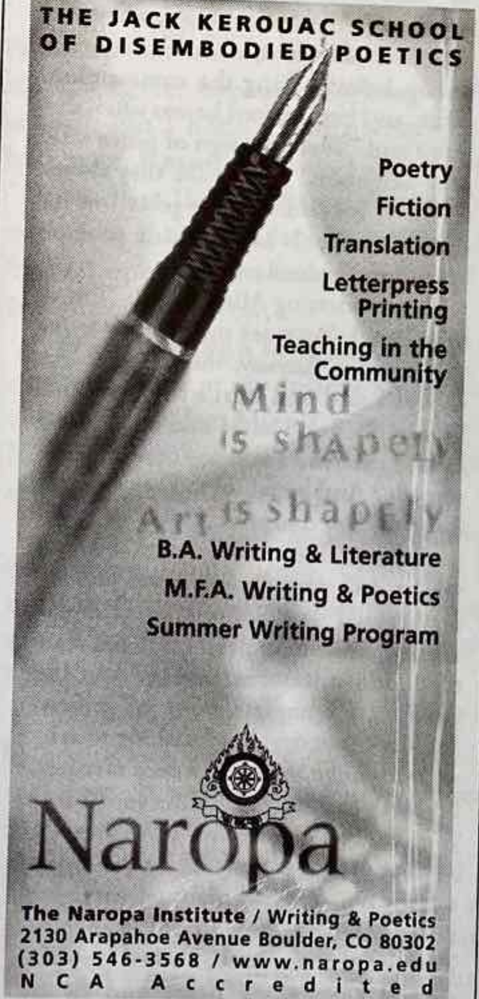
That afternoon Judy and the baby and I went to the Mother Cabrini shrine in Golden, about twenty miles from our house in Boulder. We lit candles and I sat in the chapel thinking about Allen. I always think of him in churches because we visited so many on our tours. I thought about our visit to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, Allen's first mass, where he bowed, Buddhist style, to the startled bishop before taking the communion wafer, and how excited he was when the priest said "Share the sign of peace with your neighbor." "Wow. Do they always do this?" he said, "this is great!" as he vigorously shook hands with a pack of bewildered French nuns.

Next morning Allen called: "I'm at Beth Israel. I can see my window from this window. Anyway, the doctor came in and I said well what's the news and he said not good and I said cancer and he said yes. And I said any operation or remedy? And he said no. They gave me four to five months. But I've been weakening, I can tell, and I think maybe only one or two. I was amazed how calm I was. Some kind of equanimity; must have been all those years of Buddhist lectures, sitting. And I've finished a complete book of poems. Just the other day, last finishing touches, a big huge book. So a nice farewell. So that's the score. I'll miss you. I love you. I always have. Carry on! Cheers!"

I was to go to Italy with the Fugs in a few days, and had planned on flying out direct and then stopping in New York on the way back. I asked him if I should change my ticket and fly in ahead of the tour and he said no, there's time, he'd see me after the trip, maybe we could do some recording. Half of the time we talked about what we'd do when we saw each other, and the other half we talked as if this would be our last conversation. I asked if he had any new songs and he sang: "Gone gone gone. All gone away. Gone gone gone. Aint no more to say."

That afternoon I was at a hundred-year-old synagogue in Denver for a concert. While waiting for the show to start, I scanned some book shelves at the back of the auditorium and took down an old dusty volume of Francis Bacon's essays, opened it at random, and read: "There is nothing under heaven, saving a true friend, unto which my heart doth lean. And this dear freedom hath begotten me this peace, that I mourn not for that end which must be, nor spend one wish to have one minute added to the uncertain date of my years."

Three days later I left for Milan. Next evening, after an all day rehearsal, Judy called me at the hotel with the news that Allen had had a stroke and was not expected to regain consciousness. Allen told me once that he'd complained to his Tibetan meditation teacher that there was no time to meditate regularly and the teacher had said that was OK, "just remember the sky." The sky became a regular motif in his poetry. He sang about being "under the empty sky," and in "Plutonian Ode" he talked about going out into the "empty, deep, and spacious . . . wakened space."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The sky over Milan is actually empty, it just goes forever. I feel like I'm with Allen, because for years to tour was to be with him, and because the top is off my head and I'm full of the sky which is him going out and I'm electrified.

Next morning, back at the studio, Coby, our drummer, teaches the Fugs a new song. We tack a tag line on the end and it becomes the center piece of a set we'll dedicate to Allen. It goes like this:

The moon won't shine. There is no sun
I light my way with the fire from a gun
Oh yeah. Oh no.
A river of blood just makes red mud
And those who suffer suffer as it flows
And it flows endlessly.

Poets of the earth come light the lamp
Illuminate the hidden path
Show us the way. Take a chance. Say the prayer
Allen Ginsberg goes. Allen Ginsberg goes
Allen Ginsberg goes.

The set starts out with me singing Allen's lyrics for "Amazing Grace".

I dreamed I dwelt in a homeless place
Where I was lost alone.
Folk looked right through me into space
And passed with eyes of stone.

I sing it in the studio and hear it as the complaint of a ghost and choke up. We start again. The set will include readings of Allen's poems in Italian and a lot of gospel-style harmonizing. It will go beautifully in concert. We decide to knock off early.

At the hotel reception desk we ask for our keys and Ed and I get notes. Mine says "Gilsberg." Ed's says "Ginsberg dead." We go to our rooms and I call Allen's house and speak to his archivist, Bill Morgan, and then to Bob, who fills me in on the details. I think of Allen saying "When my father died, Chögyam Trungpa Rimpoche said, 'let him go and continue your celebration.'"

I call Ed's room and he and Miriam come over to my room and Coby comes down and we sit and talk about Allen and I realize we're sitting Shiva, and I hear Allen saying, "I'm a Buddhist Jew." I say I'm glad Gelek Rimpoche was there to handle everything, and that I feel proud of Allen, that he did a good job of it. Ed says Allen was always fearless. He says one time in the sixties they were at Ed's bookstore and a bunch of local kids were throwing rocks at the place and being generally aggressive and Allen went out to talk to them and one kid had a hunting arrow with a big razor point poised to stab him and Allen got down on his knees in front of the kid and the kid hesitated and then backed off. Ed says, "That's guts, man. I would have gotten out of there."

By the time everyone's talked out, they're hungry but I'm jet lagged and too tired to go out. Coby says they'll bring me something back. I watch Netanyahu fuck up the Israeli-Palestinian situation on the CNN for a while and fall asleep. Dream of AG. How will we recognize one another? Pure delight in friendship, flash of the purple heart of the pansy in the hedgerow, the chickadee's descending minor third.

Wake up in the van doing 130 kph through spring green white cliff Tuscany, the most delicately exquisite landscape on earth. The Italian newspapers are running big stories on Allen. **The Corriere della Serra** has an excellent, detailed piece by Fernanda Pivano. **Il Manifesto**, the communist paper, has a full front-page photo of Allen. Another paper inexplicably decribes him as "the poet of the family." One of the papers runs a beautiful Ferlinghetti poem.

Our first show in Florence is an appearance at a new bookstore, City Lights Italia. The place is so mobbed when we arrive that the van has to part the crowd and the guys have to plunge through the masses to get into the shop. I've been avoiding these scenes for years, and I'm hungry, so I dodge down the block for a sandwich. After a while the crowd thins out and I go in, unpack my guitar, and Coby and I do an unrehearsed, boisterous "Carpe Diem." Sing, cuckoo, sing. Death is a-coming in. Sing, cuckoo, sing. Death is a-coming in. You can't out-think the angel of death. Sing, cuckoo, sing. You can't out-drink the angel of death. Sing, cuckoo, sing. Death is a-coming in.

Fernanda is there. Aside from a brief hello in Milan, I haven't seen her since Allen and I toured with her in the late 70s. She hugs me and says, "Allen will protect you." Allen will hover about looking after me? I guess it's true one way or another.

Next morning I have a quick whip around the Uffizi Gallery. Leonardo's Annunciation is astounding, and Michelangelo's Holy Family is a pure shot of Love. I remember countless gallery visits with AG. He would look at a painting for a long time, narrating all the minute details. Most of the time in the early years I hadn't the patience for it. So there's a tiny little man shitting in the corner of an Avercamp landscape? Great. Next.

Two days later we're doing Rome in a day because a day is all we've got. We get a bus to the Vatican and head toward the Sistine Chapel. On the way we stop in to the Vatican Post Office for postcards of the Pope making weird secret hand gestures at us. Michelangelo's ceiling is a magnificent cartoon of the original protection racket which is the state. Authority reclines in the company of naked babes while man leans on a skinned elbow, uncomfortable and lonesome on a great lump of limestone. The woman snake tips Eve to what's up and boom, angry old Nobodaddy explodes across the ceiling, catches mamma with her pants down, and cancels her food stamps.

Near the hotel an energetic old woman flits like a sandpiper along the Via Principe Amadeo, darting into shops singing "Regini per la bambini!" (Coins for the babies?) to an excellent and ancient tune. Back in Milan we spend one last night in the Hotel Baviera. Allen is on the CNN playing a gig somewhere with Stefan Said.

In the morning we load out for the ride to the airport. We say goodbye to Tuli; he's going on to England to do research for his musical comedy, "Marx in London." I wonder if it will ever open on Broadway. I wonder if the Fugs will ever tour again. Ed says we have invitations to go to Japan, so maybe we'll hit it one more time. Meanwhile there's work to do. Ed says we have to go home now and figure out what to do in America without Allen Ginsberg.

THE
WORLD
53

Meena Alexander, Sherman Alexie
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Jeffery Conway, Jordan Davis
Connie Deanovich, Joe Elliot
Elaine Equi, Foamola, Josephine Foo
Merry Fortune, Amy Gerstler
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David Henderson
Robert Hershon, Mitch Highfill
Patricia Spears Jones, Bill Luoma
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WRITING WORKSHOPS AT THE POETRY PROJECT

Poetry Workshop (Tuesday evenings 7-9 PM; 10 sessions from October 21–December 23)

In this workshop, participants will do assignments, read poets such as Henri Michaux, Frank O'Hara, Francis Ponge and Kenneth Koch, and will learn how to rigorously edit and review their work. As Rick Pernod from **Exoterica** says, "Frank Lima was an outstanding teacher and provided insight, encouragement and a deep knowledge of his craft to our workshop participants."

Frank Lima is a poet and teacher of the culinary arts. A student of Frank O'Hara and Kenneth Koch, his new book, **Inventory: New and Selected Poems**, the first to be published in over 20 years, is being published by Hard Press this fall. He also teaches at the New York Restaurant School.

Poetry Workshop (Friday evenings, 7-9 PM; 10 sessions from October 24-December 19)

The focus of the workshop will be to build on what we know and do as poets in an attempt to create something we've never done before, or has ever been done before. Texts which foreground the intersection of political responses (what we feel when we read the newspaper) with emotional stress (what we thing about when we look out the window) will be studied as models.

Lewis Warsh's most recent books are **Avenue of Escape** (1995), a book of stories **Money Under the Table** (1997), a book-length poem **Private Agenda** (1996), and a memoir **Bustin's Island '68** (1996). He edited **The World** from 1992-94 and is presently publisher and editor of United Artists Books.

Writing with Local and Visiting Languages (Saturday afternoons, noon-2 pm; 10 sessions from October 25–December 20)

The workshop will explore writing as it pertains to America as a geographical, psychological and metaphysical landscape. Writing under such a wide, yet circumscribed umbrella, each member will create and navigate new writing maps. The workshop will examine material in the context of an "American" definition–idioms, history, states of consciousness, crime, politics and beauty. The course will include in-class writing exercises and collage-making as well as local history investigation. Poets and prose writers seeking to develop new forms are welcome!

Brenda Coultas is a poet and prose writer whose work has appeared in numerous journals including **The World, Bombay Gin, The Indiana Review** and **Bust** magazine. Her first collection of stories, **Early Films**, was published by Rodent Press in 1996.

poetry project calendar

events

OCTOBER 3

David Trinidad & Wayne Koestenbaum

David Trinidad is the author of eight books and chapbooks, most recently *Answer Song*, published by High Risk Books. His poems have appeared in magazines such as *Harper's*, *The Paris Review* and *New American Writing*, and in over a dozen anthologies, including *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology*, *Up Late: American Poetry Since 1970*, and *The Best American Poetry 1991*. In 1996, he edited *Powerless*, the selected poems of Tim Dlugos and he currently teaches poetry at Rutgers University and the New School. Wayne Koestenbaum has published two books of poetry, *Ode to Anna Moffo and Other Poems*, one of VLS's Favorite 25 Books of 1990, and *Rhapsodies of a Repeat Offender*; and two books of cultural criticism, *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire*, nominated for a National Book Critics Circle Award, and *Jackie Under My Skin: Interpreting an Icon*. He wrote the libretto for the opera *Jackie O* which had its world premiere at Houston Grand Opera in 1997.

6

Open Reading, sign-up at 7:30 pm [8 pm]

8

Bernadette Mayer & Barbara Guest

Bernadette Mayer's most recent collection, *The Desire of Mothers to Please Others in Letters* was published by Hard Press in 1993. She has several books forthcoming next year, including *Studying Hunger Journals* (Hard Press). *Another Smashed Pinecone* (United Artists), *Two Haloed*

Performance Art. His work will appear in the forthcoming anthology *New American Poets* (Talisman House Press). Edwin has just completed a new chapbook *SandHommeNomadNo*, and during November will concoct a weekly Friday experiment at The Knitting Factory called VaVa Vum. Rod Smith is the author of *The Boy Poems* (Buck Downs Books, 1994) and *In Memory of My Theories* (O Books, 1996). A limited edition, *Protective Immediacy*, is forthcoming from Potes & Poets. *Object* 5 featured his "A Grammar Manikan" and *Abacus* 104 "The Lack (love poems, targets, flags. . .)." He lives in Washington, DC where he edits *Aerial* magazine and publishes Edge Books.

22

Jena Osman & Fiona Templeton

Fiona Templeton was born and grew up in Scotland, co-founded The Theatre of Mistakes in London in the 70s, and has lived in New York for 15 years. He recent books include *Cells of Release* (Roof), a permanent installation in collaboration with Amnesty International, *Hi Cowboy*, prose poems (Mainstream, London), *Delirium of Interpretations*, an autobiographical play (Sun & Moon), and *oops the join* (Rempress, Cambridge UK). She has had fellowships from the NEA in both Literature (poetry) and Visual Arts (new genres). She is currently writing a project for multiple directors. Jena Osman edits *Chain* magazine with Juliana Spahr. Her work has recently appeared in *Conjunctions* and on the internet at the Electronic Poetry Center. Her most recent chapbook is *Jury* from Meow Press. She teaches creative writing and literature at Ursinus College.

poet, novelist, playwright, translator, and founding member of the French OULIPO movement. He is the author of several volumes of poetry and prose including *Something Black*, and *The Great Fire of London*.

12

Peter Gizzi & Lorenzo Thomas

Peter Gizzi's latest collection, *Artificial Heart*, is just out from Burning Deck. His other publications include: *Periplum*, *Hours of the Book*, and *Music for Films*. In 1994 he received the Lavan Younger Poets Award from the Academy of American Poets. He currently lives in Santa Cruz, California. Lorenzo Thomas's poetry and critical writing has appeared in many journals including *African American Review*, *Arrowsmith*, *Partisan Review*, and *Ploughshares*. His books include *Chances Are Few*, and *The Bathers*. He currently teaches at the University of Houston.

14

Situations Press Reading

A reading celebrating the publication of four new chapbooks by the Soho-based publisher Situations Press: *Turn* by Mitch Highfill, who is also the author of *Take No Precautions* (Next Century) and *Liquid Affairs* (United Artists); *Match Book* by Douglas Rothschild, co-curator of the Zinc Bar Reading Series; *Light as a Fetter* by Chris Stroffolino, author of *Cusp* (Aerial) and *Oops!* (Pavement); and *Triangle* by Yuki Hartman, with drawings by Basil King. Hartman is the author of several books including *New and Selected* and *The Coloring Book* (Hanging Loose).

19

Charlotte Carter & Lydia Davis

Charlotte Carter is the author of *Sheltered Life* (Angel Hair, 1975) and *Personal Effects* (United [illegible] *Island Red*, was published by Serpent's Tail this year. She has led workshops at the Poetry

Desire of Mothers to Please Others in Letters was published by Hard Press in 1993. She has several books forthcoming next year, including *Studying Hunger Journals* (Hard Press), *Another Smashed Pinecone* (United Artists), *Two Haloed Mourners* (Granary Press), and a yet untitled collection from New Directions. Barbara Guest's most recent collection, *Quill: Solitary Apparition* (Post-Apollo Press, 1996) won the America Award. Her *Selected Poems* (Sun and Moon) were published in 1995 and she has a forthcoming volume from Sun and Moon called *The Confetti Trees: Motion Picture Stories*.

10

Arthur Nersesian & Dan Barden

Arthur Nersesian is the author of the novel *Manhattan Loverboy* and was managing editor of *the Portable Lower East Side*. He has been teaching English at Eugenio Maria de Hostos Community College in the South Bronx since 1990. Dan Barden has written for *Details* and *GQ* magazines, and received an MFA from Columbia University.

13

Schedule information for Monday night events was unavailable at press time. A post card will be mailed with a complete listing of these events by the end of September.

15

Edwin Torres & Rod Smith

Edwin Torres has worked at The Poetry Project as a workshop giver and Monday Night hoster. He tours with the poetry collective Real Live Poetry and was a recipient of a year's fellowship from The Foundation For Contemporary internet at the Electronic Poetry Center. Her most recent chapbook is *Jury* from Meow Press. She teaches creative writing and literature at Ursinus College.

29

Prageeta Sharma & Stephen Rodefer

Prageeta Sharma is the publisher of Vimal Press. Her own work has recently been published in *Agni*, and she has work forthcoming in *No Trees*. She was the recipient of the Academy of American Poets Prize in 1995. She currently lives in Brooklyn where she is the curator of the Fall Cafe reading series. Poet and translator Stephen Rodefer is the author of several books including *The Bell Clerk's Tears Keep Flowing*, *Four Lectures*, *Emergency Measures*, and *Passing Duration*. He has been a major force in American poetry since the mid-1960s and his work has been anthologized internationally. He currently lives in Paris.

NOVEMBER 3

Open Reading, sign-up at 7:30 pm [8pm]

5

Rosmarie Waldrop & Jacques Roubaud

Rosmarie Waldrop's most recent books of poems are *Another Language: Selected Poems* (Talisman House, 1997) and *A Key Into the Language of America* (New Directions, 1994). Station Hill has published her novels, *The Hanky of Pippin's Daughter* and *A Form/of Taking/It All*. Recent translations include Edmond Jabès' *The Little Book of Unsuspected Subversion* (Stanford UP, 1996) and *Mountains in Berlin: Selected Poems of Elke Erb* (Burning Deck, 1995). Jacques Roubaud lives in Paris where he is a mathematician,

Charlotte Carter is the author of *Sheltered Life* (Angel Hair, 1975) and *Personal Effects* (United Artists, 1991). Her most recent novel, *Rhode Island Red*, was published by Serpent's Tail this year. She has led workshops at the Poetry Project and currently lives in New York City. Lydia Davis is the author of *The End of the Story*, *Break it Down*, and *Almost No Memory*. She has also translated the work of Maurice Blanchot and Michel Leiris. She has been a recipient of the Whiting Writers Award and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Ingram Merrill Foundation.

21

John Bradford, Brendan Lorber & Shannon Ketch

John Bradford was co-editor of the art and literary journal *Monster Trucks* and author of *Rowdy Avocados* and *The Perfection of Wisdom Handwritten on a Day's Pay*. In collaboration with artist Rich O'Russa, he has published two books, *Ruffled Rhumba Pants*, colllaborative translations of Gabriel Garcia Lorca's poems, and *Halvah Kills Four Cows*, on Time Release Press. His work has also been published in *Beet* and *The Baffler*. Shannon Ketch co-edited *Monster Trucks*, has published several chapbooks with Evil Clown Press, and has been included in the PoemFone Anthology: *Verses That Hurt*. Responsible for many multimedia events in New York City, he is now living in Northhampton, MA. Brendan Lorber is the editor/publisher of *Lungfull!* magazine and has guest edited for *Booglit*. His poetry has been included in *Explosive*, *Brooklyn Review*, *Valentine* and *The Chicago Tribune*. He is a member of the East Village Militia and teaches at Brooklyn College where he is earning his MFA in Poetry.

April 4 Friday

by Rosebud Feliu-Pettet

evening–Peter Hale calls and asks me to come quickly, Allen is in a coma, dying. Pull on my sneakers and taxi down, trying to keep calm breathing, trying to arrive in state of peace. 15 minutes after Pete's call he opens the door to the loft and I go in to join those already gathered. I went and embraced big Peter–Orlovsky–and Eugene, Allen's brother. About 20 friends talking in low voices, looking lost, comforting each other.

After being diagnosed with inoperable liver cancer the previous Friday at Beth Israel Hospital, Allen had been told he had maybe 2-5 months to live. When I heard the news, for some reason I felt strongly that it would not be that long–I felt that he would go very soon. He had come back home Wednesday in good spirits, organizing things as ever, making plans for the coming days. But someone (I forget who; perhaps it was Bob) had said Allen personally felt that he had very little time left. A month or two, he thought. So Wednesday he was busy, writing and making phone calls to his friends all over the world, saying goodbye. Amiri Baraka said Allen called him and said "I'm dying, do you need any money?"

But Thursday he was much weaker, he could hobble from bed to chair only with difficulty. There was a phonecall from Italy, in the middle of it Allen begins to vomit, throws up right there on the phone! "Funny," he says, "never done that before." Said he was very tired and wanted to go to sleep. He fell asleep and later that night had a seizure and slipped into a coma. He was alone.

In the morning Bob Rosenthal discovered him unconscious and called the Hospice doctor who came and told him that Allen had most likely had a stroke and had hours to live. The task of notifiying family and friends began.

Everyone had feared that as word spread, there would be a huge throng appearing at the loft, but that wasn't the case. People came and went quietly during the afternoon. Bob, Pete Hale, Bill Morgan and Kaye Wright, the office staff, were busy constantly at the phones making and receiving calls. Shelley Rosenthal and Rani Singh helping with everything that needed doing. Eugene and several nieces and nephews of Allen's consoling each other. Larry Rivers down from his apartment upstairs, wandering around forlornly in his pink white and blue striped pajamas. George and Anna Condo and their little girl. Francesco and Alba Clemente, beloved friends of Allen's. Patti Smith sitting in tears with Oliver Ray and her young daughter. Bob and Shelly's sons Aliah and Isaac. Mark Israel and David Greenberg, two of Allen's young boyfriends. Philip Glass and June Leaf. Robert Frank. Simon Pettet. Andrew Wylie. Roy Lichtenstein. Steven Bornstein, who had flown up from Florida. A few others, I don't remember who all was there. I went to the back of the loft and Raymond Foye stood looking pale and so sad. I told him he must be very blessed, he had spent so much time giving support and love to the dying–Henry Geldzahler, Huncke, Harry Smith. "Yes, but this is the big one, the hardest," he said. Allen lay in a narrow hospital bed beside the windows overlooking 14th street. There were two almost invisible tubes coming out of his nose, attached to a portable small oxygen tank on the floor. His head was raised up on a couple of big striped pillows and he looked tiny and frail, thin arms with bruised veins from hospital tests sticking out from his Jewel Heart T-shirt. Head to the side, slight shadows under the eyes. I had walked through the loft, people whispering greetings, hugging, telling me all that had happened. But still not really prepared for the sight of him. The windows were open, curtains waving softly. His breathing was deep, slow, very labored, a snoring sound. "Hey, Allen, wake up!"

Joel Gaidemak, his cousin and doctor, was there constantly, and a young lady nurse sat in the corner reading, occasionally getting up to check on heart and pulse, or administer morphine for congestion. Gelek Rinpoche said he thought Allen might last the night. Joel didn't think so.

A few chairs were set up nearby, and there was the big white leather Salvation Army sofa of which he was so proud. People sat, or at intervals went to sit beside the bed and hold his hand or whisper to him and kiss him, his hand or cheek or head. An altar had been set up along one side of the loft and Gelek Rinpoche and the other monks sat chanting and praying, the sound so soothing constantly in the background, bells tinkling. A faint scent of flowers and incense hung in the air.

I had a little throw-away Woolworth's camera, and Gregory Corso asked me to take a picture of him with Allen. He knelt beside the cot and placed his arm over Allen "like that picture, or statue, of Adonais, right?"

There was a medical chart, a picture of the human skeleton, hanging over the bed. Bob said Allen had put it there, half as a joke, half as a reminder. And Allen's beautiful picture of Whitman (that had hung in the kitchen on 12th Street) gazing down from the wall at the other dear bearded poet in the bed below. As it got late, many went home to try and catch a little sleep. It was around 11. Bob and Pete were just playing it by ear, deciding that anyone who wanted to stay would find a place, on the floor if necessary. Peter Orlovsky was taking photos and I felt a little uncomfortable, the idea of taking pictures at this time, but I figured, hey, if it was you, Allen'd be the first one through the door camera in hand! Eventually, Eugene leaned over, held Allen's hand, whispered "Goodbye little Allen. Goodbye little Allen. I'll be back later. See you soon." He kissed him and left. And Gregory–Gregorio!–too, telling us to call him at once if there was any change.

Joel had said that there was no way to know how long it would be, minutes or hours, surely not days. I had felt from the minute I saw Allen there that it would be very soon. I sat at the foot of the bed where I had spent the last few hours, holding his feet, rubbing them gently from time to time. An occasional cigarette break–the little guest bedroom by the office area was set up as the smoker's lounge.

Bob and Pete and Bill were as strong and remarkable as ever, supporting everyone, keeping a sense of humor, and constantly dealing with the dozens of phonecalls, faxes, and the visitors as they came and went. They'd had a few days for the news to sink in, but they were dealing with—literally—hundreds of people over the phone or in person who had just found out and were in the first stages of stunned, disbelieving grief.

I had remained at the bedside and it was now after midnight. I could not believe he still hung on, the breathing so difficult, the lungs slowly filling with fluid. Labored breathing (gulps for air—like those gulps he'd made when he was singing—almost like he was reciting poetry in his sleep). Those who had been there all day were exhausted. It was down to a few now. Bob and Pete and Bill Morgan. Peter Orlovsky so bravely dealing with his pain, strong Beverly holding his hand. David and Mark. Patti and Oliver, there together all day trying to be brave and sometimes giving way to red-eyed tears. Simon Pettet sitting beside me for hours.

Allen's feet felt cooler than they had been earlier. I sat remembering the 33 years I'd known him, lived with him, my second father.

And still he breathed, but softer now.

Around 2 o'clock, everyone decided to try and get some rest. Bob and Joel lay down in Allen's big bed near the cot where he lay, everyone found a sofa or somewhere to stretch out.

Simon and I sat, just watching his face. Everyone was amazed at how beautiful he looked—all lines of stress and age smoothed—he looked patriarchal and strong. I had never seen him so handsome. The funny looking little boy had grown into this most wonderful looking man. (He would have encouraged photos if he had known how wonderful he looked!) But so tiny! He seemed as fragile as a baby in his little T-shirt.

The loft was very quiet. Most were resting, half-asleep. Suddenly Allen began to shake, a small convulsion wracked his body. I called out, and Joel and Bob sat up and hurried over. I called louder, and everyone else came running. It was about 2:15. Joel examined him, pulse, etc., and said that his vital signs were considerably slower; he had had another seizure. The breathing went on, weaker. His feet were cooler. Everyone sat or stood close to the little bed. The loft was dim and shadowy; only a single low light shining down on him. It lent a surreal, almost theatrical look to the corner of the loft. Peter Orlovsky bent over and kissed his head, saying, "Goodbye Darling."

And then suddenly a remarkable thing happened. A tremor went through him, and slowly, impossibly, he began to raise his head. He weakly rose until he was sitting almost upright, and his left arm lifted and extended. Then his eyes opened very slowly and very wide. The pupils were wildly dilated. I thought I saw a look of confusion or bewilderment. His head began to turn very slowly and his eyes seemed to glance around him, gazing on each of us in turn. His eyes were so deep, so dark, but Bob said that they were empty of sight. His mouth opened, and we all heard as he seemed to struggle to say

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something, but only a soft low sound, a weak "Aaah," came from him. Then his eyes began to close and he sank back onto the pillow. The eyes shut fully. He continued, then, to struggle through a few more gasping breaths, and his mouth fell open in an O. Joel said that these were the final moments, the O of the mouth the sign of approaching death. I still continued to stroke his feet and thin little legs, but the Tibetan Buddhist tradition is to not touch the body after death, so I kissed him one final time and then let go.

At 2:39, Joel checked for vital signs and announced that the heart, so much stronger than anyone knew, had stopped beating. A painless and gentle death. The thin blue sheet was pulled up to his chin, and Peter Hale brought over a tiny cup and spoon, and placed a few drops of a dark liquid between Allen's lips. It was part of the Buddhist ritual— the "last food." Bob put his hand over Allen's eyes and said the Sh'ma. We all sat quietly in the dim light, each with our own thoughts, saying goodbye.

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ALLEN GINSBERG: A MOMENT OF GRIEVING

Allen's face stares up at me from a dozen newspapers.
Never to give his stiff and upright form another hug!
No more vegetarian concoction dinners at Varsity Town Houses!
No more lucid, humorous analysis of puzzling political climate!
Not to be buddies again on some committee to spring a friend from prison or
raise bucks for yet another civil liberties trial!
No more late hours in punk dives reading poems together for lamas or
dharma centers, or expounding Buddhist theory 2 a.m. into green
room mikes for Pacifica radio!
No time to fuss that he doesn't take care of himself!
No more presentation copies with funny drawing of flowers, sun, and
Buddhas!
No chance to meet next generation of pretty boy poetry groupies, borrow
coffee on Boulder summer mornings!
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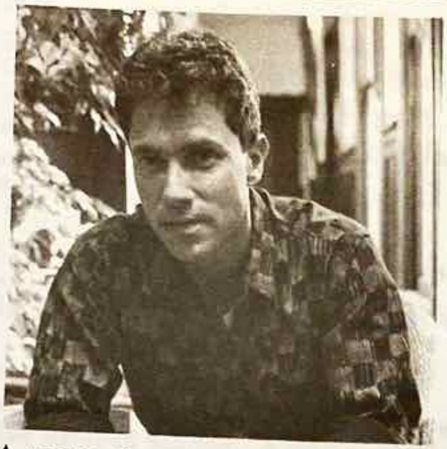

AARON SHURIN

Unbound: A Book of AIDS

Sun and Moon (6026 Wilshire Blvd, Los Angeles, Ca 90036), 1997, 89 pages, $19.95.

How does one respond to a plague? This is the task anyone is faced with when writing about the AIDS epidemic and it is a challenge Aaron Shurin takes on in **Unbound: A Book of AIDS**. Books about AIDS are supposed to be moving; the plague evokes profound sorrow and pushes us to the edges of understanding where so often our wish is to be soothed and to shut out the world which causes so much misery. **Unbound** is remarkable for its emotional engagement of the subject and its author's ability to remain lucid amongst the sweeping losses.

But Shurin attains a level of engagement with this massive subject that stretches beyond the immediately personal and speaks to the pervasive influence the disease has had on those in its wake, on those fortunate enough to have escaped its path, on anyone listening and watching and living in these times. In his struggle for a means of address, Shurin writes that, at first, he saw two possible responses: one of loss, the other of rage. The first, he writes, seemed to him "woefully personal" and the latter already embodied by Act Up, Queer Nation and other activist organizations; neither was satisfactory to him.

"The range of information AIDS presents keeps one at full attention," says Shurin, indicating the scope of the thing that began in the early 80s to "claim unavoidably" his consciousness. In "Towards an Open Universe," Robert Duncan, friend and mentor to Shurin writes, "We do not make things meaningful but in our making we work towards an awareness of meaning...Becoming conscious, becoming aware of the order of what is happening is the full responsibility of the poet." The "order" of AIDS is both multiple and awesomely singular in its end, microscopic and terrifyingly huge in scope, figurative and disfiguring. It is simultaneously erasing and creating history. And yet Shurin does manage to *fully* respond to this subject and find a useful way to articulate his reaction to AIDS, listening and responding to what is presented, working towards an apprehension of what this plague means to him and to us. Through his engagement with the subject and through the means of his address, he comes to realize meaning.

Shurin didn't set out to write a book about AIDS; "There was no project," he claims in the preface. Instead AIDS took its toll on those around him and he was compelled to respond in a manner "weighted toward witness."

"How to write AIDS named me," he says. And the range of prepositions used here in writing about how to write AIDS is indicative of the range of questions encompassed by the book, the range of the "brutal presence" of the disease. It is a book *about* AIDS, a book written *into* the "dark oracle" of the mouth of a young friend with Karposi's sarcoma, a book by HIV—"It's writing me."— but primarily it is a book *of* AIDS as the title claims. What emerges is a hybrid of poetry, personal narrative, and poetics that is as variable as the channels in our lives the Human Immunodeficiency Virus creates.

The narrative of **Unbound** tells the stories of many of Shurin's friends who struggled with the disease and died of it. He renders them with intimacy and clarity and I found myself startled by the courage of these men. Jackson, "a renaissance man [who] could do *everything* (except maybe relax)" who had an "unhealed open 'mouth' on his neck from a gland that hadn't been quite excised" had this wound rupture twice in one morning and "hemorrhaged so that he could see he would be swept away in its profusion of blood." So "he asked C, his lover and primary caregiver, to carry him into the garden so he could 'bleed into the earth.'" In this, Shurin sees creation: "Jackson was able to arch over his death this worshipful poetic figure, to guide as communion a passing that others would read as being taken away...Who knew that a man could have such precise integrity in that particular moment, could engage his death actively—with cognizance and will—as a life image, could make of his final moments not a destruction but a creative act?"

A young man, John Davis, haunts Shurin's consciousness and writing throughout the book. John "documented his bodily demise in a series of dispassionately precise photos," one of which appears on the cover of **Unbound**. Shurin describes John's ability to "distance *and* devour" and includes two of his own reviews for exhibition because, I believe, they capture his own concerns about addressing AIDS through art in a culture that shuns the body. In such discussions of poetics and/or art theory, Shurin reveals his own ability to maintain a detached critical eye while not becoming emotionally numb; he too distances and devours. And he "keep[s] the body forward" so that we still see it as it is—as Davis did in chronicling the disease's destruction of his body—refusing to allow the virus to reestablish shame and concealment in his work or in the community. "I do of course propose safe sex—*medically* safe but not politically safe, not socially or even psychically safe." This "chaotic force of eros," he says, "is a depth charge for change."

Leland, another figure and friend Shurin traces, confronts himself with remarkable bravery. "Leland was well into ten years of ardent Tibetan Buddhist studies when his first KS lesion appeared" and "he'd left a live-in ashram in an attempt to localize, individualize the mind-stilling Buddhism he craved." He wanted to merge his life of "theatricality, drama and drama queens" with his religion, a difficult and troublesome path, but one that, after an amusing frustration involving meditation and the theme from "Bonanza," he began to succeed at by "gain[ing] the courage to transform Buddhism to his own specifics." And when "he was having trouble with one of his former ashram mates, who felt him straying from the Way, and was raising alarms, making him feel like a Bad Boy," he began to feel that Tibetan Buddhism was "exo-cultural" and less relevant. So he began courageously to replace the devas with his own icons "long ago installed," Liz Taylor and Barbra Streisand. Leland broke free from doctrinaire forms and found his religion in the things that had meant the most to him his whole life. And throughout **Unbound** are the footprints of Shurin's gods: Cocteau, Whitman, Proust, Chopin, possibly Baudelaire. He has created this response to AIDS from the things that matter in his life. The writing is informed by (and sometimes constructed from) the creative work of these deities so that it cracks doctrinaire forms and breaks free from genres into a wrought language of both historical context and the immediacy of this particular history.

Sometimes this language is so heavily textured it seems to threaten the reader's sense of being in control, of being afloat on the work, and evokes the primal fear of drowning in it, of being eaten by it: "the terror, that coming-to-get-you shark with its boom-ba boom-ba boom-ba beat." This shark motif occurs in a couple of places in the book, signifying an ever-present threat, an open-ended terror that remains, circling and waiting as AIDS does, regardless of how well-adjusted or safe one may be. And some of the titles in the book bring the reader below this sea as well—"Notes from Under," "Further Under." But the works that pull the reader beneath the surface do it not through title or motifs but through a splintered narrative that appears, disappears, seduces and finally is out of the reader's grasp. In "The Depositories" and "Strips and Streamers," Shurin uses Whitman's language to create sharp and gashing sentences amidst the carnage of a battlefield: "Green oozing out from the grass—large spaces swept over—burning the dead beards, odor of the rejected arm and leg. In history the paper remain and still remain soaking up the glaze."

The sentence in these more fragmented works is an important element of composition. Sometimes the sentences and sentence fragments become short in length, creating a dream-like logic, pulling the reader in step by step as if they were a recitation from memory or the incantations of a secret spirituality. "I like to stand and look a long while. Individuals in human places verify the forms. The dim leaden members with heads leaning and voices speaking. In the arms and in the legs from my observation." Other times the sentences lengthen and engulf: "Right through the bladder and coming back out—Washington waters with all its features—entering us like a wedge—through the helpless foliage, flashes of fire, crashing men, groans in an open space with the fresh smell of blood blown off the face or head—amid the wood, masses; mortal purpose up there, a few stars." Shurin tells the reader outright in "Inscribing AIDS" that this is Whitman's language and that he found "kinship in scenarios of war." For me, these works also evoke Whitman-through-Ginsberg because they not only memorialize, as the wounded and dying are cared for, but incite, though these "best minds" of Shurin's generation are lost to AIDS and AIDS alone, "a unified swath of lifetime lost."

"Human Immune" is the vortex of **Unbound** in more ways than one. It is placed roughly in the middle of the book and, formally, each paragraph lengthens incrementally so that they spin out longer and longer; the funnel widens and spreads as a virus does. I read this work as the spiritual center of the book; everything before it is a prelude and everything after is contextualized by it. It alters the reader's experience when proceeding through the book because it offers a glimpse of an erotic inferno—of sex and death's closeness—raging behind the smoother narrative passages which follow.

> He knelt down next to me—fallen giant, empty stump. Feeling the blood pulling around my thighs, "I think it's screaming," I said. He stood barefoot, one warm leg, nest at the belt pink wriggling sack, I wanted to run into the sun now, bristling muscular bulging animal sedated by his eyes. My body shook against him on a hot summer day, gushing to life, blood-filled, blood-dizzy. He rolled over onto his side, watching the men. A ruin. A patient. Overgrown so that the flat air had no answer. We floated in which the memory moving our bellies going dark have all taken flight—a cure may be possible—tell me what words mean—pleasure for a coffin: turn and enter your home.

And in "Human Immune" is the reoccurring motif *Hell is round*, the double meanings of which ("hell all around" and "hell as a widening, swallowing circle") bring the reader amidst the language and invoke Dante. This "dimensionalizes AIDS from the per-

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sonal to the historical: the curve one rounds is also around one, surrounding, a world," Shurin explains. Here, the reader gets the feeling that the work is really being written by HIV, that it is spreading outward, mutating and threatening. The reader can never be quite sure who this "I" is that speaks, then disappears, who this "you" is that is addressed, who this "he" is that is described, all three persons speak, act, are spoken to, receive.

Unbound is a work of dedication. It is an effort by its author to address a moment in history of great calamity and personal sorrow with full awareness. But there is redemption in this book as well in Shurin's struggle toward articulation and consciousness. "To characterize this visceral struggle as esthetic is to recognize an ecology of paradigms, a streaming mutuality of influences artistic and social, and to pay attention—poetics—as if one's life depended on it." One's life does depend on it and one does need full dedication: "The poet meeting his fate in poetry, the lover in loving: propriety serves neither, both must go too far." Shurin goes beyond the threshold and carries the reader with him.

BRIAN STRANG

JACQUELINE RISSET
The Translation Begins

Burning Deck (71 Elmgrove Avenue, Providence RI 02906)
Translated from the French by Jennifer Moxley, 1996, 96 pages, $10.00.

In **The Translation Begins**, Jacqueline Risset writes a synaptic space between languages—while a text is necessarily bound to the singularity of "a language," it's the divergent possibilities of the plural that constitutes the ground for Risset's shape-shifting figures. An accomplished translator herself, including a recent version of **The Inferno** into French, Risset explodes the concept of translation from that of word/object substitution (one language to another, transparently):

> Order still exists—but no longer the objects
>
> Take the objects, put them back at the core

relocating the act of translation in an anti-system in which the very notion of signification is endlessly, and critically, at stake:

> And what do they do? They behold what has become of them
>
> Their occupation is waiting for what will become of them
>
> Who shall be come? It's only after

As languages break down in translation, their self-referentiality seemingly denying any sense of larger, cognitive coherence, Risset suggests that there is in fact a common proposition, though it is not necessarily the same as our intention-driven desire to manufacture meaning:

> there is a uniformity that comes from the world—every letter inhabits the very same space, with or without descenders

In this manner of continuous, reflective commentary, much of Risset's work reads like an introduction to a preface to a foreword to a note (etc.) in which "the entire question is concentrated in crossing the preliminary threshold." Of course, there is nothing as concrete as a "threshold" to cross, or perhaps more accurately, what we find on the other side of this metaphorical threshold is simply another, and so on: door-after-door, word-after-word, world-after-world.

As readers, we're consistently both *here* and *there* at once; in as much as her project is at least partly driven by writing as reading-the-reader-reading, Risset offers few grounding points in the sense of structural or narrative devices. Her fast shifts of attention and context, inventive page formats, and oblique reference to or translation from other texts makes this work a challenging experience. A few end-notes help locate various references in the text; these serve to deepen an appreciation of the complexity of the work, without attempting to decode it.

Jennifer Moxley's translation is delicate, provocative, and, given the density of the original project, remarkably lucid. Indeed, within the context of translation of this book which interrogates the very idea of translation, Moxley's text constitutes a striking and adventurous work in its own right.

CRAIG WATSON

In The Name

CHRIS TYSH
Past Tents Press (3168 Trowbridge, Hamtrack, MI 48212), 1994, 72 pages, $10.00.

In The Name is a collection of three performance/action pieces: "vice versa," "canal, a play" and "car men, a play in d." Cross-stitched (two of the "characters" of "vice versa," Set and Stage Grammar, presuppose and predetermine the Chief of Police and Mayor in "car men, a play in d" via—and this essay is about nothing but trivia—"Roy"—ma-yor reversed and decapitated—the Chief, and Father Ray—decapitated anagram of Mary, who appears in "vice versa"—in "canal, a play"). These actions shuttle back and forth, over and under, the name—metonym for the frame, constraint, definition, *and* that which, as the proper, is outside or at the border of an history. As the middle play, a literal canal connecting the conditions of theatre ("vice versa") and the "example" of theatrical acting out/up ("car men, a play in d") "canal, a play" invokes the Lacanian / Guattarian /Deleuzian revisions of Freudian psychoanalysis to enact and valorize possibility, play, within the canal, the vagina, the orginary frame of female desire even as these permutations of absence is necessarily acknowledged: "to begin with something is missing," a phrase that aptly exemplifies the ambiguity of desire under traditional psychoanalysis.

Attentuation at all levels: narrow, tight, constricting: the characters Carla and Mary, who appear just once to question the similarity between men and women in "vice versa," are prefigured in the characterizations of vice and versa (reductions to the vulva, site of worship and damnation on stage) and the disembodied (only "men" can be decapitated, "Ladies" merely being their "headless relatives") c and m who "dialogue" according to theatrical etiquette. Vice and versa enact the back-and-forth of exchange—language, money, women, etc.—that defines the theatrical as a microcosm of the capital/patriarchal panopticon. Their commutative relationship is analogous to that between Set and Stage Grammar—syntax is not only to language what prop arrangement is to language. Thus attenuation as another name for overdetermined, a trivium always, since the two of dialectics—here, Set/Stage Grammar and Vice/Versa—intersect just once at Carla/Mary—in the nanosecond lifespan of two/one name(s).

But these actions are not simply functioning under the law courts—men v. women. Both "vice versa" and "canal, a play in d," via Carla, Mary and Queenie explore the role that women play in their own denomination. Crudely put, Tysh reprises Patti Smith/Yoko Ono: woman as nigger. Thus "car men, a play in d," Tysh's homage to her residence, Detroit, a term which also enacts the canal, the channel, the narrow passageway (de+troit, "by," "of" and "from" the "strait"). The title names the city's most well-known industry and alludes to Bizet's well-known opera, thus collapsing and reversing gender and race since, for Tysh, the operative oppositions are political, not biological. In this respect, **In The Name** privileges feminism and Marxism only to the extent that they have also been channeled—laundered through Lacan and Derrida. Another trivium. Such pyrotechnics invariably invoke the theatrical: "a play in d" not only suggests transgression and containment within a staging/staged site (d, Detroit) but also the "key" of a musical composition ("Two sharps and a flat"). Another trivium. Musical/literary devices and forms (e.g., the rondo) dominate the three pieces: allusions, counterpoint, dissonance ("WHERE'S THE FUCKING SET?"), quotation (themselves a frame of "before/and after"), epistles, rants, literary analyses, etc. all in a plethora of dialects, lexicons, slang, patois, befitting the multilingual reality of the city, or human existence in general. The underlying violence which, a la **Day of the Locust**, explodes in the climax of the play, is never romanticized. Rather, true to the spirit of the play, Tysh sees in the riot of 1967 and subsequent outbreaks of violence a resistance to capital, a resistance both marginalizing and empowering. Detroit, as Jerry Herron pointed out in his small but important study, **Afterculture: Detroit and the Humiliation of History** (Wayne

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State University Press, 1993), was one of the first cities to be postmodernized–or as Tysh would have it, decapitaled. As such it, like its car men inhabitants, bohemians, gypsies, outside the law, d remains transfixed by its undressing, denuding–and open to the possible, what name it will attach–or be attached–to, as the fourth term, fourth letter, the delta opening up the dialectic to a "vast orange library of dreams."

TYRONE WILLIAMS

Homage to Allen G.

GEORGE SCHNEEMAN AND ANNE WALDMAN

Granary Books (568 Broadway, #403, New York, NY 10012), 1997, limited edition portfolio, $500/$250.

A planned collaboration turned tribute, **Homage to Allen G.** is George Schneeman's drawing/tracings of Ginsberg's photographs, with, in a sort of "text conversion," Anne Waldman's handwritten words intertwined with the images. It's a thought-provoking work in taking the incompleted project from the already completed photographs, and using the bare bones of the images as a basis for liquid and simple line drawings which distill down to the essence of the photograph–more often than not the person photographed. These drawings, in their melancholy lines, eyes and face reduced to opaque strokes of black, are actually the antithesis of the documentary, almost cold nature of photographs; Ginsberg's were leavened by his expressive handwritten poem-descriptions at the bottom. Waldman physically elevates the sense of Ginsberg's scrawls into the space of the drawings, limning the sides of tables, angles, legs with words or floating words in the "speech-space" of the figures. The book ends up being "ghostly" in the truest sense of the word: the two artists inspired by an incompleted project (incompleteness being one of the most inspiring and proto-creative states) consisting of photographic bones and transforming these bones into subjective "words" which themselves become drawings–responsive to the traced and transmuted images of the photographs, what the words "say" becomes ethereal. **Homage to Allen G.** takes the documentary evidence of a life, seen through the lens/eyes of the live-r, and turns it into a true haunting: the physical transformed into the mental and emotional traces of a remembered life.

MARCELLA DURAND

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photographs from Buchenwald began to appear in books which I would look at in the 8th Street Bookshop. I really couldn't afford these books, but I would see these concentration camp pictures and I'd already started studying Ezra Pound and I didn't realize what the deal was. So finally I realized why people were so upset with Ezra Pound—I understood by seeing these wasted bodies in boxcars that I was not told at all about in the Midwest. So I had this sense of what one country can do to another by looking at these horrible concentration camp pictures. So I began to evolve and to become a Social Democrat, and I point out in my book on 1968 that it took 1968 in all its moil and toil and boil to realize that that's really where I was. I believed in voting. Like Sweden in 1968 voted to have 25 percent of their economy controlled in the interests of the people, by the state, and I realized that I believed in that, and the nationalization of certain key industries, while allowing for some entrepreneurial activity, what they called a mixed economy. And I realized that's what I believed in when I was running through the tear gas of Chicago with Allen Ginsberg.

Jarnot: How did the Fugs fit into all of that?

Sanders: We really didn't. The Fugs were formed in 1964 out of my bookstore. And we didn't grow out of the political culture of the late 60s so much as out of the Civil Rights and Happening movements. And my bookstore was just a block away from where Claes Oldenburg had his storefront and those happenings and stuff. I had this little kosher meat market that I rented and left the "strictly kosher" sign up. It's gone now, it's a community garden. And Tuli Kupferberg lived above an egg store next door and we got to talking and one thing led to another and we decided to form a poetry group and he thought of the title the Fugs. The Peace Eye for a while was a very famous hang out place, like there'd be Nico or Donovan. People would, visiting poets would come by, Jerry Rothenberg, whoever was in town. And Allen lived just down the street at 408 East 10th . It was half a block away. And there were all these bars on Avenue B. Mazur's, Stanley's, and then there was the Charles Theatre which had all the avant-garde films—Jonas Mekas, Ron Rice, the Taylor Mead movies. So there was a four block area of culture, and it was a hangout and then we formed the Fugs there and I put out **Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts** in the back room. The exact spot last summer was a zucchini barrel. They made better use of the space probably. So anyway, the Fugs grew out of the labor union songs of the 30s and "We Shall Overcome" of Pete Seeger and out of the three chord Protestant hymns that were transformed into civil rights songs. And out of jazz poetry and out of Bird and beebop and early rock and roll. 1964 when we were formed, that was "Mustang Sally," Roy Orbison's "Pretty Woman" and the Beatles' "I Want To Hold Your Hand." Those were the things that were happening—early Beachboys, Dylan hadn't gone folk rock yet. That's how we came out. We came out of those concepts of a happening. You'd go to these galleries and there'd be people jumping up and down in barrels full of grapes and then somebody naked covering their head with pieces of ticker tape. And you could call that art. Easy rules—all you had to do was bring youthful genius and will. For all the flaws of the early Fugs we had pretty good timing, and a lot of energy, and we were quite confident in ourselves. And we were all poets, so we could whip out these songs that well, we're not talking Schumann here or Schubert. Because of the recording equipment they were able to capture these things. These things we did one take only, as wild young men looking at each other. We didn't know that you were supposed to face the microphone. So these things we did had a certain life for 32 years.

Jarnot: Did you have training as a musician?

Sanders: Well, training, sure—in the 50s all young men and women took their five years of piano. My mother bought a piano at my aunt's auction when she died and brought it home, a baby grand, and took it apart in the living room. She was quite skilled with her hands, and she rebuilt it, fixed hammers and got it all organized and I remember that piano all over our living room rug and she put that piano back together, had it tuned so that we could take piano lessons. So I took piano lessons. Then I studied drums for a while with the woman who was a drummer for the Kansas City Philharmonic. I used to go to Kansas City for a lot of stuff. Kansas City was jazz, so we would go there to these clubs so that we could dance with black girls and Mexican girls. I didn't even know it was jazz. It was just this wonderful music that you could be interracial and sneak liquor bottles into the club when you were a teenager. They never asked for identification in Kansas City. So I got exposed to a lot of jazz. And then we would go to country-western shows in Kansas City. I would see Roy Acuff; I'd see country acts. And then there was the big arena shows in '55 at the Kansas City municipal auditorium where I saw great shows of Bill Haley. I saw Chuck Berry. I saw Bo Diddley. I saw Laverne Baker. And then of course the mating teenage lust game conducted to the christian emblems of Elvis Presley and the Clovers. So we were exposed to this rock and roll tied to country and western, Hank Williams. And then as soon as I got to New York I got exposed to the Civil Rights music, "We Shall Overcome" and "Down By The Riverside." I went on a lot of peace walks and took part in civil rights stuff. I didn't know about things like Eric Satie or Debussy at that stage. Oh yeah. And I left out the Christian church. My mother was very religious. She taught a Sunday school class for high school kids. And I went to church. I was exposed to all these Christian three chord hymns; I knew all of them, still do. That was a big boon when we were starting writing popular songs and realizing that they were just fast versions of Christian hymn structures.

Jarnot: The Fugs were in Europe recently. What was your sense of the political scene there?

Sanders: We were in Italy for three weeks in the spring. The Center Left is in control of Italy. Berlusconi, the right wing populist media magnate, was tossed from power and so the cutbacks in medical care and cutbacks in social programs are over for now. And it's true of a number of places in Europe where the right wing has begun to ebb, such as in England with the labor party winning. Sweden of course, which has always been a social democracy. Denmark is the most left of all those advanced countries. Austria is still under the control of the Social Democrats, and even the Social Democrats in Germany could theoretically take over. But anyway the point is, their politics were quite grand and I was impressed with the country; the economy was booming. Allen died while we were in Europe and that was a great, sad experience, a national time of mourning. It was all over the newspapers, and on the national television and radio networks. I broke down weeping on Italian national radio. And oddly enough just an hour before he died, we got back from a gig in Milan and we had heard that he was pretty ill and we toasted his soul, just about 45 minutes before he actually passed away. But Italy was glorious other than that great sadness. I recommend it to painters and poets.

Jarnot: What are you working on now?

Sanders: I'm preparing a lot of galleys and stuff for European publications. **Tales of Beatnik Glory** Volume 1, Volume 2 and the new one Volume 3 are coming out in Italy and Austria. I've got to teach a course in Vienna in September called "The Poetry and Life of Allen Ginsberg", so I'm preparing for that. I've got to find something to do, another book. Maybe I'll finish **Tales of Beatnik Glory** Volume 4; I've sort of begun it. I thought about writing a novel, a short novel. And I have this play called **Cassandra**—I thought I would polish it up a little bit, change it, and try to get it produced somewhere. And I have to hang around to see that **1968: A History in Verse** gets a fair listen. It's designed to be read quietly in a room. It's not really designed to be performed. Of all my books it's the one most deliberately designed to be just sort of studied. My other book, the biography in verse of Chekov is also designed to be read quietly in somebody's house or room. With Allen's passing I've decided to read more and not be so driven and calm down a little bit, and not be so clingy to my possessions and boxes of files. You realize how impermanent—because here's a guy who because of his congestive heart condition and other reasons had to get this big fancy loft and a place to put his things up in, and he had just unpacked when he passed. So you really can't cling to anything. So that's my program at this point—do a little writing and do a lot of reading. And that's about it. Except for my little newspaper which eats up a lot of time. Just getting used to post-Ginsberg life.

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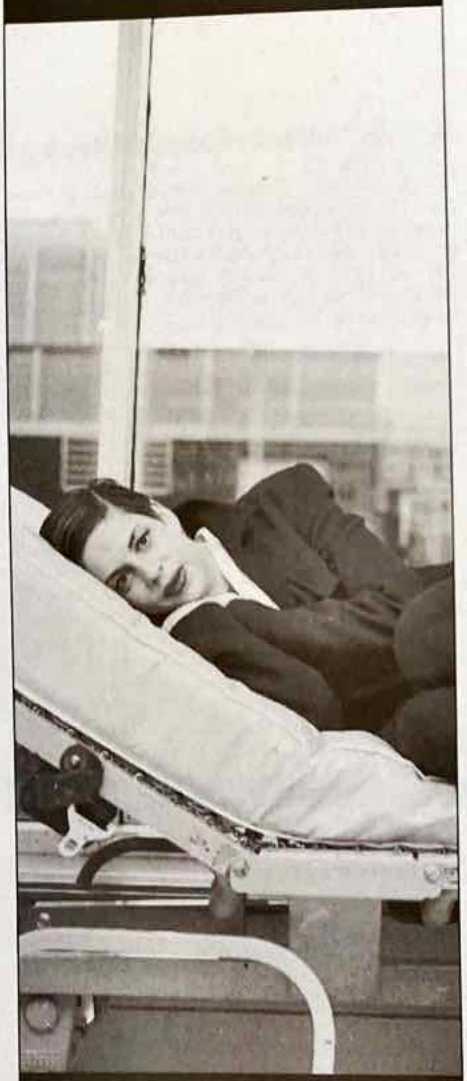

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