

Generations of Inspiration and Community Poetry Project Directors Past and Present Talk

While *The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church*—now in its 42nd season—might be a haven, a community, or just a reading venue for poets, it is also a not-for-profit by any means adventure, a place to debate, celebrate, and most importantly, instigate social change and justice by means of poetry and language.

With Stacy Szymaszek having recently begun her tenure as artistic director of *The Poetry Project*, *Boog City* editors David Kirschenbaum and Christina Strong recently conducted email interviews with her and a

'The implications are of a sacred space for poetry and poets and poetry community activists.'
—Anne Waldman (r.)

Greg Fuchs photo



and had to pick up the paycheck at the building by the Central Park Zoo for a couple of years). Support came from Noble Foundation, Kaplan Fund, N.Y. State Council etc. We got some support for *The World* from the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines. [There were] modest amounts that went far in those days.

Stacy, what are your plans for your term? Fresh voices? More symposiums? More media, video for example?

'I have the idealism of a new director who inherited a solid, healthy Project from Anselm Berrigan.'
—Stacy Szymaszek (l.)

Greg Fuchs photo

past director, Anne Waldman, about the East Village, community, and the future of *The Poetry Project*. Waldman was the director of *The Poetry Project* from 1966-1978, has published over 40 books of poetry and prose, and is the director of the M.F.A. writing and poetics program at Naropa University. Szymaszek's most recent book is *Emptied of All Ships* (Limus Press).

Speaking of community, Anne, how did *The Poetry Project* serve the East Village community when you were the director? Stacy, how will *The Poetry Project* reach out to the East Village community as the neighborhood is changing?

'I find the spirit is essentially the same at the Project, and it's still the place to go when you hit town as a poet.' —AW

Anne Waldman: The initial funding was from the Office of Economic Opportunity under Lyndon Johnson (heavens that admin seems light years away!), which was specified for "alienated youth" on the Lower East Side. Most of us were certainly alienated by the war in Viet Nam, and were involved with alternative activities in and around poetry and the arts, and benefits and the like which used the space. The space was key to a range of activities.

The readings were by contribution; the workshops were free and generated a lot of participants. We had a library and the means for mimeo production that benefited a lot of folk on the premises, plus jobs for locals. Ted Berrigan "put up the chairs."

We served the community by being open and welcoming, and we built on and continued the whole downtown scene, which had historical precedence in the *Deux Magots* series and more. It was a place for people to come together. With a focus on poetry and community, we cultivated an amazingly sophisticated LISTENING audience. I remember Edwin Denby speaking of that—how attuned the audience was. As Allen Ginsberg once said, "St. Mark's was my Poetry Church." So the implications are of a sacred space for poetry and poets and poetry community activists; infrastructure poets I like to call them.

Stacy Szymaszek: I think being located in a church, and a church as progressive as St. Mark's, really amplifies the message that this is a place where you can come and feel welcome and comfortable, if one is comfortable having a different experience with language. Even the way the church is situated, triangular facing Second Avenue, with a sitting area is

appealing. Joel Kuszai recently talked at the Project about how real estate structures life.

The East Village has changed and many of our constituency of poets are commuters. But, given the struggle for space, the streets around the project are still teeming with poets and poetry readers and punks and shopkeepers. Quite a few still live here with the ominously out-of-sync, but rapidly replicating, bank branches. Anselm [Berrigan, the Poetry Project's previous director], recently pointed out that as long as the trains and buses are running people will come to us.

But I think you are asking how will we reach out to the people who are currently living in this neighborhood, how will we know of each other's existence? Which is a fine place to begin. From a practical administrative perspective, we have increased the number of newsletters that we'll distribute via the office to neighborhood cafes and bookstores. We'll make use of our outdoor bulletin board, which at the moment features poems by Sparrow and Hettie Jones, as well as a sneak preview for fall, and we'll post signs on reading nights earlier in the day. These small actions gain momentum and inspire bigger ideas.

The Project is also a part of the St. Mark's Church community, and the possibility of some collaborative programs between the arts projects and the church are in the works. It's another opportunity for us to reach local audiences that wouldn't otherwise know about us.

Regarding funding, Stacy what are the needs that you'd like to be taken care of and advanced but can't because of lack of funds? Perhaps technological for example or, better, someone to transcribe and digitize all those recorded readings? Anne, what were the funding issues in your day?

SS: I would love to be the one to see the Project to a place where increasing the stipends for readers, pay for support staff, and salaries for employees is viable and sustainable. Our operating costs go up every year but our income doesn't necessarily correspond. Fund development would also allow for more technical equipment (more preservation options), website development, and larger-scale programming and publishing projects. I see a path for realizing these goals during my term, or at least leaving the next director in an even more able situation. Then again, I have the idealism of a new director who inherited a solid, healthy Project from Anselm Berrigan. Our recorded readings are being attended to, though all I can say at the moment is stay tuned for more news later in the year.

AW: Just being able to maintain doing what we were already doing [was the key issue in our day]. After the two-year grant ended and I was director by then ('68), we had to seek the funding to pay \$25 for readings, workshop, and staff salaries (I had one—\$7,000 a year?—from the Parks Department

SS: My plans are to continue to improve what we do well. The Project's curatorial philosophy is solid and provides for a remarkable range of poets thoughtfully paired. I look forward to applying my sensibility to the Wednesday Reading Series. I believe the symposiums were no longer financially viable (also the reason for the hiatus of *The World*), and I know they are missed. This is in the "lack of funds" list.

Many of my goals involve the aspect of the job less visible to the general public and pertain to organizational well-being: board development, fund development. A couple of ideas feel too delicate at this stage to publicly document and may not be able to be implemented during my first year. The Project creates and thrives on "outrider" energy, and Corrine Fitzpatrick, Arlo Quint, Akilah Oliver, John Coletti, David Vogen, and everyone else bringing in season 42 are here because we have chemistry
Please see DIRECTORS page 7

Stacy Szymaszek Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn

self-worth	the state of
encrypted in	major organs
pet monkeys	deviate
recoup myrrh tree	from self-made men
memory book	expect enlarged retinas
of a sea	spartan containers
false friends	monkeys and cobras
affluent and affluent	confuse only the reader
grains are grain-sized	log of adult injury
in the diorama	in a painting of me
a shame	as a boy
my tricks are	too small to notice
too small to notice	a columnist in columns
take an item	perpetual current affairs
from the collection	"a furious bonfire"
that will help you	during martial law

from Hyperglossia

East Village Stalwarts, Instrumental Artists, and Guilty Pleasures New Music—Sprinkle Genies, Bobby Perfect, Guilt By Association Compilation

BY JONATHAN BERGER

Sprinkle Genies

The Class is on Fire

These East Village veterans tend to mix it up. As the band's nominal frontman, Andy Ras Vegas has said, "In the Sprinkle Genies, you can do whatever you want... we do it the way we like to do it. If we want to play disco-influenced songs followed by Led Zeppelin, that's cool. People here don't feel constrained by rules."

This means, of course, that this band's cast (this time out, they number six) each follows their own particularly idiosyncratic muse. With *The Class is on Fire*, the latest Genies' album, the band moves away from a Pixies' fixation and embraces more country leanings. Moving in the direction of their earlier track, the hilarious "Metronome," the band has transformed into a modern-day X, with Ras Vegas taking on John Doe's later world-weary pose while multi-instrumentalists Erika Simonian (playing guitar

that sound straight out of The Bangles' *Different Light*.
For more information visit www.sprinklegenies.com

Bobby Perfect
Shackles

Backing guitarist for Larissa Schmailo and Leigh Harrison, Bobby Perfect steps into the limelight with his first disc of originals. While the material is entirely instrumental, his guitar work speaks as fluently as Schmailo's spoken word or Harrison's songs.

The starting point for all his material is clearly the blues, but styles are varied throughout; from the peppy opener "New York City" to the stinging "Hard Times and Trouble," which immediately segues into the old timey "14th Street Shuffle."

"Breakdown" rages. "Harpo's Strings" speaks volumes in less than two minutes of solo acoustic guitar. It's as if the quiet Marx Brother were chatting with us on set, between takes.

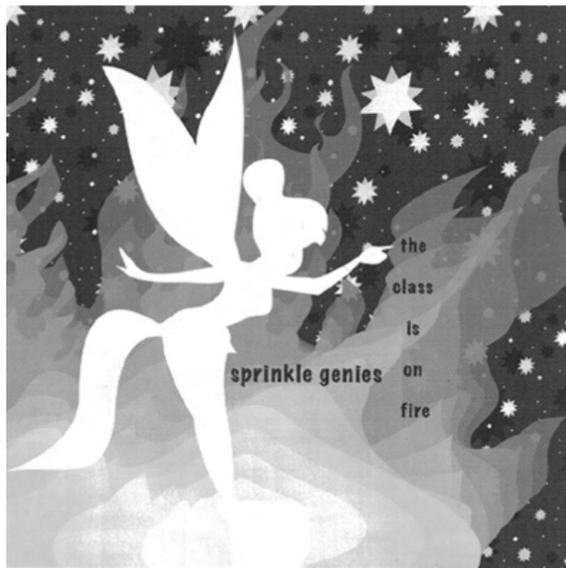
The two covers on the album show the elder statesman's

different and exciting. Now a fresher collection of artists is taking on a more shameful collection of songs.

The press release says it best: "Your favorite Indie superstars are... joining together for Guilt By Association, a collection of songs by today's most exciting Indie talent re-interpreting their favorite guilty pleasure pop songs."

Engine Room Recordings, an upstart label borne from the audio production center on Canal Street, came up with the idea and quickly enlisted the best and the brightest of New York (and beyond) to cover their favorite dirty little secrets.

Highlights include the album opener, Petra Haden's a cappella reading of Journey's "Don't Stop Believing"—and this version doesn't get cut in the middle, just as we're waiting for Tony to get whacked. Also great is Mike Watt (of The Minutemen and FIREHOSE), singing "Burnin' For You." He approaches the irony most directly, adding glossy background vocals that feel like they'd fit perfectly on the '80s original. Luna does a pretty



Who are the Sprinkle Genies? A less annoying B-52's, a less foreign Sugarcubes, a trashier Ween.

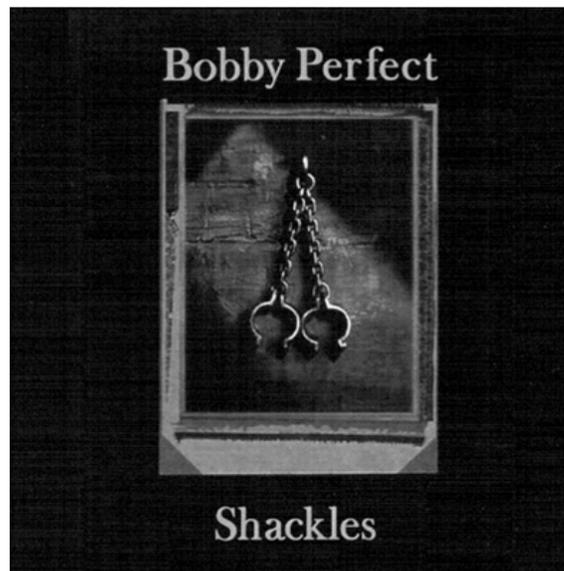
and bass and mandolin) and Ananda Sunshine (on bucket and violin, as well as a bunch of other stuff) counterpoint beautifully. Other points of comparison? A less annoying B-52's, a less foreign Sugarcubes, a trashier Ween.

Steve Espinola, credited as co-producer and the latest member of the band, plays subtle piano throughout the release and co-wrote the first track, "Pepe," from which the album's title comes.

"Welcome" is an able introduction to the group. (It even features a call and response query "Who knows the Sprinkle Genies have merchandise for sale?" before informing the public, "We are welcome... come on in, you're welcome.") It's a rare track, featuring bassist Steve Bag on lead vocals, and one of a couple that present an optimistic side to this typically dark band.

Many of the band's lyrics state mundane or primitive concerns, and then change the conditions to the absurd or epic. "Set them free!" the girls shout, after Ras Vegas tells about returning bread to the fields from which the wheat was created (later even going so far as returning a pencil to nature). The varied vocalists make the lyrics seem somehow magical, like in "Underline Sole," about a musical corporate stooge, and "Cursed," which has harmonies

All instruments are credited to Mister Perfect, though clearly it's the guitar that is his true love.



roots. "Back at the Chicken Shack" hits that easy space where jazz and blues meet and groove together. While not so funky as the original, it pays respect while presenting something different. Santo and Johnny's "SleepWalk," meanwhile, sounds somewhat less organic than the fifties' standard. It is one vaguely imperfect note on an otherwise great background listen.

All instruments on the album are credited to Mister Perfect, who seems capable enough in all of them, though clearly it's the guitar that is his true love. Is it the autonomy that he seeks, the distance from his regular companions, or the freedom to do what he wants apart from his regular journeys to Manhattan jam sessions? It's unclear precisely what Bobby Perfect wants to break away from, but with the release of *Shackles* it seems he is free.

For more information visit www.songcrew.com

Various Artists
Guilt By Association

I picked up the 1992 collection *Freedom of Choice*, featuring alterna-acts of the '90s singing songs of the '80s, transforming the sunny and synthetic pop of years previous into something



Anyone who can feel guilty appreciating that instrumental is a fool.

sophisticated "Straight Up" with a spoken word break, and Superchunk soars on their amazing version of "Say My Name" (originally conceived by Destiny's Child). Other contributors to the collection are Goat and The Mooney Suzuki.

Of course the album raises some controversial issues. Casey Shea, of rising stars the Undisputed Heavyweights, soulfully covers System of a Down's "Chop Suey." Maybe the song charted, but who would think of that as a guilty pleasure? And "Love's Theme," interpreted by The Woody Jackson Orchestra (featuring Money Mark), was a classic the instant Love Unlimited Orchestra created it. Anyone who feels guilty appreciating that instrumental is a fool.

Regardless of this sort of debate—or perhaps because of it — Guilt by Association is a fascinating document, a view into the minds of each of the artists. It's enlightening to hear how they chose to reinvent the hits of yesteryear, and which songs they chose in the first place.

For more information visit www.EngineRoomRecordings.com
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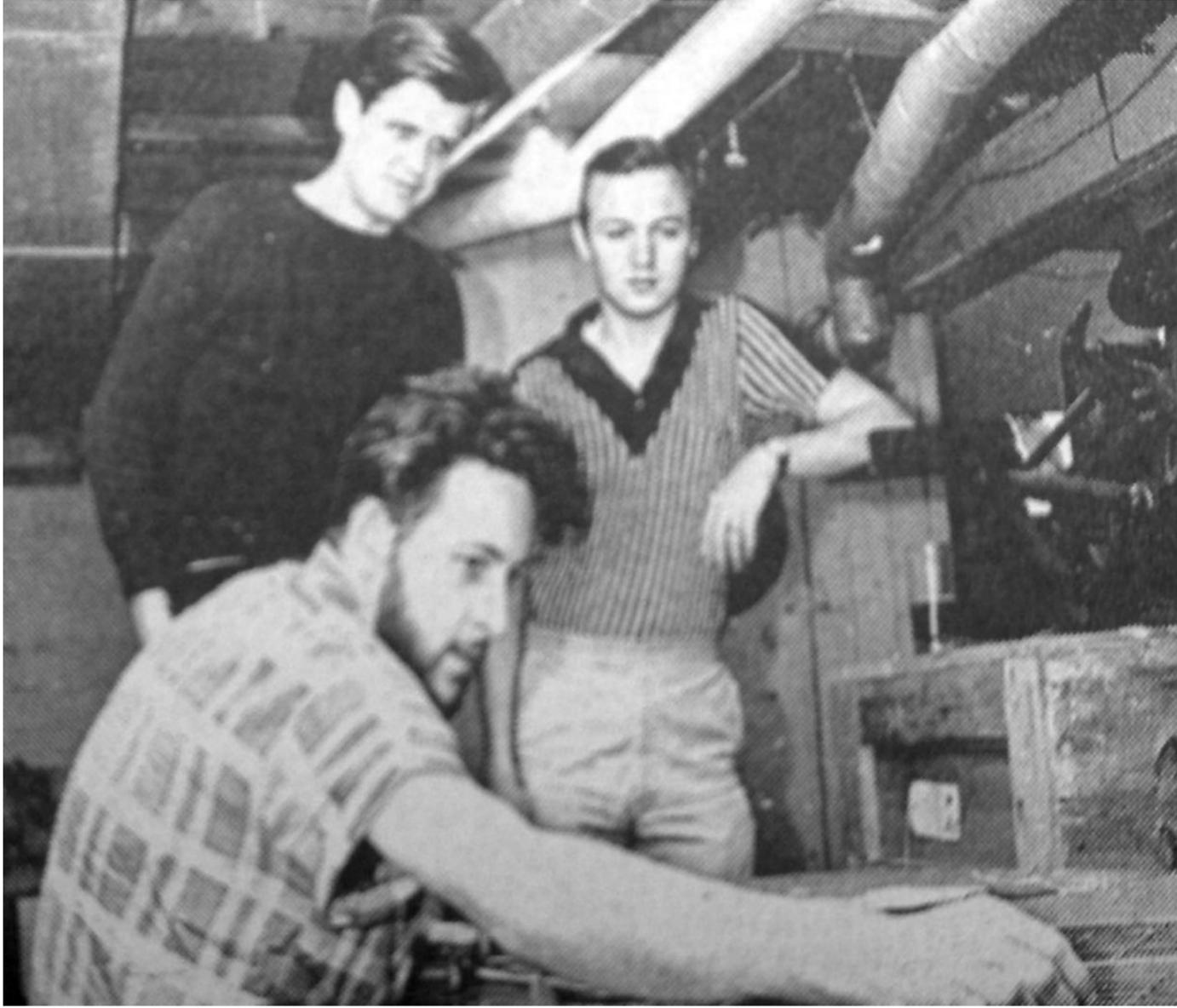
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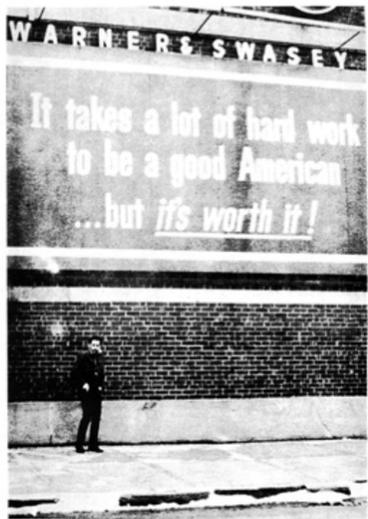
letters to the editor
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d.a. levy at 65



Russell Salamon and Kent Taylor watching d.a. levy set type for his renegade press books, c. 1963-1964.

This coming Mon., Oct. 29, d.a. levy, the late Cleveland poet-publisher who was at the vanguard of the mimeo revolution, would've turned 65. That day Boog City and The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church will celebrate the radical and enduring effect levy left on small press poetry and publishing during his short life with readings of his work, informal discussion, and a screening of the levy biopic "if i scratch, if i write" (see p.6 for details). In the coming pages we share with you work on and by levy.



ukanhavyrfuckinciti bak.

What happens if we let go of the mythology surrounding levy's life and attempt to read the poetry as atheists or agnostics? Is it even possible?

does not include work written in late '67 or '68, but while there is indeed a significant amount of poetry from that period, it is not as though it takes a radical shift during the last year of his life—levy simply becomes increasingly obsessed with Cleveland, death, and eastern religion, mythology, and philosophy.

More to the point, the kind of book this is—part collected poems, part sampling from levy's visual work, part festschrift or tribute, and in great part an attempt to mythologize levy—casts a particular shadow over every collection in its wake.

From the introduction to the original 1967 edition by rjs: "maybe this book is here to fuck with levy the same way the earli christians fuckd with christ. create a mythology around d.a. & kill him with his own words. so he can't be human anymore. thats kinda mean, u mite believe me. why els wd such a book appear? read this book as a bible. its healthy. its wher yr at. maybe."

Was he serious? If so, how so? levy himself seemed bent on creating and maintaining a self-mythology, at least in some of the longer poems (I'd love to see Libbie Rifkin do a close reading of "Cleveland Undercovers," say), at the same time outwardly (usually in interviews or manifestoes, though also in a few of the poems) rejecting attempts by the establishment and the underground to turn him into an icon or, worse, a martyr.

Whether or not levy was genuinely "martyred" is moot in 2007. Far more to the point is how resonant the idea of him as martyr remains, how actually Christian our particular

Junkmail Oracle collection, suspicions hover around levy's suicide—was levy, Golden asks, really alone in his room at the time the trigger was pulled?

Despite Swanberg's valiant but ultimately half-hearted attempt in *Zen Concrete & Etc.* to shift focus away from the legend and onto the body of work, we continue to read levy's output in an oddly religious context. I suspect that the original publication of *ukanhavyrfuckinciti bak.*, which, as one contributor puts it, casts levy as "savior-in-charge of clevelands conscience & consciousness," is in great part responsible.

What happens if we let go of the mythology surrounding levy's life and attempt to read the poetry as atheists or agnostics? Is it even possible?

For better or worse, this recent facsimile reprint of *ukanhavyrfuckinciti bak.* reminds us that, fundamentally, we aren't ready to do that. It's not how we've ever read levy. And—one begins to suspect—it may not even be how we read poetry in America, period.

To order a copy of the 2007 facsimile edition of *ukanhavyrfuckinciti bak.*, send a check for \$15 payable to:

Russell Salamon
10537 Chandler Blvd.
North Hollywood, CA 91601-2926

Heavy Rotation

ukanhavyrfuckinciti bak.

D.A. LEVY: A TRIBUTE TO THE MAN, AN ANTHOLOGY OF HIS POETRY

Edited by rjs, published by t.l. kryss/Ghost Press Cleveland, 1967
Facsimile edition, 2007, with a bibliography, glossary and afterword by Russell Salamon

By Gary Sullivan

Four decades after his death, all evidence suggests that Cleveland poet, publisher, and agit-prop artist d.a.levy is currently among the most frequently published American poets.

Take a quick peek on abebooks.com and you'll find, in the last couple of years alone, a surprising amount of posthumous activity: numerous magazine and anthology appearances (*Mineshaft*, *Speaking for the Dumb*, *Long March to Cleveland*, *sometimes city undercovers*) and a good number of chapbooks and full-length collections of poetry, art, and letters (*Red Lady*, *Great Man Sleeping in a Closet*, *Random Sightings*).

levy never had much institutional support for his writing while he was alive, and his death hasn't changed that situation much. Forty years after the poet's suicide, not only academia, but the for- and non-profit publishing worlds, generally, remain disinterested or blissfully ignorant of his life and work: there is no Coffee House selected; no collected from the University of California; no "Man and Poet"

volume from the National Poetry Foundation; and it's a safe bet there'll be no Library of America edition any time soon.

Yet, roughly every decade since levy's death, at least one independent press has brought out a new compilation, including: *Collected Poems* (Druid Books, 1976); Ingrid Swanberg's *Zen Concrete & Etc.* (ghost pony press, 1991); Mike Golden's *The Buddhist Third Class Junkmail Oracle* (Seven Stories Press, 1999); and, most recently, Larry Smith and Swanberg's *d.a.levy & the mimeograph revolution* (Bottom Dog Press, 2007). levy only wrote poetry for the last five years of his life, and sometimes it feels as though these posthumous publications reconfigure or update our sense of the work somewhat less than they simply recycle the same material for a new generation of readers.

Except for Druid's *Collected Poems*, the collections above all contain, in addition to levy's poetry, statements about levy by other poets and interested readers, and documents from the '60s, such as photographs, newspaper clippings, and reproductions of levy's concrete poetry, his typewriter art, and other similar creative/visual material.

The model for each of them is *ukanhavyrfuckinciti bak.*, the sprawling festschrift/collected poems that was published in 1967 to raise money for levy's defense (he'd been charged with reading obscene poetry to a minor and was then in jail, unable to make bail). The book

THE BUDDHIST THIRD CLASS JUNKMAIL ORACLE



investment in this poet is. ("its wher yr at," as rjs says.) As late as 1999, in Golden's essay accompanying *The Buddhist Third Class*

Follow the Leader?

d.a. levy and the mimeograph revolution

Edited by Larry Smith and Ingrid Swanberg
Bottom Dog Press

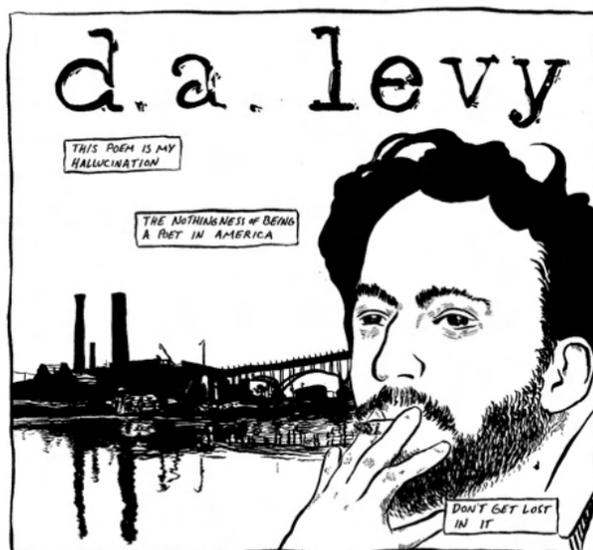
By Christina Strong

So overwhelmed by all the chapbooks, books, anthologies, I haven't been submitting to things I barely have the time to read. Which is why I don't like writing book reviews. Basically everyone across the board wants to hear a positive review of a book.

levy seemed to turn his life and his writing into a death trip. After which he is eulogized, and for his being a Jew that's kinda funny, and turned into a martyr by his community is even stranger. It's one thing to be neglected, and I'm thinking of Philly Sound's Neglectorino Project (www.neglectorino.blogspot.com) but really, why have a book of chapters about people interviewed who knew levy, the run down of police reports, and the repeated descriptions of what mimeograph levy used? Why a book like *d.a. levy and the mimeograph revolution*?

For those folks born in the '60s, the book is a collage of history during that time, and, having been an American studies major in

excerpts from Gary Sullivan's in progress d.a. levy comic



college, I'd like to think stepping into the past might give us a clue into the future. Instead, it's often a feeling of I know too much. It's the bad old days. Reading about the Chicago 8 and the government cracking down on free speech doesn't make me wish I was there.

The second thing that comes across in the book is class. It takes great risk to not work, and not come from money, and not work a day job, and output as many poems, quarterlies, and ephemera which is now floating around on eBay. This comes across in the inevitable

I'm guessing he wouldn't have wanted this kind of attention. levy never wanted to be a leader.

downward spiral of levy, no money, no academic connections as we see today, and fighting a losing battle against the Cleveland old boy violent corrupt network of police and politicians in a city once dubbed "the mistake on the lake."

I'm not not a fan: sure I can scan his artwork and collages in, because he rejected copyright, but why? There's something naïve about his work and life, the cut-ups and collages, his usage of old porno quasi-Dover knock-off print books, and the naïveté that poetry could organize the masses. He arrived at the fourth plateau but didn't hit the fifth. One essay in the book used the word "trite" but that's not it, nor is naïve, because, if you know his history, he took a lot of action that led him to his end.

And this book. While I never knew the man (which was impossible), I'm guessing he wouldn't have wanted this kind of attention. Here's a man who said to some up and coming, cock-sure young poet: ukanhavyrfuckincitii bak.

Our culture has changed. levy never wanted to be a leader. And now, I'm just guessing, he'd want his fuckin' citii back, taken back from the law enforcement agencies and the surveillance cameras and the crackdowns on free speech. Where are the young, angry, disenfranchised poets from Cleveland now? Let's not eulogize the man, let's recognize the energy and the work of previous and present poets, and not the act of annihilation; we have more than enough of that going on as it is.

A 65th Birthday Celebration for d.a. levy

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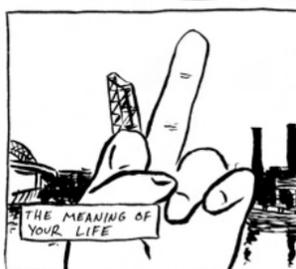
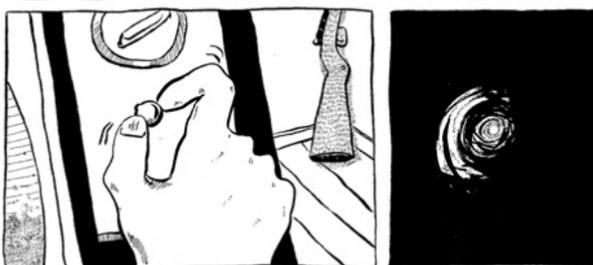
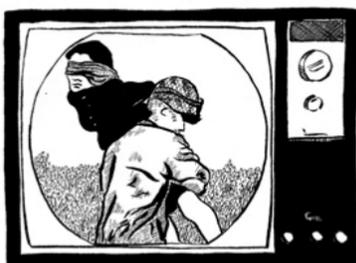
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For info: www.poetryproject.com

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Gary Sullivan is a cartoonist and poet. Get copies of his comic book, Elsewhere, and read more of his obnoxious opinions at garysullivan.blogspot.com.

Jaywalking Blues

for t.l.k/r.j.s. and grady

FUNNY THING

AFTER the first police putsch
on the cities

information sources
sorcerors
& magicians

UNI*Coprsed from psycho
logical operations
similar to those musically
performed at well known
rest resorts like Dachau &
San Diego/

strange figures
rose from beneath the
streets of medina marble &
UNIFIED

(gave me the first
christmas ive had in years)

new family
of the sun
i fell- - -
funny thing

a dark winter night
5 years & finally
the moon is setting on the
whore
eye
zone

/chicago poets
do not understand
my pottery/

after 8 yrs writing
& 4 yrs printing
& being very poor
& being romantic (only enuf to
fill in the nothingness of
being a poet in america

A PIONEER!
(spelled peon)

the years disapated
& I havent anything
except sum unbelievable

>>>

beautiful friends with
tears in their eyes
& i havent anything
to say
my name is myself
the pencil dead in my hand again

how is this connection made?
ink - pencil suddenly sucking
my brain cells dry -
is it that i become
in tune with the
consciousness of the
WRITING Tool?

it is when the
ink starts spurting from
the pen like sperm
& the exstasy
moves upward
between the eyes
ORGASM

i am beyond
physical matter
SENSATION
i am beyond myself NOW
who is this speaking from
beyond the strings of this
world?

i hiding?
(something from cleveland)
look there first i say to
myself

& LOOK
PUKE
& unlike the city
administration

i cannot sweep it under the carpet
& ask the federal govt. for help

i cannot even drive to hunting valley
& watch the policemen deliver news-
papers

next week tho,
when the zipper on my levi's is fixed
i'll put on my numbered dungaree shirt
& go to Conninwood

burn incense at Five Points
& buy Kumara's brother at Norms

that is, if im not arrested
for some serious violation
like enticing a minor
to jaywalk.

1967

Logic 21

2 1/2 Times Square

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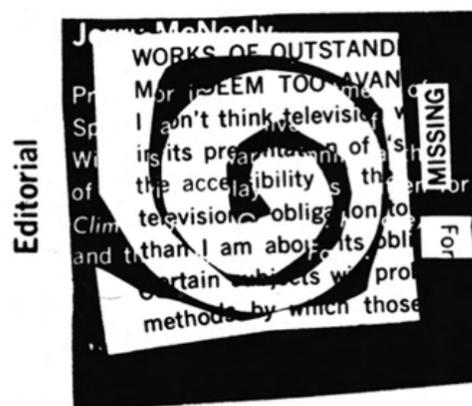
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0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

The world is fast

2 CENSORSHIP POems

Censor



digs

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DIRECTORS from page 1

with each other, with this place, and this feeling extends outward.

Anne, can you talk about your days as director and what you've seen changed between then and now, i.e. the neighborhood, The Poetry Project itself, the poetry world as a whole, and what do you think about these changes?

AW: Change is inevitable. And there are new generations of writers—the post-post mod (post-Holocaust/post-bomb?) independents, free of the shackles of so-called "schools" and male-dominated heroic scenes. Women are so much more empowered in recent decades, cutting their teeth on different wars, more sophisticated info tools—the internet, cell phones, etc.—[as well as] faster hook-ups, swifter activism projects.

What does not change is the will to change, of course. The Lower East Side neighborhood. The economics of gentrification

might be seen as problematic, and I would hope that the energy of what occurs here can spread to other needier neighborhoods.

The poetry culture, if you will, however, seems alive and healthy. There are so many more venues currently than there were in the "old days." If the proliferation of the M.F.A. programs and careerism isn't your style, there are still alternatives outside the "credentialed" universe.

I find the spirit is essentially the same at the Project, and it's still the place to go when you hit town as a poet. There's a species of inspiration and going-the-extra-mile there that's rare in many institutions. Like the Kerouac School at Naropa, it's still a relatively young experiment and perhaps ultimately a "temporary autonomous zone" in the grand scheme of things, but it will have made a mark.

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