

PROJECT PAPERS

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EDITH JAROLIM

THE WORLD

The history of *The World: A New York City Literary Magazine* is inseparable from that of The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery, on New York's Lower East Side. The first appearance of *The World* followed close upon the heels of The Poetry Project's first "official" reading, 22 September 1966. Poetry readings had been held in the Church since 1965, when poet Paul Blackburn had the idea of moving the threatened reading series at the Metro Cafe to nearby St. Mark's, but it was not until the fall of 1966 that the Office of Economic Opportunity provided grant money to be used for regularly scheduled open readings, paid readings by invited poets—and a poetry publication. The Poetry Project, now celebrating its 20th anniversary, continues to be the most important downtown locus for poetry readings in New York, and *The World* continues to function—if somewhat less actively than in the beginning—as a major outlet for the work of writers involved with the Project.

The energies of poet Anne Waldman were largely responsible for the dynamic role the magazine played in the formative years of The Poetry Project. Waldman, director of the Project for nearly a decade, served as either editor or co-editor of 28 of the 30 issues published in the eight years *The World* was most active, 1967-74 (in the next 11 years, less than half the number of issues of those first eight years were brought out). From 1967 through 1969 Waldman was also co-editor, with Lewis Warsh, of another Lower East Side literary magazine, *Angel Hair*.

In the early days of The Poetry Project, *The World* had briefly as competitor for the role of house organ a single issue of a glossy little magazine, *Genre of Silence*. It was soon decided, however, that the Project would be best served by concentrating on the mimeograph magazine already in existence. In her introduction to *The World Anthology*, the first of two collections of *World* material she compiled for Bobbs Merrill, Waldman describes how the magazine functioned to fill a void in the Lower East Side literary scene of the mid-1960's. Referring to some of the most popular mimeograph magazines of that era, she says: "Ed Sanders' *Fuck You, A Magazine Of The Arts*, Ted Berrigan's *C, A Journal Of Poetry*, and Diane DiPrima's *The Floating Bear* were resting on their laurels for the time being....Although slick offset and printed publications were showing up regularly, there were no active mimeo-magazines coming out of the poetry community at this time. And 'mimeo' is a special kind of experience involving the energy of a whole community of

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poets to respond...The people editing such magazines are poets and people reading them are poets, poets who exist in some sort of working community together."¹

Certainly contributors to the first two issues of *The World* were directly involved with its publication: writers were sent, in mailing tubes, stencils on which to type their work. As a result of this policy, instituted by the magazine's first editor, Joel Sloman (then assistant to Joel Oppenheimer, the first Poetry Project Director), the periodical was, in Waldman's words, "almost like a news sheet, carrying people's latest work (some of it still in progress), silly collaborations from the night before and so on."² Problems with the use of the stencils—as regular *World* contributor Ted Berrigan put it, they came back looking as though they had been through a meat grinder--and with the mailing tubes resulted in the more conventional editorial policy which has been in effect until recently: poets mailed in contributions which, if accepted, were typed up on stencils by the editor and volunteer friends, who also ran off and collated the magazine.

Direct publication of contributions may have been eliminated early on, but the immediacy and casualness it represented were not. If any aesthetic principle might be said to dominate the rather eclectic group of poets published in *The World*, it would be that articulated by Frank O'Hara (a spiritual father of The Poetry Project, who died just months before it was funded) in his "Personism: A Manifesto." In this half-parodic, half-serious agenda for writers, O'Hara declared that a poem should be "between two persons instead of two pages," and that, in writing, "You just go on your nerve....As for measure and other technical apparatus, that's just common sense: if you're going to buy a pair of pants you want them to be tight enough so everyone will want to go to bed with you."³

The sexual openness and the irreverent, ironic tone of this manifesto pervade much of the poetry and the (less frequent) prose pieces, short plays, and interviews that appear in *The World* (although two issues, #29 and 30 are dedicated to reviews and prose critiques, and two, #27 and 35, consist solely of translations, the magazine has always focussed primarily on original poetry). Many of the poems published in *The World* concentrate on local detail: they include lists of familiar items, specific names of people and places, dates and even times of day; and they bear such titles as Peter Schjeldahl's "Some Topics Lee Harwood and I Discussed on Our Visit to Washington, D.C., August 3, 1966" (#7 n.p.). Emanating out of, and continuing in the spirit of, the leftist, drug-oriented counter-culture of the 1960's and 1970's—and following, too, in the tradition of the French Symbolist poets—*World* poems are often politically explicit, informal, surrealistic, and collaborative. At their worst they can be formless, cliquish, and campy, incongruously combining political statement with an air of world-weariness. At their best, however, *World* poems written in this mode use the evocativeness of immediate circumstances to illuminate universal concerns with deftness and with humor.

Poets sharing even a few of the above-outlined stylistic tendencies are often referred to as descendents of "New York School" poets, a designation conferred on Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, John Ashbery, and James Schuyler by Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* anthology (1960). Some of the most frequent "second generation"

contributors to *The World* are Bill Berkson, Ted Berrigan, Jim Brodey, Michael Brownstein, Jim Carroll, Tom Clark, Clark Coolidge, Kenward Elmslie, Larry Fagin, Dick Gallup, Lewis MacAdams, Gerard Malanga, Maureen Owen, Ron Padgett, Carter Ratcliff, Harris Schiff, Peter Schjeldahl, Tom Veitch, Anne Waldman, and Lewis Warsh, while so-called third and fourth generation New York School poets include Ed Friedman, John Godfrey, Bob Holman, Ruth Krauss, Gary Lenhart, Bernadette Mayer, Eileen Myles, Alice Notley, Pat Nolan, Bob Rosenthal, Paul Violi, and Jeff Wright. Moreover, just as the New York School progenitors were known for their connection with the City's art world (O'Hara was Associate Curator at the Museum of Modern Art, for example), *The World* has also had a close relationship with local artists. Some of the painters who have contributed cover artwork and/or illustrations, *gratis*, over the years are Joe Brainard, Mike Goldberg, Mimi Gross, Philip Guston, Keith Haring, Alex Katz, Larry Rivers, and George Schneeman.

Numerous affinities with the New York School notwithstanding, however, the diversity of styles and aesthetic bents of *World* contributors must not be understressed. Such an early *World* regular as Clark Coolidge, for instance, has come to be linked with the "language" poets,⁴ a group whose poetry is generally perceived as much more obscure and intellectual than that of the New York School—and, indeed, nearly every poet associated with the language group has appeared in the pages of *The World* at one time or another. Similarly, Jim Carroll, whose poems and whose entries from *The Basketball Diaries* were frequently published by the magazine, has, with the release of a number of albums, become associated with the rock music scene—a scene with which other, if less regular, *World* contributors such as Lou Reed, Patti Smith, and Fugs members Ed Sanders and Tuli Kupferberg were connected earlier. In the late 1960's through the mid-1970's, Joanne Kyger, Aram Saroyan, Philip Whalen, and other writers more commonly linked with the San Francisco Renaissance or Beat movement regularly appeared in *The World*, while Paul Blackburn, Robert Creeley, Ed Dorn, and Joel Oppenheimer, generally designated Black Mountain poets, were all published there too. Perhaps the only link between this disparate group of writers—aside from that they all lived or stayed, if only briefly, in New York City at some point—is that they are not generally accepted by the Academy, their poems not often discussed in university classrooms.

But even that distinction is breaking down, as the 1960's counter-culture and its representative poets become of historical interest to academe. And *The World* itself has changed with changing times. Whereas the directorship of The Poetry Project and editorship of *The World* had been informally determined for years, after 1978 the positions were filled by a newly formed Poetry Project Advisory Board, after 1984 by a Board of Directors. More important, *The World's* days as a mimeograph magazine are likely to be numbered: if the required funding is obtained, issue #42 will be computer typeset.

Notes

1. Anne Waldman, ed., *The World Anthology* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1969), p. xiii.
2. Anne Waldman and Larry Fagin, "Discussion of Little Magazines and Related Topics," in: Elliott Anderson and Mary Kinzie, eds., *The Little Magazine in America: A Modern Documentary History* (Yonkers, N.Y.: The Pushcart Press, 1978), p. 510.
3. *The Selected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. Donald Allen (New York: Vintage Books, 1974). pp. xiii-xiv.
4. The term "language" poets is derived from the association of these writers with *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, a magazine of critical inquiry published in New York from 1978 through 1982.