

RANDY ROARK

**A POET'S PROGRESS: POETIC APPRENTICESHIP—LIFE
LESSONS FROM GINSBERG, SNYDER AND WHALEN:
INTERVIEW BY MICHAEL LIMNIOS**



Randy Roark is a poet and author who writes a monthly column for Newtopia Magazine on his travel experiences entitled "A Poet's Progress." Roark graduated from Naropa Institute (BFA 1983, MFA 1991). He worked with Allen Ginsberg for the last 17 years of his life, first as an apprentice, then as his teaching assistant, and finally transcribing and editing 28,000 pages of Ginsberg's poetry lectures, currently available on-line through the Ginsberg trust.



Poet, author, and producer Randy Roark.

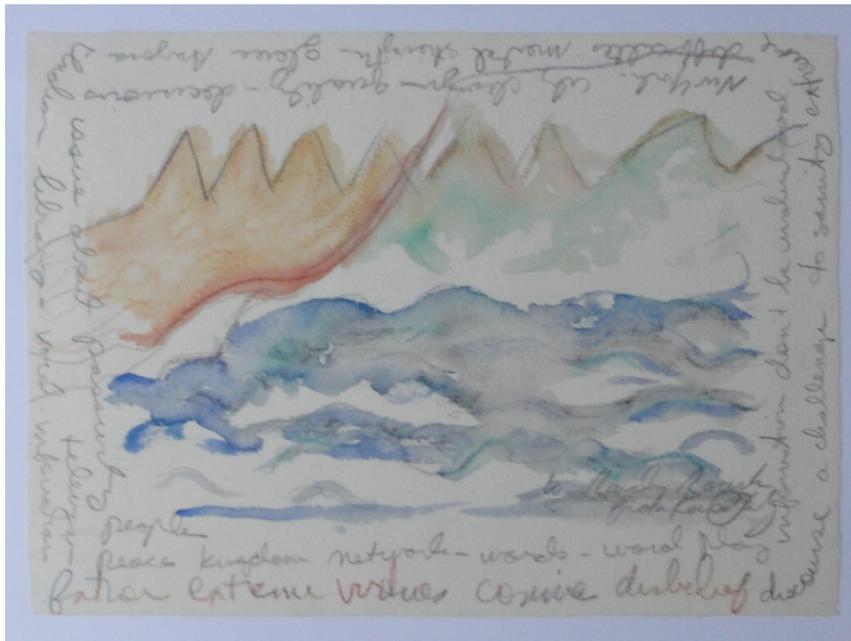
Following Ginsberg's death, he worked with filmmaker and artist Stan Brakhage, and produced a week-long celebration of Brakhage's work that won "Art Film Festival of the Year" award from Westword magazine in 2001. Since 1998, he has worked with Sounds True as a producer, where he has edited artists such as Alex Grey, writers including William Burroughs and Robert Anton Wilson, and a wide variety of spiritual teachers, including Alan Watts, Krishnamurti, Jack Kornfield, Pema Chodron and Lakota Elder Joseph Marshall.

His poetry collections include *The San Francisco Notebook*, *One Night* (with Anne Waldman), *Hymns*, *Awakening Osiris*, *Mona Lisa's Veil: New and Selected Poems 1979-2001*, and *Dissolve: Screenplays to the Films of Stan Brakhage*. Since 2006, he has been traveling outside of the United States for two months of every year as part of a twelve-year plan, and is writing a work based on his travels.

This piece was adapted from an original interview with Roark, conducted by Michael Limnios of Athens, Greece, for his *Mixalis* series of interviews with the Beats and students of the Beats, January 18, 2013. An expanded version—with the Prelude and Interlude included here—of this interview originally appeared October 2013, in *Newtopia Magazine* (<http://newtopiamagazine.wordpress.com/2013/10/16/a-poets-progress-poetic-apprentice-life-lessons-from-ginsberg-snyder-and-whalen/>). The interview itself, appeared in October 2013 at the online Blues GR site in two parts. Part 1 can be found at <http://blues.gr/profiles/blogs/interview-with-poet-author-and-producer-randy-roark>. Part 2 can be found at <http://blues.gr/profiles/blogs/interview-with-poet-author-and-producer-randy-roark-part-2>).

This version was compiled by the Museum of American Poetics with Randy Roark's permission and assistance, and includes some additional material, not included in the previous two versions.

PRELUDE



Karen Finley: Psychic Portrait of Randy Roark, Boulder, Colorado, 2003.

In 2003, I met performance artist Karen Finley—the woman who nearly brought down the NEA—in the mezzanine at the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art. We shook hands, she asked me to spell my name, and then she had me take a seat on one side of a medium-sized white wooden table. She explained she would paint my psychic portrait. She would hang the portrait in the BMoCA gallery for the duration of the show. When the show was over, I could come in and claim my piece.

She had watercolors, crayons, pens and colored pencils, and a jug of water that she had replaced before I'd arrived. She tore off a sheet of 12" x 18" Arches watercolor paper and attached it to a drawing board and began talking. As she simultaneously painted and talked, she would look up at different intervals, her eyes sometimes focused on me, sometimes not. Occasionally she would put the brush down, pick up a pencil and write something in the margins.

She explained that she was painting not what she saw but what she felt sitting across from me—not my body, not my person, but my soul, my spirit. Mine would be part of a series, using the same all-white room, the same set-up, the same time of day. This way it would be obvious by what changed in the room what effects that person's presence had on their surroundings. The light changes colors, it flares or is smothered. Sometimes the temperature changes. Sometimes it's hard to breathe, as if the air has turned inky. In this state, sometimes words appear, rarely as much as this time, usually a word or two, a title. With you it's as if the room is filled with words. It's as if a thousand voices are speaking all at once, trying to be heard. Even when your mouth is shut, you keep talking.

Her story and the painting ends with the same flourish. We're done! She looks at her watch. She has lost track of time, she says, it has run long. She shakes her head and looks at me, her eyes growing comically wide. "Well, shall we?" Then she closes her eyes, takes a deep breath, and leans forward.

She says that every portrait has been different, but this one is more different than most. It is the only landscape in the series, the only one with so many words. "You are surrounded by words—they are either keeping you safe or they are keeping you from others. Yet, is this a landscape or is it surrealism? What a strange place for an ocean! There are golden mountains in the distance. Gold is the color of the spirit. And there's a river of blood, of flesh, separating the spiritual from the lush green fields over here. This mountainside looks like the only place where anyone could live, but it's isolated on every side—to the west by the bloody river, to the south by these swirling waves straight out of Hiroshige, but traveling in the opposite direction." She demonstrates how the waves are moving east to west. "That seems important." She stops and looks up at me in earnest: "Now is not the time for travel, but the time to store provisions, to prepare for *hejira*, to explore your surroundings for means of escape." Then she turns back to painting. "These are not waves to sail on. These are the waves of emotion, of danger. Of impermanence, of dreams, of mystery. Of anger, of dissolution. It's hard to see a way out of this dilemma. You must wait for the waves to settle."

Then she read the words that ringed the painting, and I'm asked to nod if any of the words are especially significant to me: The words are father (nod) * extreme virtues * conscience (nod) * disbelief * discursive (a laugh and a nod) * a challenge to sanity * extreme difficulties * mental strength (nod) * glory * Arizona * Indian (nod) * library (nod) * void (nod) * unboundaries * peace * kingdom * network * words (nod) * word play (nod) * information (nod) * don't be understood (nod) * New York (nod) * design * quality * decisions * issue about passivity (nod) * television * people (nod).

Then she asked me what significance the words had for me and wrote down my responses in a black Moleskin just like the one I'm writing in now.

I don't remember her telling me what she was going to do with these psychic portraits, but I notice that on her website there is a section called "Psychic Portraits," which is currently a blank page.

INTERVIEW



My spiritual mother and father: Diane di Prima and Allen Ginsberg, "Born in the USA"—Denver, Colorado. July 4, 1983, photo and treatment by Sheppard Powell.

Michael Limnios: *Randy, tell me a few things about your meeting with Allen Ginsberg and how has Allen changed your life?*

Randy Roark: I've written quite a bit about that time and what I learned from him already, and those other stories are easy to find on-line for anyone interested, so I'll try to stick to things I haven't talked about before.



Randy and Allen Ginsberg, July 1996, Boulder. Photo by Kai Sibley

I can say without a doubt that my time at Naropa transformed me from one consciousness into another. I enrolled as one person and graduated three years later a different person. For example, Allen and I argued about everything, but nothing more than the core point of his teaching—the slogan he attributed to Chogyam Trungpa, “First thought, best thought.” From its founding, spontaneous poetics was important to the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, and Allen insisted on making us improvise in class—almost always in meter—and I was terrible at it and I wasn't about to get any better because I really didn't care to. I found most of the spontaneous poetry I'd heard indulgent, and I thought the classes he turned over to the creation of spontaneous chain-poems an annoying waste of time. And yet both times when I was asked to give the commencement address at Naropa, I decided to speak extemporaneously. The first one

was the most important because Allen and Anne were in the audience. I had never done anything like this before. It was the largest and most important performance in my life, and yet, as I was walking up the stairs to the stage, I kept pushing thoughts out of my mind. I would have felt like a phony if I accepted a diploma from the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics with a prepared text.

PROGRAM	GRADUATING CLASS	
<p>OPENING ADDRESS Judith Lief <i>Dean of Naropa Institute</i></p> <p>STUDENT ADDRESS Miss Karey Christ-Janer</p> <p>STUDENT PERFORMANCE Mr. Theodore Brandt</p> <p>STUDENT ADDRESS Mr. Randy Roark</p> <p>STUDENT PERFORMANCE Mr. Joe Richey</p> <p>FACULTY ADDRESS Mr. Bill Douglas <i>Chairperson, Naropa Institute Music Department</i></p> <p>PRESENTATION OF DIPLOMAS Mr. Jeremy Hayward <i>Vice-President of Naropa Institute</i></p> <p>CLOSING ADDRESS The Venerable Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche <i>President of Naropa Institute</i></p>	<p>John Madison Aiken Vincent Annoni Monica Bosch Eric W. Brandt Theodore Brandt Luanne Teresa Calvanese Allan Fix Carla Rachel Friedman Greg Gombert Barbara Anne Gullede Fenja Heupers Karey Christ-Janer</p> <p>Wendy Jo Johnson James Matthew James Lepore Alexandra Susan MacKay</p> <p>Lorrie Monte Joseph Richey Randy Roark Rosalie A. Robison Marion G. Wilkinson</p>	<p><i>B.A. Psychology</i> <i>B.A. Psychology</i> <i>Certificate Dance</i> <i>Certificate Music</i> <i>B.A. Music</i> <i>B.A. Psychology</i> <i>Certificate Music</i> <i>B.A. Poetics</i> <i>Certificate Music</i> <i>B.A. Dance</i> <i>M.A. Buddhist Studies</i> <i>B.A. Interdepartmental/ Visual Arts & Psychology</i> <i>M.A. Psychology</i> <i>B.A. Poetics</i> <i>B.A. Interdepartmental/ Dance/Movement Studies & Theater</i> <i>Advanced Certificate Dance</i> <i>B.A. Poetics</i> <i>B.A. Poetics</i> <i>B.A. Poetics</i> <i>B.A. Psychology</i></p>

Graduation Program, Naropa Institute, 1983

Ever since then, whenever I'm asked to speak as a graduate of Naropa, I'll arrive at the podium without a single prepared thought in my head. For me, it's ironic that the guy who argued most strenuously against spontaneous poetry has been seen by more people speaking extemporaneously than reading from a text. Another irony is that the biggest fights I've gotten into in the studio as a producer have been because I insist that the authors speak from notes and never use a script.

DEAR MR. GINSBERG -

I HAVE WRITTEN SEVERAL VERSIONS OF A "WHY I WANT TO BE YOUR APPRENTICE" LETTER AND ALSO A FEW "WHY YOU SHOULD CHOOSE ME AS AN APPRENTICE" LETTERS ALONG WITH THE USUAL "WHAT I HAVE DONE IN MY LIFE THAT CAN BE BENT INTO SOMETHING POETICAL." LETTERS.

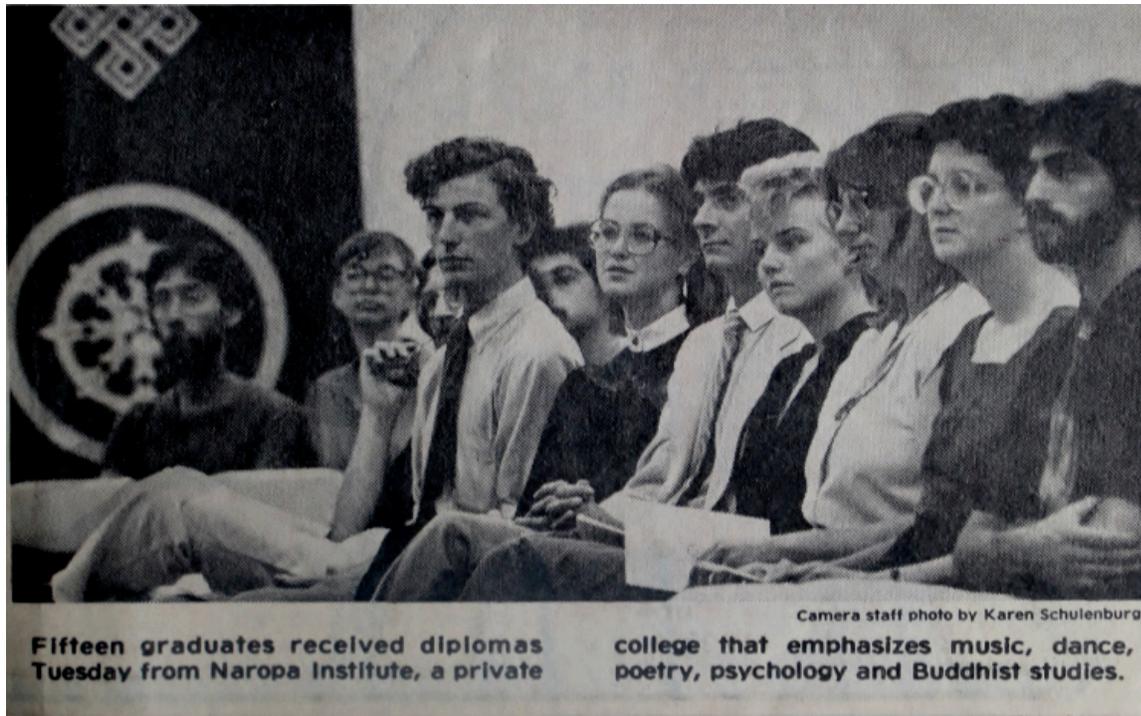
I AM ACUTELY AWARE THAT IF I WERE SOLELY INTERESTED IN POETRY AS SELF-EXPRESSION, I COULD HAVE REMAINED IN CONNECTICUT AND CONTINUED MY EMILY DICKINSONIST DEVELOPMENT. SINCE I HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN A ONE-ON-ONE APPRENTICESHIP WITH ANOTHER POET/TEACHER, I AM ALSO AWARE OF THE POSITIVE ASPECTS AND THE DRAWBACKS OF "BEING TAUGHT." TEACHERS, IF TAKEN TOO SERIOUSLY, ARE SIMILAR TO EYE-GLASSES. THEY CAN CHANGE THE APPEARANCE OF YOUR WORK WHILE YOUR OWN EYES ADJUST TO THAT VISION AND BECOME LAZY AND GUIDED.

AND, YET, WITH THAT SKEPTICISM, I MOVED MY FAMILY TWO THOUSAND MILES IN THE CHANCE THAT I MIGHT BECOME, EVEN FOR A SHORT TIME, AN APPRENTICE

The first page of my nine-page application letter for Allen's apprenticeship program, August 1977. I was twenty-three years old.

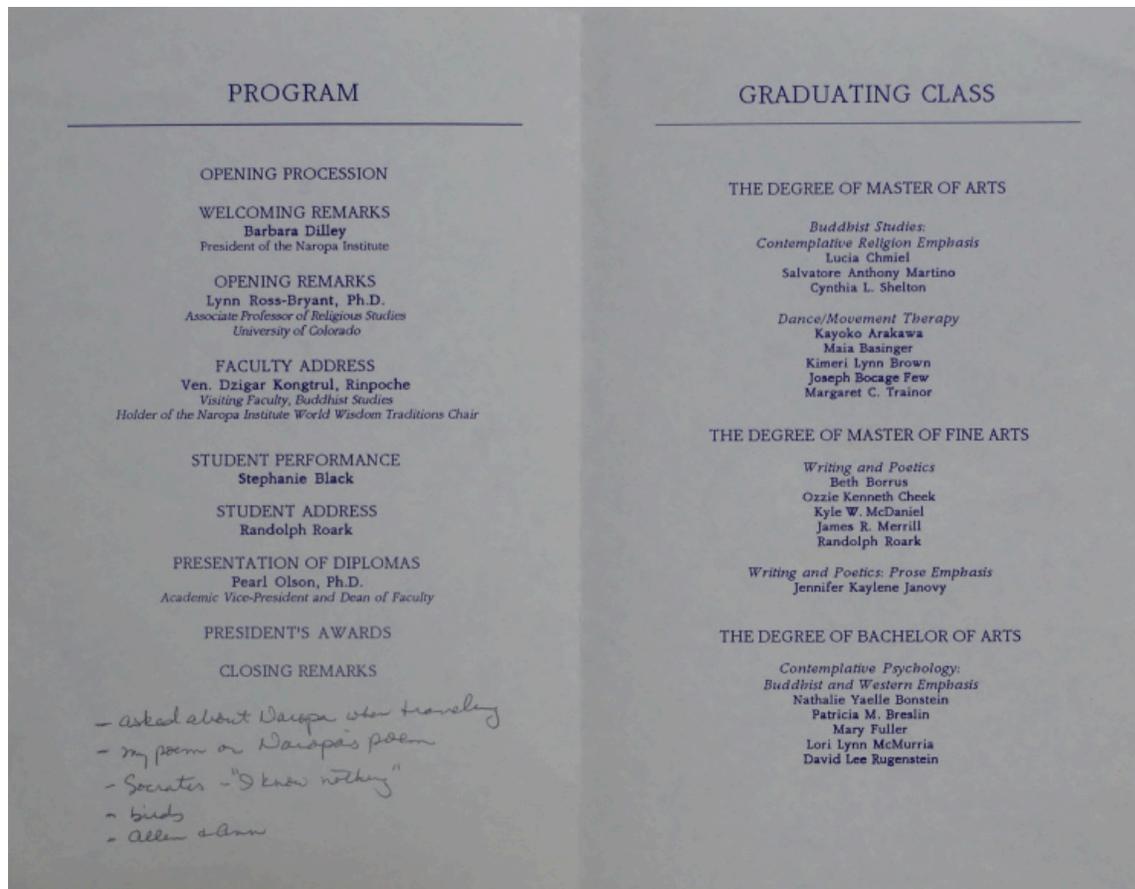
There was one moment at the very beginning of our relationship that was almost mystical for me. We were walking up the steep stairwell from Pearl Street to the Naropa mailboxes in the first few days of our work together and I was walking on Allen's left and his left foot slipped and he slid toward me and I caught him with my right arm before either of us really knew what was happening and I stood my ground. It surprised us both and Allen took a moment to stop and look at me like he was seeing me for the first time.

And in some indefinable way in that I think our relationship was either cemented or defined in that moment.



Boulder Daily Camera newspaper photo of the Naropa Graduation, 1983. Joe Richey, super-posture. Randy Roark (on his right, the guy chewing on his flower, the guy who belongs to the knee) not so much.

One time I asked Allen about a scroll he had hanging outside his kitchen in Boulder. He told me it was the “Prajnaparamita Sutra”—it’s known as “The Diamond Sutra” in English. Then he recited a piece of it in Sanskrit, which he then translated, his hands in the air in front of his, as if he is conjuring from a text: “All composed things are like a dream, / a phantom, a drop of dew, a flash of lightning.” Then to make sure I got it, he acted it out for me. “You know that passage in Kerouac where he’s staring into the bakery window, and he’s starving and he doesn’t have any money? He can see the pastries—they’re only separated by a thin sheet of glass he could break if he tried to—but he knows that he will never know those pastries, no matter how hungry or deserving he is. And yet their scent has woken in him a hunger for what he cannot have. The “Prajnaparamita Sutra” is warning us that that’s what human life is like.”



1991 Naropa Graduation Program with Cynthia's handwritten notations on my talk: "asked about Naropa when traveling"; "my poem or Naropa's poem"; "Socrates: I know nothing"; "birds"; "Allen and Anne."

But there were also ways in which Allen and I were just fundamentally different. For example, I'm an introvert, and proud of it. But if a scene or a party or a class was getting too complacent or dull, Allen would break the boredom by doing something outrageous. I remember one party in Jane Faigao's back yard where I was talking to someone and there was a commotion and a lot of yelling and skin flashed by and I looked over and it was Peter and Allen and Gregory running naked through the party. The funny part was that no one paid any attention to them, other than a glance to see if that was really Allen Ginsberg running naked through the party, followed by Peter and Gregory. And it was and we went back to our conversations. But it did wake everyone up for a moment. Everyone thought, at least I did, if only for a second, Should I take my clothes off and run through the party as well? If not here, now, when? People like me who had never thought that thought, thought that thought that night, and a choice was offered to us that for me has never come again: Is tonight the night I'll remember all my life as the night I ran naked through Jane Faigao's backyard with Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky, and Gregory Corso? But, see, that's it; I'm not Allen Ginsberg. I'm never going to do that because I don't want to. But I'm glad that Allen did. I can still bring up that image of Allen's hairy back from over thirty years ago and it still makes me smile.



Underneath the title, Allen wrote, "What, me worry? Dummy Dimwit Buddha om a hum." Could this be the largest book inscription ever? Allen Ginsberg: *Photographs* (14" x 22").

And I'm coming to realize recently how important it's been to my writing that Allen taught that poetry could transmit actual states of consciousness and emotion. The idea is that if a poem is written while experiencing a particular emotion—such as ecstasy in the last stanza of Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind"—it will retain something of the original

experience preserved in its vocabulary, its rhythms, its imagery, as well as its sentiment. But for Allen, sentiment was secondary; the rhythms in the words that rise up in us without thinking when overcome by an emotion were what would trigger the same emotion in the listener. And for Allen the most important aspect of the original emotion was the breathing rhythms recreated in the length of the phrases and the punctuation of any poem written while under the possession of any genuine emotion. For Allen a poet's commas were more than punctuation—they were instructions for breathing. So as a poet you were doing much more than writing a poem; you were repaying attention with genuine emotion, and transmitting it to the human on the other end of the poem. Allen knew he responded as a child to emotions in poetry before he had ever experienced the emotion itself. But having experienced the physical sensations associated with that emotion recreated in a poem, he could recognize them in real life, and experience them more deeply, with more awareness, and try to capture them in poetry in the moment. That's why it was important to get the breathing and the rhythms exactly right—or it'd just be another intellectual exercise—nothing real would be woken up in the listener.

Allen would demonstrate this at least once a year by arranging a choral reading of the last stanza of Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind." All the new students would gather with the veteran students and Allen would instruct us on proper breathing, the importance of precise enunciation of our vowels and snapping our consonants. Vowels are like sails, you fill them with air. Aaaaaiirrrrr. If a word ends with a consonant—con-SO-nanT—pronounce it! Then he would teach us how to stand with proper posture—erect but relaxed, feet firmly planted on the earth—and on the count of four we enunciated clearly and loudly the poem in unison while Allen instructed us from the front, breathe only at commas!

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is;
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies (Keep going!)

Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe (No breathing!)
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an extinguished hearth (Good!)
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawakened earth (Yay!)

The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

And we'd get high. The more you put into it, the higher you got.



Randy reading, Penny Lane, 1989. Art by Julia Connor.

Allen also taught that Euripides and the ancient Greek dramatists would go to the marketplace and listen to people arguing, and later use those same rhythms when they wanted to write for Medea as she was cursing Jason, say. And if Euripides wanted to write words for Agave after she realizes the bloody head in her lap is her son's, he would listen to the women keen over the burial of a son who has died too young. These meters then got codified and carted off by the Romans, but the Romans didn't realize their proper uses and would write any kind of poem in any fashionable meter. Poems became technical exercises, word puzzles, and the original uses were lost. Poetry's roots in the human voice were lost, of communicating truth by communicating the actual experience of what is true. And finally, poetry's connection to music was lost when it was converted to the page. So if you need to explain Allen's poetry, that's a pretty good start: to reclaim

the poet's voice, to speak truth in order to wake the truth up in others, and to return poetry to its musical roots.

Allen also found in mantra a spiritual philosophy that believed that sound—especially poetry—could be an agent for transformation in the speaker and the listener. But Allen's deepest roots were in the Norton anthologies and not the *Bhagavad Gita*, so he was especially excited to find poets who believed in the incantatory power of verse, from Shelley to the Russian poets of the Stray Dog Cafe.

"So, You're A Poet" Productions Presents
A NIGHT AT THE STRAY DOG CAFE
AN 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION
RUSSIAN POETRY FESTIVAL
FEATURING THE POETRY OF
ANNA AKHMATOVA ALEKSANDR BLOK
SERGEI ESSENIN VELIMIR KHLBNIKOV
OSIP MANDELSTAM
VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY
MARINA TSVETAEVA
and more



Stray Dog Cabaret (New Year's Eve, 1911).

FEATURING
KATIE AHEARN JIM COHN
JACK COLLOM ANSELM HOLLO
TOM PETERS KAYANNE PICKENS
PATRICK PRITCHETT SUE RHYNHART
JOE RICHEY RANDY ROARK
SHIRA SEGAL KAI SIBLEY
STEVEN TAYLOR ANNE WALDMAN
RICHARD WILMARTH BARBARA WILDER

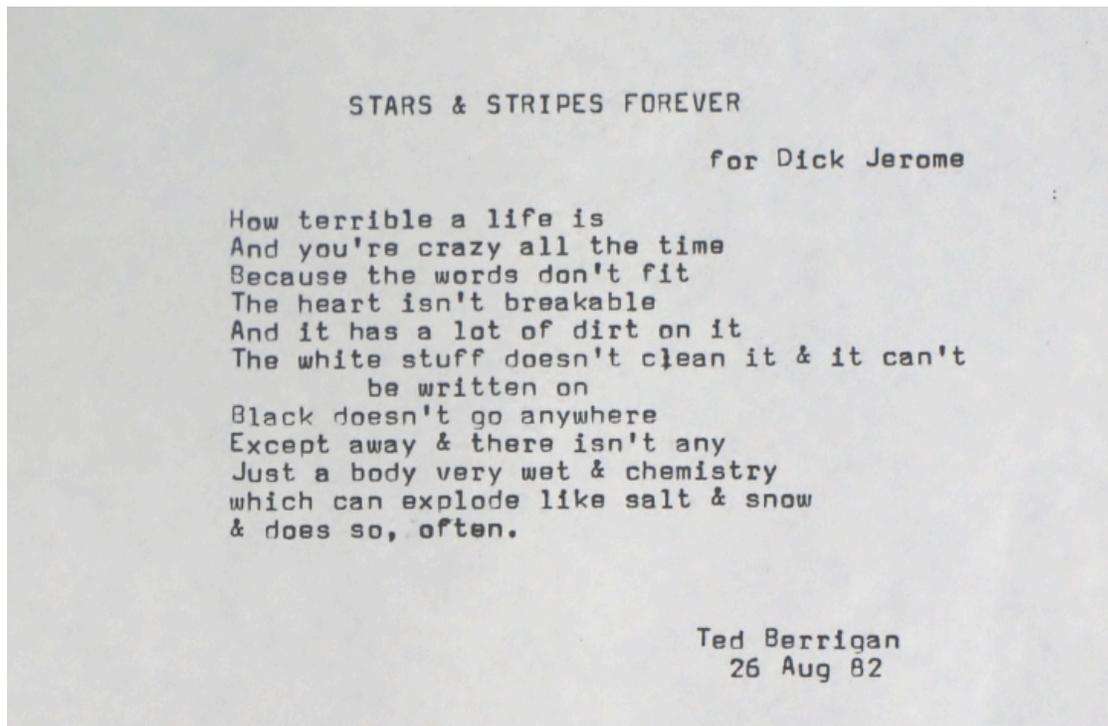
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 1997
8PM
PENNY LANE COFFEEHOUSE
18th AND PEARL
FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

This is the seventh in a series of performances produced by
Randy Roark for Dangerous And Difficult Art Productions.

A DADA Production.

While I was studying with Allen, this was more or less an intellectual concept for me. I worked in language, not in meter or rhythm or breathing. I wrote words to be read off the page, not read aloud. But about a year later I had an experience that would change the way I wrote and how I thought about writing.

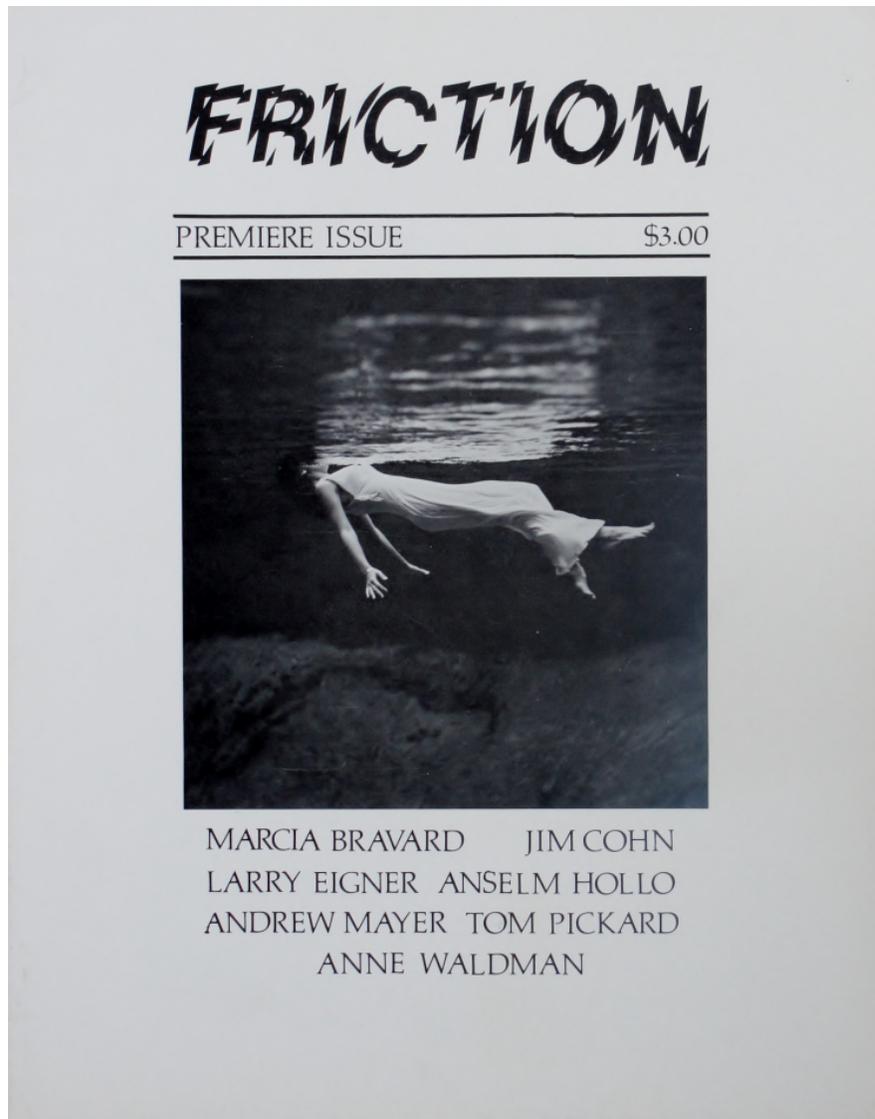
Ted Berrigan gave us a homework assignment that I'd completely forgotten until the last possible moment and, worse, I was headed out the door after a heated argument with my wife. So I sat down on our front porch and took out a pen and completed the assignment while I was still upset, my heart racing, my breathing shallow. The assignment was to describe a physical object—in my case an ash tree in our front yard—without using its noun. Then I rushed to class and waited my turn to read. I was still a little hot, a little nervous. My voice quivered. When I'd finished, Ted's mouth hung open, an unfiltered Chesterfield hanging from his bottom lip. "Wow," he said, the cigarette bobbing up and down, "you were really *angry* when you wrote that poem!"



If you publish a literary magazine, every once in a while you'll go to the mailbox and open an envelope full of brand-new poems addressed to you by someone like Ted Berrigan, written only months before his death.

What changed in my writing in that moment was in my realization that I didn't write that poem to communicate my anger, I wrote that poem to sketch a tree without using the word "tree." Yet what I communicated—at least to someone like Ted Berrigan—was my actual state of mind. The repercussions of this realization were devastating to my understanding of who was really writing my poems, and how to write them, and exactly what to do with everything I'd already written, but it was ultimately very good for the writing. I probably wouldn't still be writing if I used my intellect alone to write. I find the mysteriousness of large swaths of my work conducive to going back and re-experiencing my past in a new way, when most of the specifics are forgotten and I can see the larger picture, which is always impossible for me to see in the moment, or I see it differently

through the lens of what happens afterwards. Like an interview. For me each interview is the latest in a series of self-portraits. I'm always surprised by who shows up.

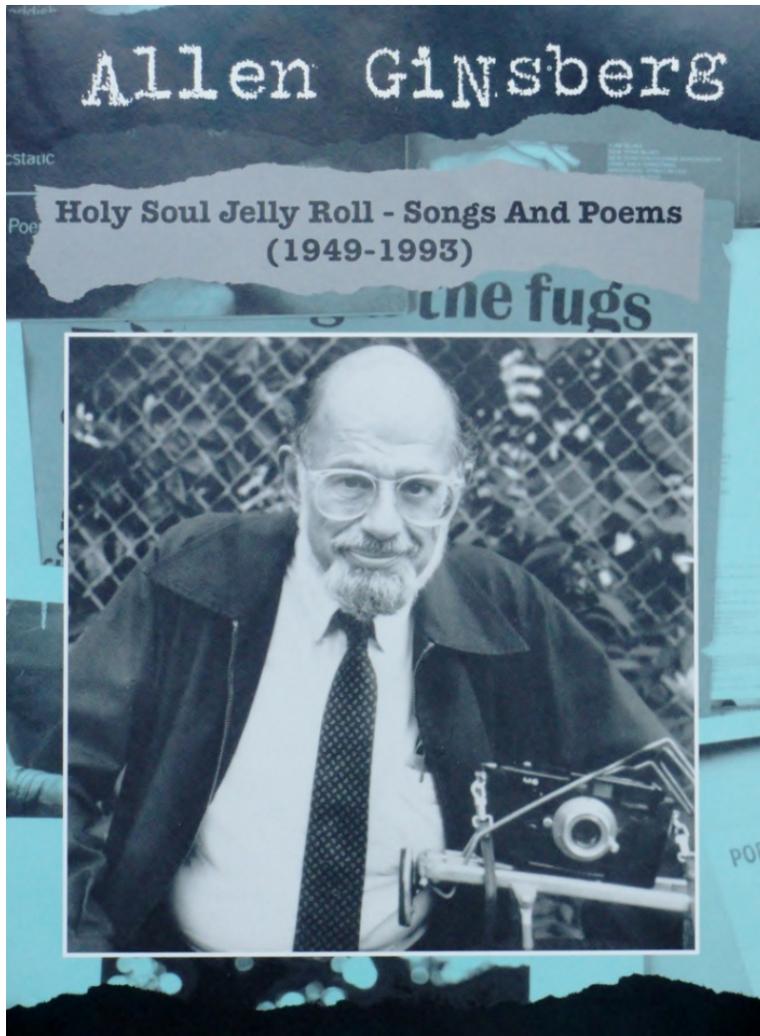


FRICTION, Issue #1, Fall 1982. *FRICTION* was my response to *Bombay Gin*, the official Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics publication. The slogan printed on the title page of the first issue was "We Matter!"

ML: *Which memory from Allen Ginsberg's adventures makes you smile?*

RR: One day I was driving him back from a doctor's appointment and he told me he was going to buy a bike and use it to get around Boulder. His Chinese doctor had encouraged him to get some exercise to rein in his high blood pressure. I laughed out loud. "You don't think I will? You just wait! One day I'll be riding around town and I'll stop by and

say hello!" I never saw him ride it, but there's a self-portrait he took with his camera attached to that bicycle's rack, I think.



The bicycle rack?

Oh, there's another time I've just remembered. It was at our last lunch together at the Golden Lotus Chinese restaurant in Boulder, Summer of 1996. At one point near the end of our meal, I noticed the waiter and someone else staring at our booth from the kitchen. Allen always carried his Indian bookbag with him, and he dressed a little different and looked different from normal people, plus he had a pretty famous face and was a long-time presence in Boulder, so if you were out with Allen, getting recognized was just part of the evening. After the kitchen conference, the waiter became overly solicitous and polite and after he left the table I asked Allen if he noticed it too. And he said, "Yah. Found out. Just ignore it."

When it was time to go, Allen gave the waiter his credit card. A couple of minutes later the waiter and the other person who was staring at us appeared at the table. The waiter introduced the cook, who shook Allen's hand, who said, "Did we have the pleasure of cooking and serving a Supreme Court Justice?" And Allen shouted, "No! I'm not that Ginsberg, I'm the other Ginsberg. I'm the anti-Ginsberg!"

ML: *Are there any memories from Allen Ginsberg which you'd like to share with us?*

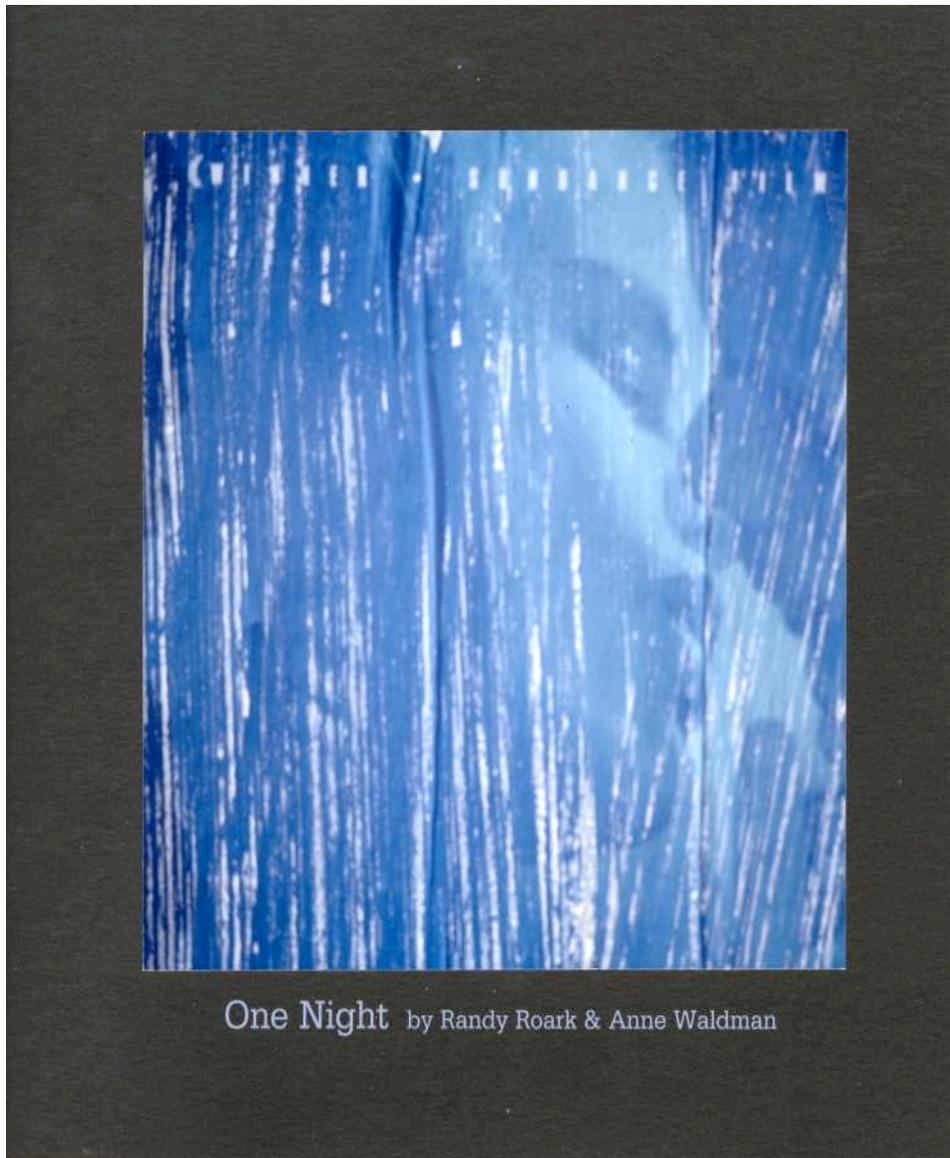
RR: I want to continue to use ones I haven't talked about before.

He was very protective and supportive of his stepmother. He would call her every weekend, even when he was traveling, and tell her all of the things that he'd been up to lately—some international honor, a new book, that he was interviewed in "New York" magazine or "Rolling Stone." And he would ask her about her life and make sure that all her needs were taken care of—was she eating well, had she been out, who visited, who wrote, who called? Then he'd catch up on all of the family and neighborhood gossip. He would put his feet up on the coffee table and pick at his teeth and talk to her at great length and laugh and joke with her—there was no sense of rush on Allen's part at all. The call would last as long as she wanted it to, and during that time she had his complete attention.

I loved to watch Allen cook. He would wear a bib that went over his neck and tied around his middle. Corso used to call him Granny Ginsberg. He made a great baked chicken with whole quartered onions and chopped carrots and celery and whole medium-size unpeeled potatoes and rosemary and garlic. When he took it out of the oven, it was an entire meal, everything ready at the same time, everything savory from the juices mixing together. And then after dinner he'd make chicken soup with the carcass and whatever was left over. But when Peter was there the kitchen was his. Peter did the shopping, he did the cooking, he did the cleaning, he answered the phone and the door. Allen paid the bills.

Allen didn't drink and he never had drugs in the house that I know of. But if you passed him a joint at a party he'd take a hit. He did get some LSD backstage from Bob Weir in Boulder in 1983 that he gave to me as payment for some work I'd done for him. I hadn't done any acid since I began meditating and I'd been meditating forever. They were black squares of blotter acid with a tetragrammaton in white in the center, surrounded by Arabic writing. It took me about seven days to decide to take one. I discussed it with my wife and took it after she went to bed.

That night I wrote my first long poem, composed of separate elements and separate incidents strung together solely by the fact that one entry followed another, without any effort to tell a single focused story. Yet to me there was a story, and it was more subtle and moving than any story I could make up on my own. For me it captured without trying something of time and the sense of time moving forward, never resolving, always changing, no rest, no ends, no beginnings. My poem ended when I went to sleep, but by then it's clear that any ending is completely arbitrary. And I was right.



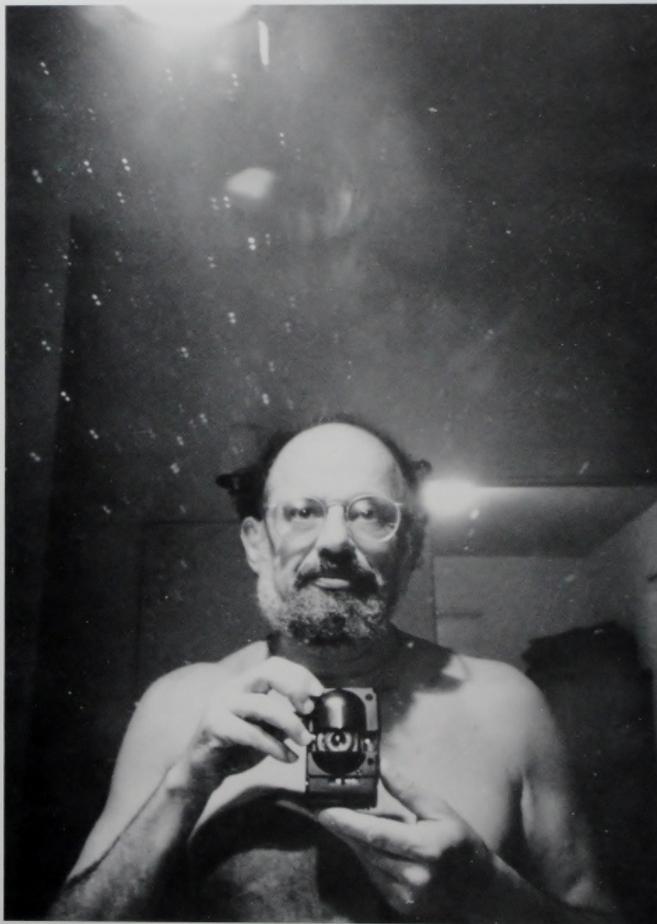
“One Night,” a poem written by me on LSD given to Allen Ginsberg by Bob Weir in 1983. Cover photo by Kai Sibley. Book design by Tree Bernstein, Nest Egg Books, 2001. Thanks Tree!

Allen would do a psychedelic once a year to—as he put it—“clean out the cobwebs.” There’s some famous photos of Allen naked, taking photos of himself in the mirror in Boulder in 1985. It was the last summer Ecstasy was legal and Bataán and Jane were getting rid of their little white pills at a party on Mapleton Hill where Allen was staying. When the drug began to take effect, Allen left the party and went upstairs to his room, undressed, and took photos of himself in the bathroom mirrors and wrote all night. Allen often had unpleasant experiences on psychedelics. I’m not sure why he persisted.

FRICTION

FRICTION 9

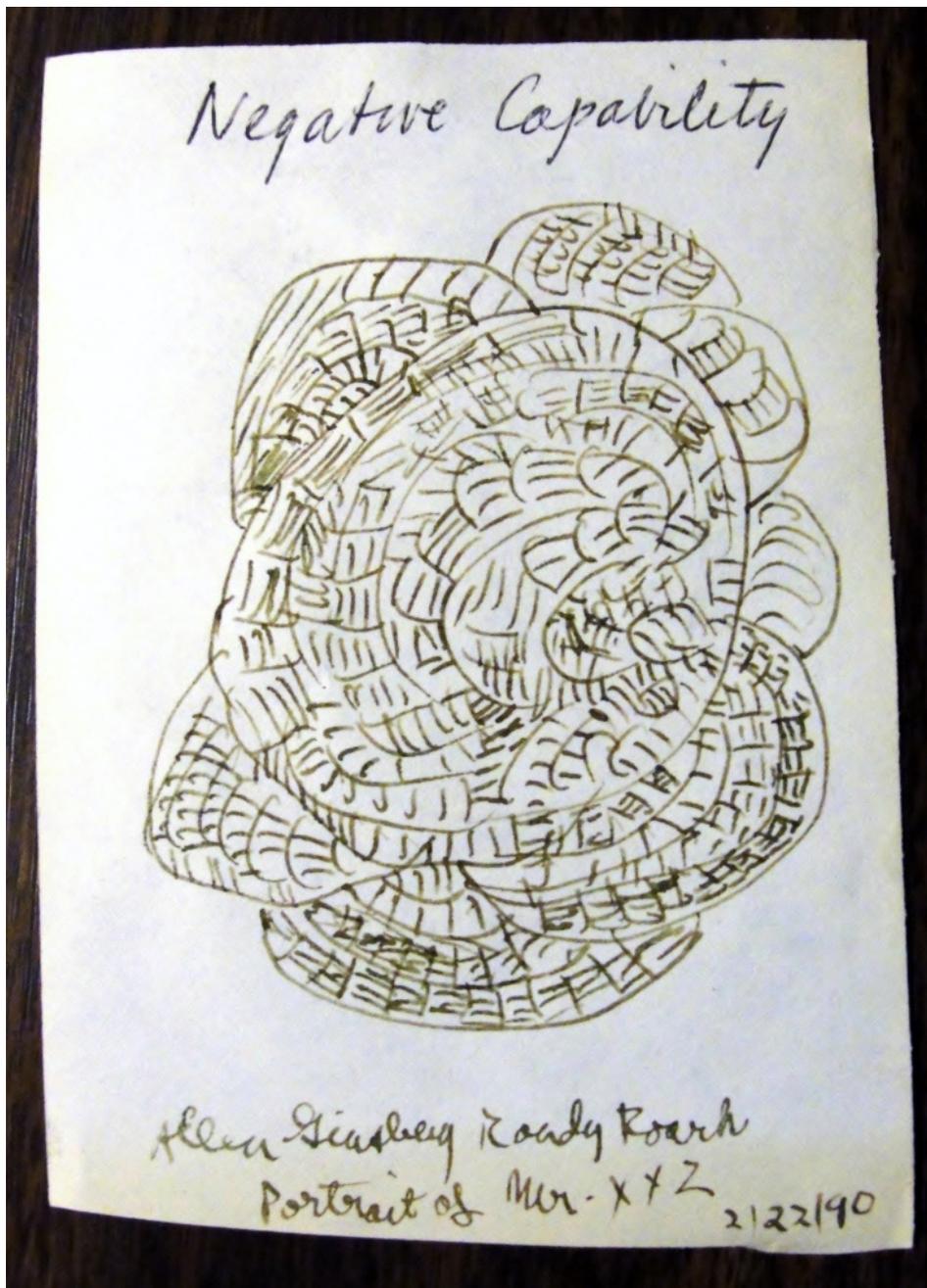
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Self-Portrait 8/1/85 Allen Ginsberg

One of the Ecstasy self-portraits, Boulder, Summer 1985.

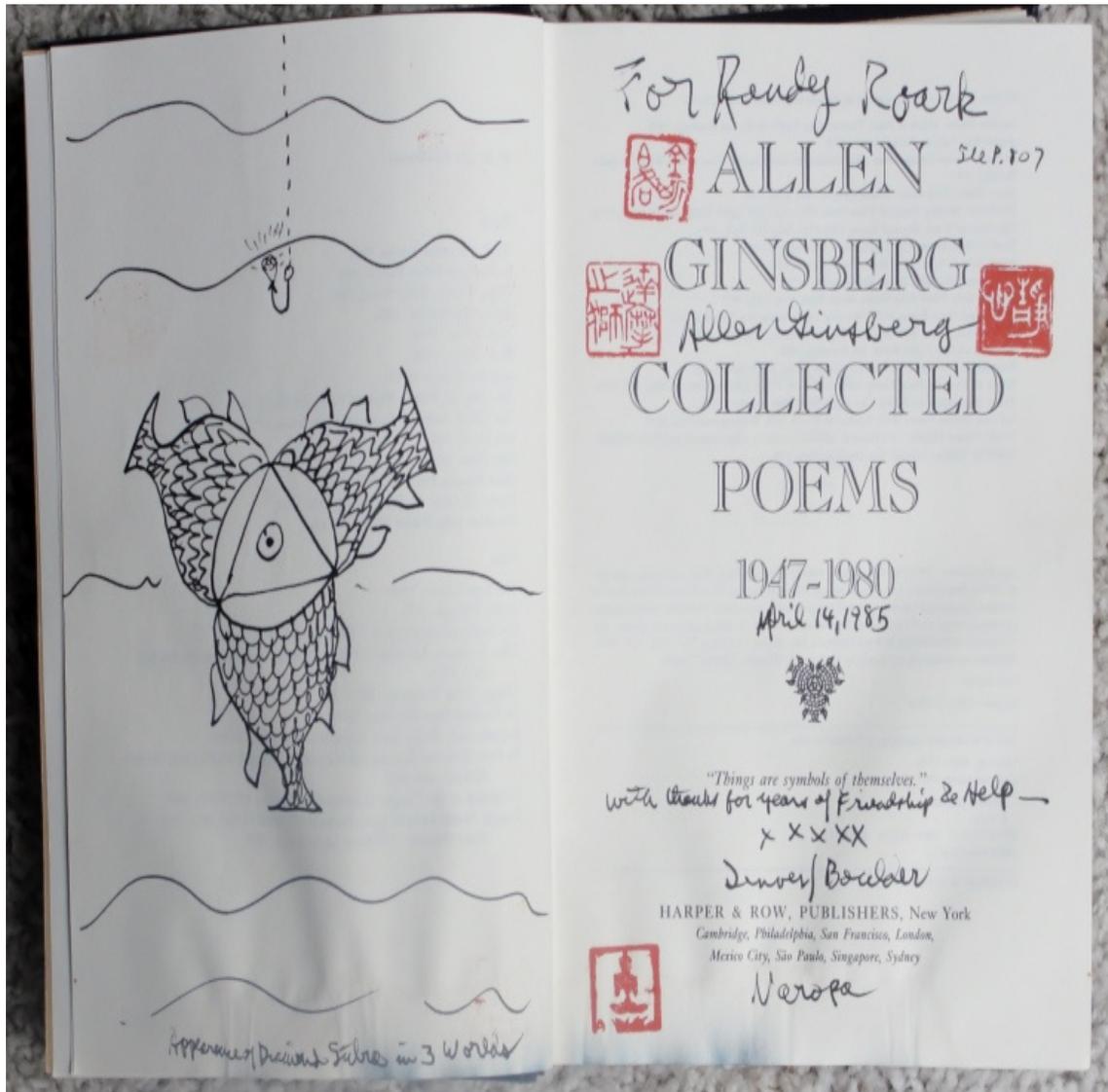
Allen always left his front door open—during summer days it was literally open—so people felt free to come and go. Often I'd come over and there'd be a dozen people in his living room and he'd have gone off to someone's empty apartment to prepare for his class. Every summer on the last day before he left town I would bring over three books—no more and no less, my limits not his—and put them on his dining room table and he'd pick them up and doodle on them while we made plans for what happens next.



“Negative Capability / Portrait of Mr. XYZ”—a doodle while having lunch at The Lotus Pavillion, Boulder, Colorado, 2/20/90.

He's the only man I've ever kissed on the lips. He never hit on me, never did anything suggestive, never misbehaved toward anyone in my presence. But we would kiss on the lips when we said hello and goodbye. Mouth closed and eyes open. It was sweet and quick and scratchy and I liked it. It seemed more manly than shaking hands or hugging.

One of my favorite memories comes from 1985, when I was driving Allen back to Boulder from a booksigning for his *Collected Poems* at the Tattered Cover in Denver. I was going through a divorce at the time and very raw. That afternoon he had drawn the appearance of the Diamond Sutra in the Three Worlds on the title page of my copy of his *Collected Poems*.



Appearance of Diamond Sutra in 3 Worlds.... See P. 807.

On the way to the booksigning I was trying to convince him that I was in hell. No, you're not, he said. You've got a good job. You've got a nice car. You speak too lightly of being in hell for anyone actually *in* hell, he said.

Horvitz, Lydia Link, William Monroe, Joe Montebello, and Dolores Simon provided essential sympathetic skills.

Kenneth A. Lohf, Director of Manuscripts and Rare Books, Bernard Crystal, Assistant Director, and Mary Bowling, librarian in charge of manuscripts at Special Collections Division, Butler Library, Columbia University, preserved author's papers since 1968. Librarians at Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, conserved letters and notebooks useful in assembling manuscript.

Various typescripts were assembled at Naropa Institute's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics by apprentice poets Walter Fordham, Jason Shinder, Sam Kashner, Helen Luster, Denyse King, Gary Allen, Alice Gambrell and Randy Roark among others, 1974-83.

Gordon Ball and Miles editing notebooks, journals and bibliographic papers retrieved texts and aided relatively precise chronology of poems.

Bill Morgan's bibliographic survey of author's work-spaces and Columbia Special Collections made possible ordering and retrieval of many writings in early script and book forms. Raymond Foye edited appropriate images from photo archive.

Bob Rosenthal provided years of logistical support to author and fellow archive workers. Juanita Lieberman contributed many hours.

Parts of *Collected Poems* were written & assembled during periods of National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, N.Y. State Creative Artists Program Service, Inc., and Rockefeller Foundation grants to author.

It was only when Allen wrote "See P. 807" at the top of this page that I knew that he had credited me and the other apprentices who had worked with him on his *Collected Poems*.

This would be my last summer as Allen's assistant in Boulder. I couldn't seem to hold anything together that year. I had decided I had no choice but to walk away from Naropa and start over at the same time my marriage was dissolving. My wife and I had lived together since we were eighteen. She was the only adult relationship I'd ever known. So I was losing not only my professional identify in Boulder but also my social identify as well, along with a life centered at Naropa for the last five years, and any friends who were more my wife's than mine. And I was extremely aware that I had nothing to replace them. I felt like I was stepping off a burning plank. At the time it seemed the lesser of two evils.

At this point I'd been in pretty intensive psychotherapy to figure out what went wrong in my marriage so it would never happen again, and my therapist was encouraging me to speak up more about what I was actually feeling in the moment, to take more chances, and I was feeling grateful to Allen for all that had happened in the previous five years. I had no idea whether we would ever work together again but it was unlikely. So I waited until I was driving him home after the reading and said, "Allen, I want you to know how important you are to me and how much you mean to me and how much I've learned from you and how grateful I am that you were willing to open your life to me. The time I spent with you is the most important period in my life and probably always will be. And that

was all made possible by your willingness to allow me into your life and I want you to know how much I love you and how much I'm aware of and appreciate what you've done for me and what you mean to me and what you'll always mean to me." Allen yelled, "I don't want your love! Someday you'll realize I'm a schmuck just like everyone else and you'll make me pay for your 'love.' I refuse your love! You can't even see me! I'm just a screen you project all of your fantasies onto about a good daddy so you can feel all of those emotions you want to feel. But I deny your love! I *reject* your love!" And he sulked and turned away.

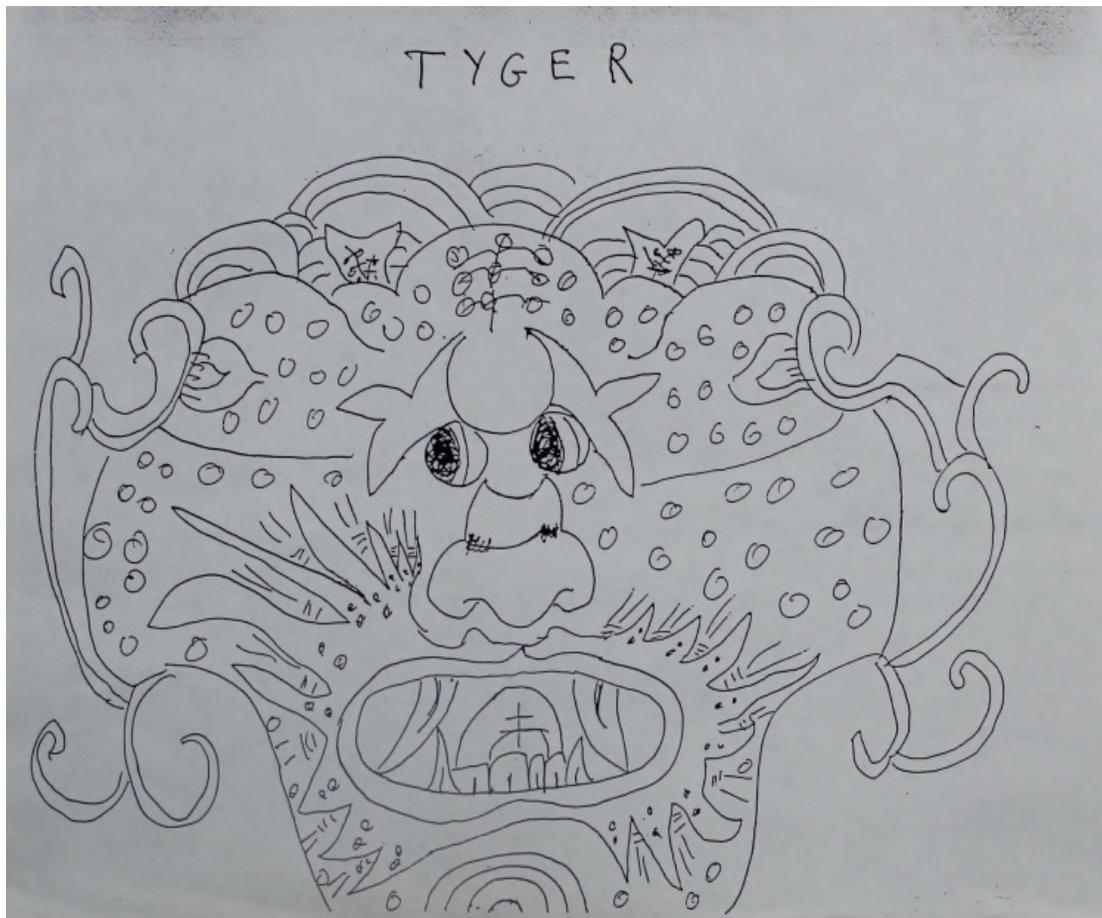
I was shocked into silence. I felt shamed and embarrassed. And then I surprised us both by saying, "That's your problem." "What's my problem?" "Your problem is that someone just told you that they loved you and that's your response. My problem is that I just told someone that I loved them and that's the response I got." From that point on, our relationship changed completely. It's like he adopted me.



Timothy Leary visiting Neal Cassidy in Cassidy's "Furber" bus, Millbrook 1964. I went up from New York with the bus to introduce it to Leary's environs. ReMarkingberg For Randy Roark with thanks for all his sympathetic company. A.G. 8/11/85

My retirement gift from Allen. He knew I was a Neal Cassidy fan, most of all. "For Randy Roark with thanks for all his sympathetic company." On the way home from Allen surprising me with this at my retirement "party," I got into a bike wreck that broke my nose in three places, and when I got home from the emergency room, my wife told me she wanted a divorce. All of that happened in less than four hours.

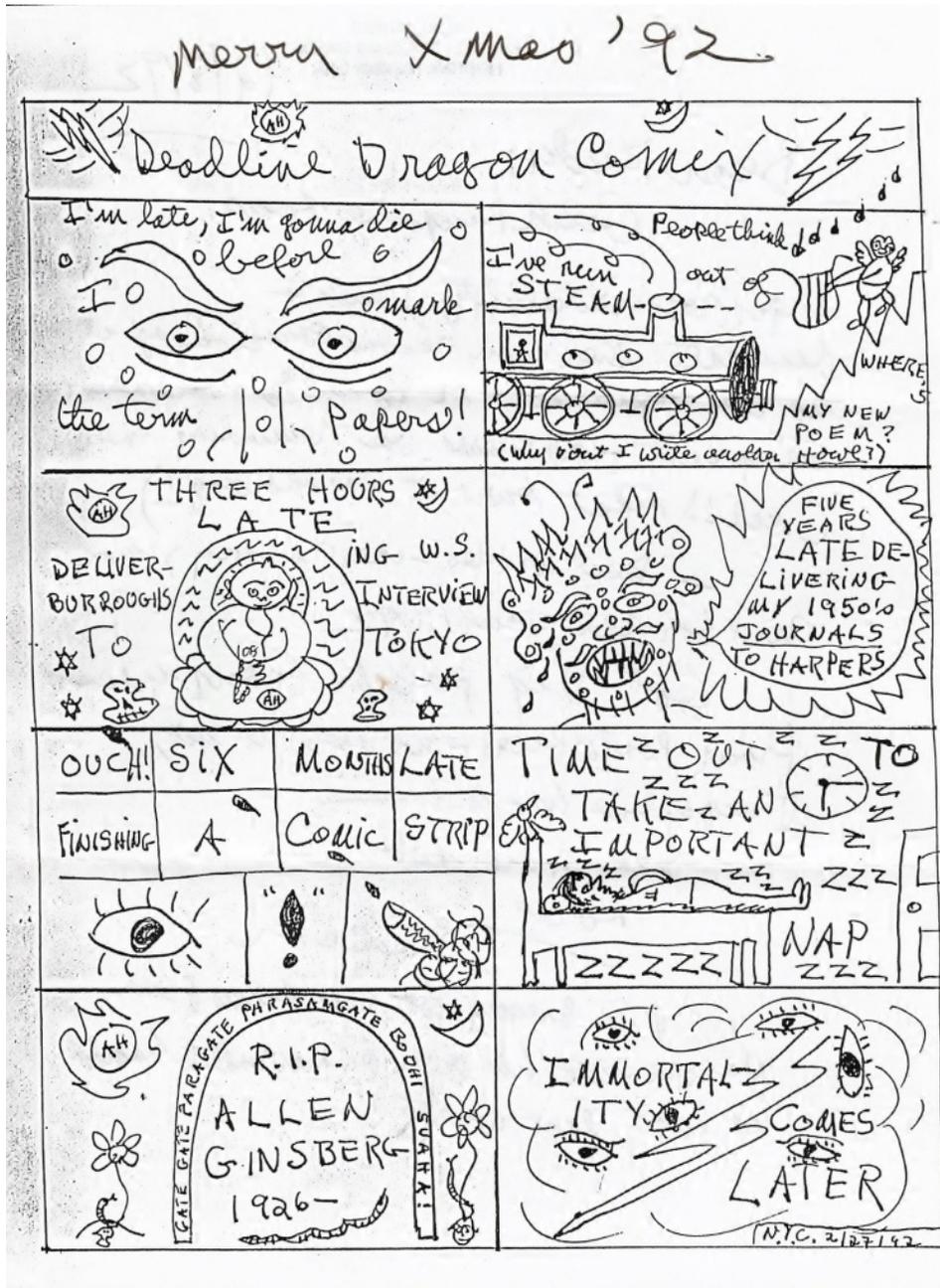
I think I was able to stay away for more than a year, but not two. Anyway, one night I got up and went to Allen's reading and Allen was on stage, doing a soundcheck when he saw me sitting third row center. He put down his harmonium, hopped off the stage, and pushed the chairs aside and I stood up and he hugged me and said, "Where have you been? I've been looking for you. I have some work you might be interested in. What are you doing after the reading? Can you drive me to the party?" And we were back in business. From then on we found ways to work together until the end. First it was to turn his lectures on Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience* into a manuscript. Then he wanted the Literary History of the Beat Generation lectures transcribed and turned into a book. Later I dreamed of doing a book based on the trip he took to China in 1985.



An illustration by Allen for a projected book based on his lectures on Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*, including his musical settings for each of the poems.

One time he told me he wanted to return to Columbia incognito and study astronomy. I told him that would look great on his resume and in the news. The only part I questioned was the incognito part. It wasn't going to be possible for one thing. And why hide who he

was? Why not be proud? Allen said, no, I can't, I'm Allen Ginsberg. And I said, what does that mean? That Allen Ginsberg can't go back to school to study astronomy if he wants to? Who made that rule? No, I need to be Allen Ginsberg. Naropa needs me, Brooklyn College needs me. I have obligations. It'd be impossible.



Merry Christmas, 1992.

His last year, before anyone knew he was sick, Allen was complaining about being tired more than usual. I immediately thought it was the “everybody needs me” thing so I encouraged him to do a personal writing retreat at Cherry Valley. What if he got sick? Naropa would muddle through. Brooklyn would find a replacement. He’d replaced Ashbery at Brooklyn College, who had better things to do. Diane got away. Other people could fill in for his responsibilities, but no one else could write his poems. No, he said, you have no idea how primitive things are out there, how difficult. He would need help. I’d help, as much as I can. But it never happened. I think he actually got energy from his constant social life in New York City. Everyone wanted to meet him, including the next generation, including Ethan Hawke and Bono and Beck. It must have been the cancer sapping him. He used to wear me out when he lived in Boulder. It seemed like that as long as the party kept changing locales he gained momentum as the night wore on. And it wasn’t alcohol—he didn’t drink. And it wasn’t drugs. He just enjoyed being alive more than anyone I’ve ever known.

ML: *What is the “feeling” you miss most nowadays from Allen Ginsberg?*

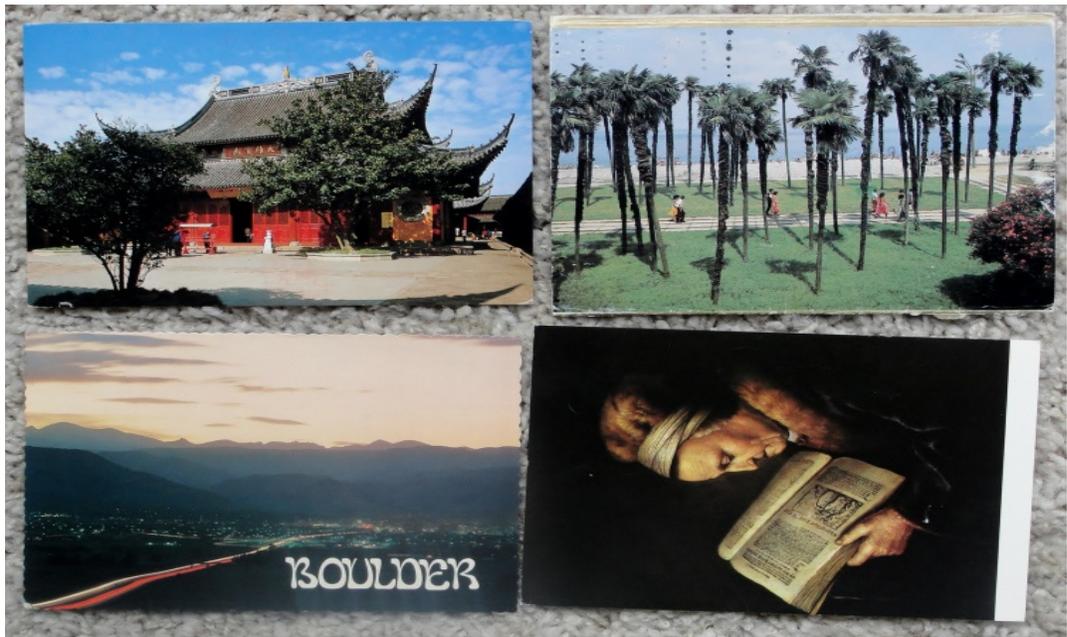
I miss talking to him on the phone in the middle of the night. He knew I’d be up late and some nights he had trouble sleeping and he’d call and we’d talk until he’d begin to yawn. I miss being able to sit in on his poetry classes. I miss transcribing his lectures. I miss reading about Allen in the news. I miss when Allen would get involved in some new project and he would dictate a list of things for me to do. I liked seeing him every spring and summer when he came to town. I miss how excited he was about everything. I wish Allen was still alive. I miss having to call him for some reason or other and then talking about whatever came into our heads for an hour or more. I miss getting postcards from him when he was traveling, just to say hi. Just knowing Allen seemed to make my life worthwhile.



Postcards from Allen Ginsberg #1, front.



Postcards #1, reverse.



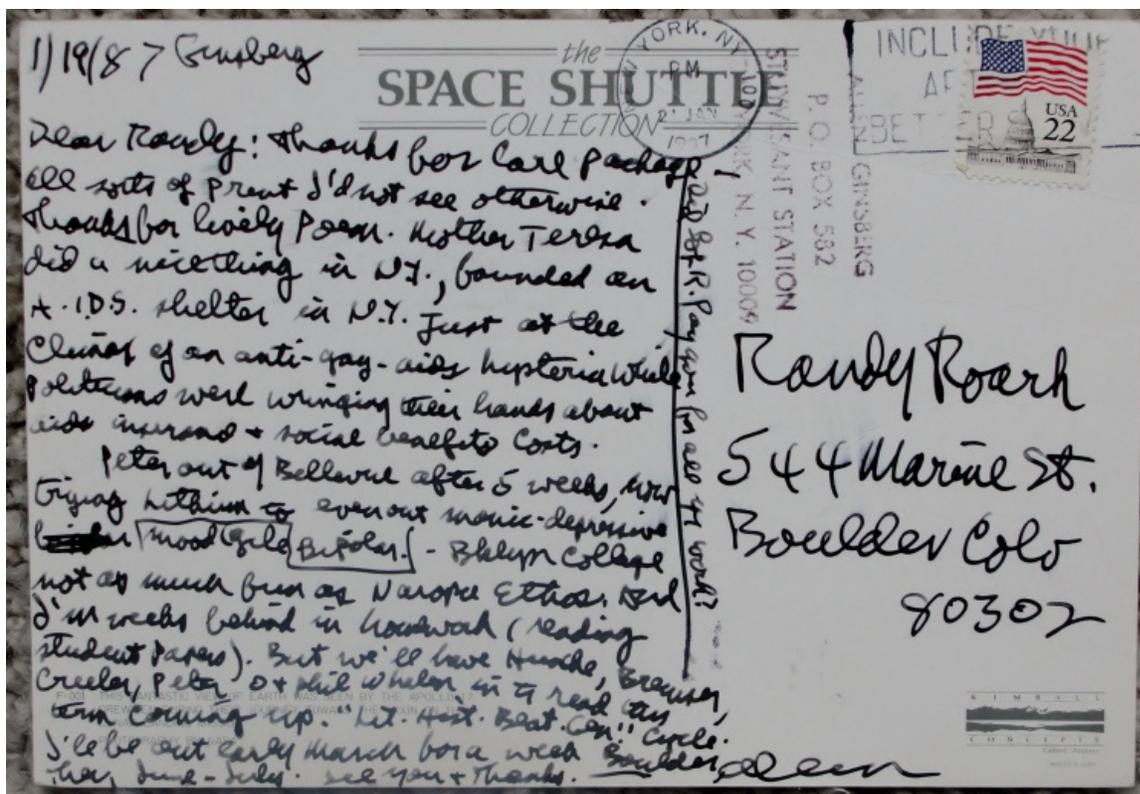
Postcards from Allen #2, front.



Postcards #2, reverse.



Postcards #3, front.



Postcards #3, reverse.

[Editor note: Transcriptions of postcards (below), in chronological order, were provided by Peter Hale at The Allen Ginsberg Project, October 18, 2013. See <http://ginsbergblog.blogspot.com/2013/10/randy-roarks-postcards.html>.]

P.O.Box 582 Stuyvesant Station N.Y.10009 April 23, 1983 (Amster)dam
 Dear Randy, Thanks for the marvellous tape, I've listened all through it, the [Mick] Jagger is clear and real Blues oomph, Dylan's Mixed Up Confusion's new to me, & the [Phil] Spector [Leonard] Cohen tape I've never heard before - don't remember hearing it anyway. I absolutely liked [double- underlined] the Friction Kerouac Festival issue. thought it was great. I had 4 minutes of self-recrimination laid temporarily on you when I examined my own letter and found I hadn't edited it to my satisfaction but that was a brief fit of ego and not your trouble. I gave my copy to Phil Whalen. I was so proud of the issue. I'll see you May 1 - o.k. see you May 1 - I'll fly in – Allen

4/24/83 NYC - Dear Randy, Whilst I can remember - for your poet's issue - see Christopher John Holda (Holda) or Chris Holda 2322 West Eastwood, Chicago, Ill(inois) 60625 for his book "Invasion at a Distance" and Steve Kowitz, 1868 Ebers Street, San Diego, California 92107. Jonathan Robbins has also replied, I'll have his address soon (he's in Israel) - all this for *Friction* later - Allen Ginsberg [maybe look at Gerry Rizza's poems too?]

NYC 9/13/84 -Dear Randy - Yes, send on tapes, index and a bill whenever you can - (Barry) Miles is ready to work with it - send them to me I leave for China via L.A & S.F. Oct(ober) 1 - Saw Anne W(aldman) tonite at showing of 50 min(ute) Janet Foreman Kerouac '82 film, like talking heads, Gregory [Corso] always fine. Tell Francis I saw Nicanor Parra tonite (at the film) and will read his translations here on the 24th. Nicanor asked after him. I'm fine. Thanks for articles. Did MTV of Father Death at ghostly Ellis Island - You OK? - Send me the Bill. OK - Allen

December 16, Nanjing-Shanghai train, 1984 [sic]

Dear Randy, Shaky hand on train desk - been down river Yangtze thru "Three Gorges" on a steamer - up to grey smogged industrial provinces teaching in hick college, eager students - Cultural Revol(ution) was universal disaster, books burnt, temples vandalized, industry stopt [sic], laboratories destroyed, 20,000,000 sent to country & camps, now new "4 modernizations" lifts the weight, some relaxed freedom. Merry Xmas. Happy New Year. Love Allen Ginsberg

Dear Randy, & Happy New Year to you - Answering mail 6 AM 1/7/86 - Allen G

1/19/87 Ginsberg

Dear Randy - Thanks for care package - All sorts of print I'd not see otherwise. Thanks for lively poem. Mother Teresa did a nice thing in N(ew) Y(ork), founded an A.I.D.S. shelter in N.Y. Just at the climax of an anti-gay-aids hysteria, while politicians were wringing their hands about aids insurance and social benefits costs.

Peter [Orlovsky] out of Bellevue after 5 weeks, now trying Lithium to even out manic-depressive bipolar mood (gale) - Brooklyn College not as much fun as Naropa Ethos and I'm weeks behind in homework (reading student papers) but we'll have [Herbert] Huncke, [Ray] Bremser, [Robert] Creeley, Peter O(rlovsky) & Phil Whalen in to read this term coming up - "Lit(erary) Hist(ory) (of the) Beat Gen(eration)! cycle. I'll be out early March for a week Boulder then, June-July. See you & thanks - Allen

3/8/93 - Carl (Solomon)'s words the day before he died to Ted Morgan (whose March 30 birthday he shared) were "I'm expiring, but I have life insurance". I gave my notes of conversation the night before to *St Marks Poetry Project Newsletter* so they'll be available in a week or 2 - Thanks for card - Allen Ginsberg

11/26/93 - Olomouc, Czech Republic, U(niversity) of Palackeho [sic]

Dear Randy - Solo travel with a heavy canvas bag full of books, mss, reading copy-edited Poems 1986-92 to send back express mail this week. Bronchitis in Dublin kept me indoors in Oslo and Norse Coast cities - young listeners everywhere crowding poetry readings Berlin, Munich, Paris, Belgrad(e), Budapest, Vienna, Dublin (I did music video bit part at request of U-2's Bono) Belfast, etc. End of this week, I'll be in Prague at old haunt Cafe Viola + have date with (Vaclav) Havel before I leave for Barcelona. Saw Renaldo and Clara in Vienna (and Paris was it?) "I want you" - his voice in the fish restaurant where I'm lunching now - familiar minstrel energy! - as ever Allen (back in NY Noel)

P.O.Box 582, Stuyvesant Sta(tion), N.Y. 10009, NY [postmarked 2/11/94]

Dear Randy, Leaving for Paris and London tomorrow back mid-December. Peter Hale

accompanying as (secretary) as I'm short of breath, he has lap-top and modem. Underground Chinese poet is famous Bei Dao. I'll ask Bob (Rosenthal) to get you xeroxes of *Journals* in China. I got lots of photos (later). How far have you gotten in Naropa transcripts? up to what year? Who're you dealing with in office now? I guess Peter Hale when he returns. Hope you're well! - Love Allen



Allen Ginsberg. Artwork by Alex. B. Bustillo.

ML: *What's the legacy of all of Allen Ginsberg's legendary bohemian adventures, especially the spiritual ones?*

RR: I think the legacy of Allen's legendary bohemian adventures is how many of them are now considered mainstream. He was part of the authoring of a new vision of humanity and it became true. The world is post-Ginsberg, post-Beat. On every social issue I can think of that Allen cared about strongly, history has proven to be on his side.

And when you ask about his spiritual legacy, it's what ties all of his interests together: the potential to transcend in any way we can—even for a moment—the limitations that are imposed on us by our culture and upbringing and history and education and social gossip and language and become essentially and quintessentially ourselves—if just for a second, to blaze! After meeting Allen, there seemed an obvious choice to be made: what Thoreau described as a life of quiet desperation or Allen's life of total engagement. He made me ask myself, what would I be capable of if I believed in myself as much as he believed in himself? My answer is the *Decalogue*, and what's ironic is that Allen would never have had the patience to read the book that he's inspired.

Another difference between us, though, is that Allen's imagination went as far as a desire to attain transcendent wisdom, the truth behind appearances. That's not part of my agenda. I don't feel like I'd know what to do with transcendent wisdom. I'm most comfortable as a child of illusion. I have no vision for anything beyond that.

I've recently become very interested in the potential of conscious evolution, and this is a concept I first heard from Allen back in 1980, when it sounded like crazy science fiction. Allen said that he was taught in high school biology that "ontology recapitulates

phylogeny"—that the impregnated human egg goes through all the stages of evolution in embryonic form before it becomes recognizably human. We begin as a single-cell lifeform like the ones that began life on Earth. Then we divide, like the second step in evolution, but this time we become a two-celled organism. And then these two cells divide again and become four and then four become eight, and then cell differentiation begins, with some cells forming a circulation system to deliver oxygen and nutrients to the farthest cell, and a primitive brain stem and neural network form to connect them all. Then we form recognizable gills at one end and a tail on the other, and then the gills become lungs, and the tail becomes a vestige, and at that point we and the chimpanzee share almost identical genetic codes, until the last 2%, which is the genetic percentage that separates us from the chimpanzee.

ALLEN GINSBERG
P.O.B. 562 - STUYVESANT STATION
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10009 U.S.A. 12/8/92

Dear Reader;

Geleh Kumpoche Tsap

anger (or irritability) tends to
dissipate when you become conscious of it —
so too impatience — or ~~so~~ so becomes
transparent — so thanks for reminding me
(see! I didn't know it was showing!)

— Best wishes — here's my Xmas
card for all year 1992

Got Big package from you
from Postoffice — not seen it yet,
Jacqueline has it! —

See you soon —

Love
Allen

P.S. Gregory got his films from
Maropa into his own pink wrinkled hands
at last, last week!

Letter, #1.

So, Allen wondered, what if evolution didn't end with our birth? What if the next step in evolution was something that happened to our consciousness? And what if for the first time in history we could *choose* how we were about to evolve? We've already talked about how Allen believed that poetry could preserve and transmit genuine emotion, even in dark times. Now he saw a use for this power in a larger plan.

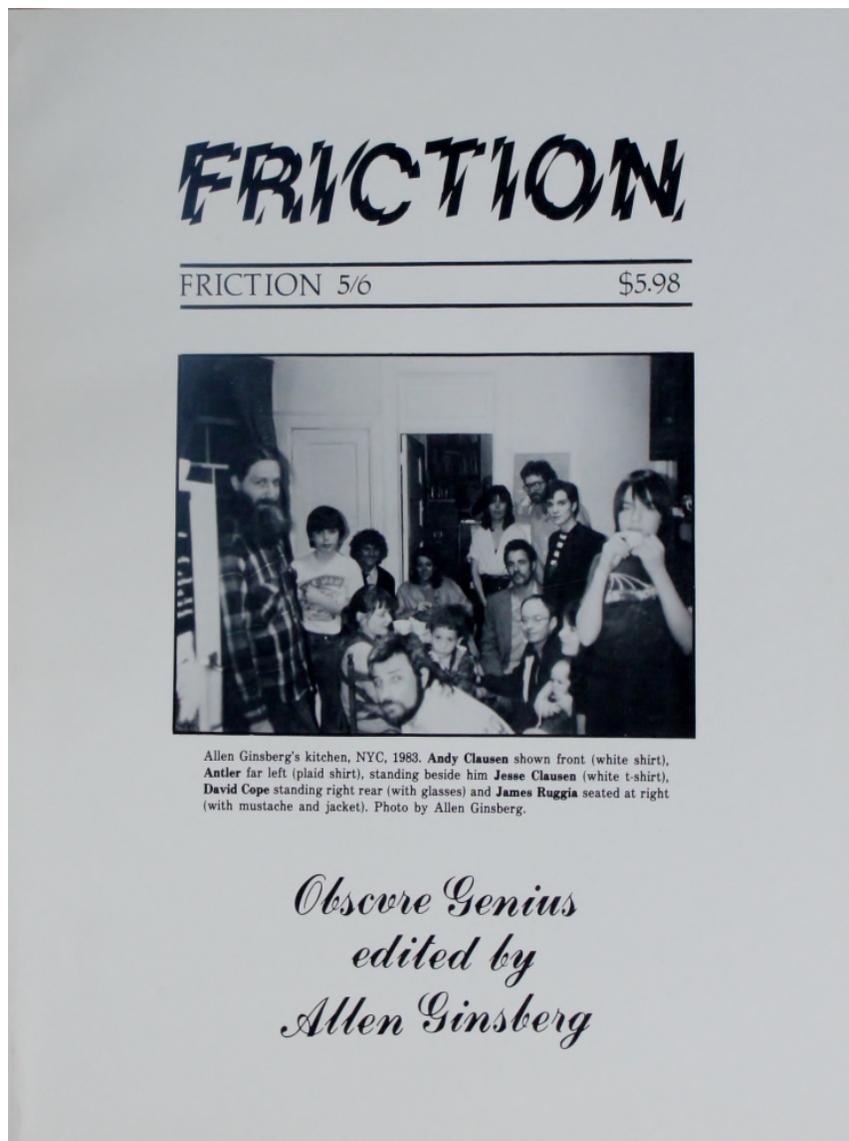
Allen had his vision of his audience redefined by Trungpa's and Whitman's visions, where they were speaking to generations in the future. They were casting their visions into the future. They were setting out the DNA for a revisioning of the future. He began taping all of his classes and interviews, of amassing an archive. He found that thinking of addressing generations yet unborn forced him to focus on his message and his language. Working with translators on his own poetry had taught him what was translatable and what was not. He had been refining his language and his presentation for almost a generation now. He knew that what he had done already with "Howl" was even more important than the poem itself: a poem written to friends with complete candor—believing it unpublishable—has become a part of the literary canon, and culturally means even more outside of the United States.



Immediately after Allen Ginsberg/Peter Orlovsky internment ceremony, conducted by Anne Waldman and Reed Bye, Shambhala Mountain Center, Red Feather Lakes, Colorado, August 28, 2010. From left to right: Joe Richey, Sue Rhynhart, Reed Bye, Peter Hale, Anne Waldman, Randy Roark, Andrew Schelling, and Jerry Aronson. Photo by Thomas R. Peters, Jr.

That's part of the reason why lineage was so important to Allen; he saw himself as part of something bigger than himself forwarding a specific agenda, picking up the poetry of Whitman and Williams and Reznikoff, and celebrating his many friends as fellow voices of particularly American verse. Who knew who his poetry would inspire sometime hence? It would certainly be as different from his work as his work was from Williams, and Williams' work was from Whitman's.

Another of Allen's legacies is his generosity. When he could he supported so many people—myself included. So many people around him benefited from Allen's good will. He used his celebrity to bring attention to younger poets and causes he believed in. He sacrificed personally for the good of others.



Allen Ginsberg's kitchen, NYC, 1983. **Andy Clausen** shown front (white shirt), **Antler** far left (plaid shirt), standing beside him **Jesse Clausen** (white t-shirt), **David Cope** standing right rear (with glasses) and **James Ruggia** seated at right (with mustache and jacket). Photo by Allen Ginsberg.

Obscure Genius
edited by
Allen Ginsberg

When I offered Allen an issue of *FRICTION*, he used it to celebrate "obscure geniuses."

ANTLER
RAY BREMSER
ANDY CLAUSEN
JESSE CLAUSEN
JIM COHN
DAVID COPE
VOJISLAV DESPOTOV
URIAH LEE HAMILTON
CHRIS HOLDA
MICHAEL IGOE
ELIOT KATZ
STEVE KOWIT
RIK McMONAGLE
ED MARSHALL
ROBERT MEYERS
JONATHAN ROBBINS
JAMES RUGGIA
MICHAEL RUMAKER
NANAO SAKAKI
CARL SOLOMON
STEVEN TAYLOR
ROBERT WALKER
RICHARD WARING

Reverse. The who of issue 5/6.

Allen also returned poetry to its oral and musical roots and saw immediately that the Beatles and Dylan were the most influential troubadours of all time. And of course there's his—impossible to believe this was ever necessary—rediscovery that Blake's

Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience were like a sheaf of Dylan's lyrics without the music. Allen would begin his readings with spontaneous songs on his harmonium, and end with a singalong of Blake's "Nurse's Song." I bet there are people who remember nothing more from one of Allen's readings than singing "All the hills echo'd" at the end.

Do not howl, voice of the
F Nurse's Song (1)

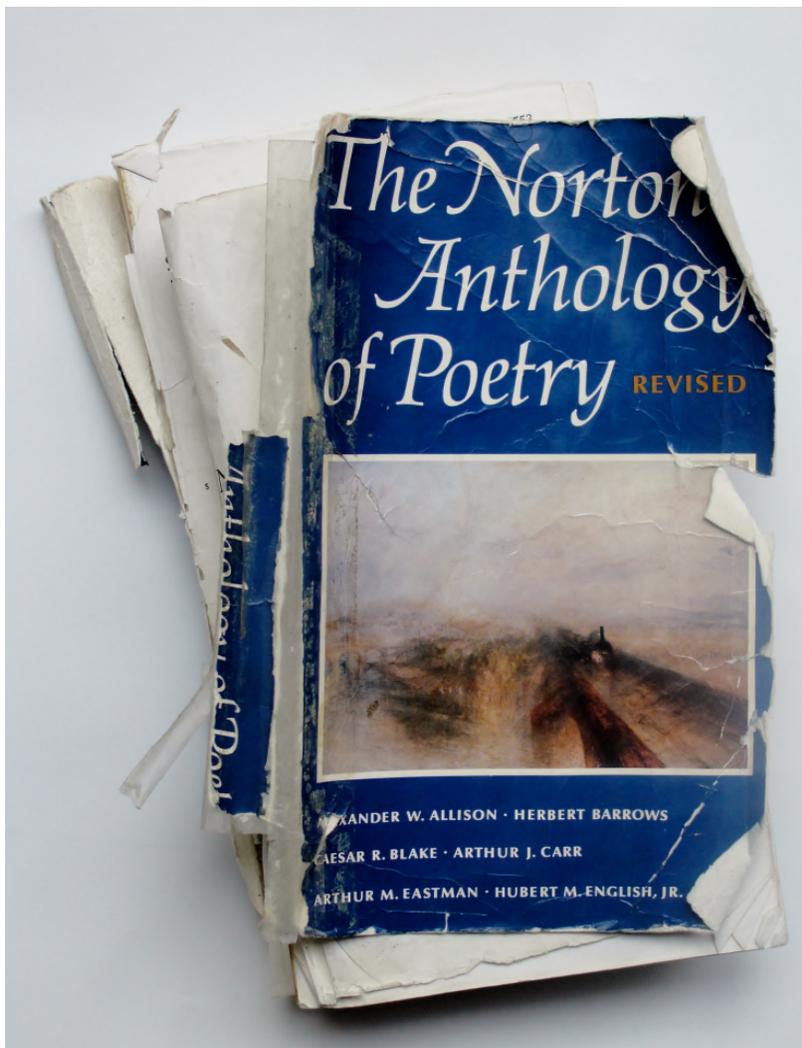
When the voices of children, are heard on the green and
and whispering in the dale: the
the deep of my youth rise fresh in my wind, my
face turns green and pale.

Form

Allen's handwritten sheet music for "Nurse's Song" intended for a book on Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*.

His most important poetic legacy that I brought with me to Boulder but he cemented in me was his love and respect for the oldest poems in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*. Students would come to Naropa expecting Allen to be teaching his own and his friend's poetry and preaching revolution and writing incendiary verse. They would find a humble, modest poet trying to remember what a gerund or a trochee is, setting a Medieval lyric to music for ninety minutes and then weeping, recalling a line from Shelley or Reznikoff or one of his own poems.

For me it was mostly by systematically reading deeply into the history of literature that I learned what that history was and where my work fits into it, so Allen's reverentially teaching so many poems from the first 250 pages of *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* probably had a deeper impact on me than any other literature class (other than Anselm Hollo's classes on European Poets and Dada).



The copy of *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* that I bought for Allen's "Basic Poetics" class, January 1980. P.S. I am good with my books.

And there was the apprenticeship, which was like poetry boot camp. It was really tough, but it whipped me into shape. Allen wasn't afraid to set what seemed to many a very high bar. Some of the apprentices didn't finish. Everyone, I imagine, got what they put into it."

NAROPA INSTITUTE

INSTRUCTOR'S NARRATIVE EVALUATION FORM

This form should be typewritten; use a carbon to make 2 copies.

STUDENT'S NAME Randy Roark LETTER GRADE A+

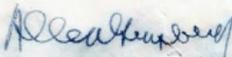
COURSE TITLE Apprenticeship # CREDIT HOURS 3

INSTRUCTOR Allen Ginsberg SESSION Winter 1980

1. How did you arrive at your letter and narrative evaluation (exam, class presentation, painting, etc.)?
Work together at my house and elsewhere. Textual problems, conversation, examination of his poems.

2. How would you describe your relationship to the student? Was the communication good, confined only to class, etc.?
Friendly, wholesome, mutually appreciative.

3. How would you describe the student's relationship to the course? Was there personal involvement, development of understanding, competence with the material? (Use back of page to answer if necessary.)
Absolutely total cheerful energy, enterprise, precision, derring-do, scholarship, helpfulness, tirelessness, patience, monumental labor. If I had six apprentices like him I'd get the Nobel Prize for hard work. His only difficulty is self-confidence with his own vivid impressions which are buried in awkward syntax.


INSTRUCTOR'S SIGNATURE

Allen's evaluation of me as an apprentice. Note: Winter 1980 cover the period January-March, 1980.

And even more important to me was the larger vision of Naropa Institute, and the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, and later the Summer Writing Program. I could spend the rest of my life paying homage to Trungpa, Allen, Anne, Diane, and everyone else responsible for the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics and Naropa Institute (now Naropa University) and still feel I haven't thanked them enough.

I also want to single-out Anne Waldman for coming back to Boulder in 1985 to resurrect the school after Barbara Dilley decided to suspend the year-round JKSoDP program because of low enrollment and low morale. Anne brought the school to life and it has survived—and thrived—ever since, now in its fortieth year.

I also want to publically thank Tom Peters. Without him, there would have been no Dangerous And Difficult Art Productions, no post-Naropa readings for me. I probably wouldn't still be writing. But I want to especially thank him as the host who has launched a thousand—and more—poets through his continuous 25 years—and more—hosting of Boulder's poetry open mic.

LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI
ANDREI VOZNESENKY*
WILLIAM BURROUGHS
MICHAEL Mc CLURE
ROBERT CREELEY
GREGORY CORSO
ALLEN GINSBERG
ANNE WALDMAN
ABBIE HOFFMAN
TIMOTHY LEARY
ROBERT FRANK
GARY SNYDER*
TED BERRIGAN
DIANE diPRIMA
DAVID AMRAM
and **MANY OTHERS**

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JULY 23 - AUGUST 1, 1982

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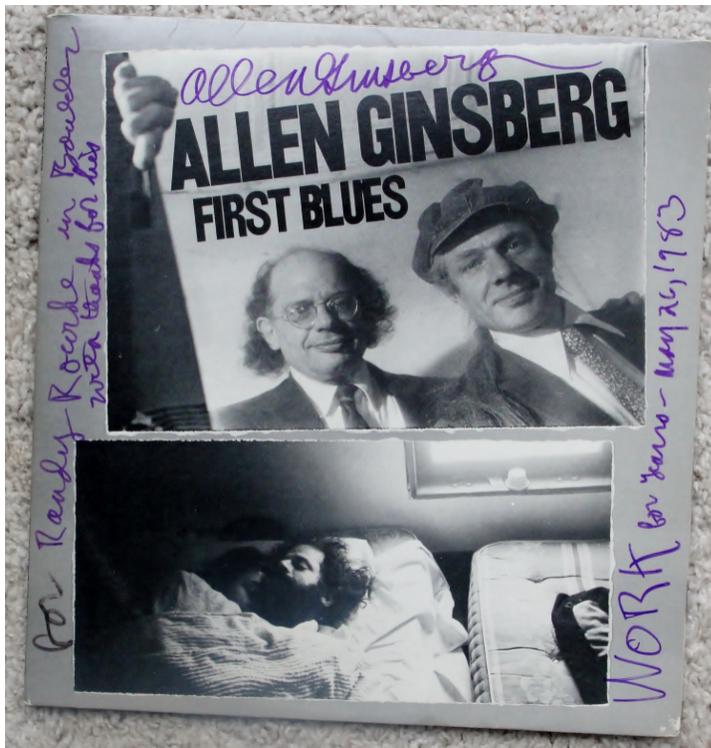
Co-sponsored by NEW AGE MAGAZINE and the Cultural Events Board of the University of Colorado. Partially funded by the Grateful Dead and a grant from the Colorado Humanities Program.



The On the Road Festival, Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, Boulder, 1982.

ML: Do you remember anything interesting about Ginsberg's record collection?

RR: I'm sure that most of his record collection remained in New York City. In Boulder he had one of those big fake woodgrain entertainment center cabinets with a record player and stereo speakers in it, something popular in the Sixties. He also had a portable record player he borrowed from the Naropa library and never returned, with detachable speakers in the lid. Nothing very high fidelity, but the music he played—except for the Bach—wasn't very high fidelity either. I mostly remember him playing Ma Rainey, Dylan, Bach, and Harry Smith's Folkways collection. Ray Charles and Coltrane and Thelonious Monk—the one recorded by Harry Smith with the first version of "Misterioso." Later he had the Clash albums. He also had several of the Fugs LPs and most of John Giorno's poetry LPs, which he would sometimes use in class. He had a live recording of Voznesensky reading in Russian and someone maybe Ivor Winters translating the poems into English, but I can't remember ever hearing it played. I was curious. He had his own records as well and played the ones with songs as often as anything else, especially the *First Blues* collection produced by John Hammond. He had a lot of cassettes and a boombox—including unreleased recordings with Dylan and Elvin Jones and Ornette Coleman, and Kerouac's unreleased and then out-of-print recordings. Other than that, it was talk radio in the background, usually NPR, especially when Peter was in the house. Music was never just on in the background. Allen put music on in order to listen to it.



A gift for doing something for Allen and Peter: promo copy of *First Blues*, 1982.

ML: *Are there any memories of working with Gary Snyder you'd like to share with us?*

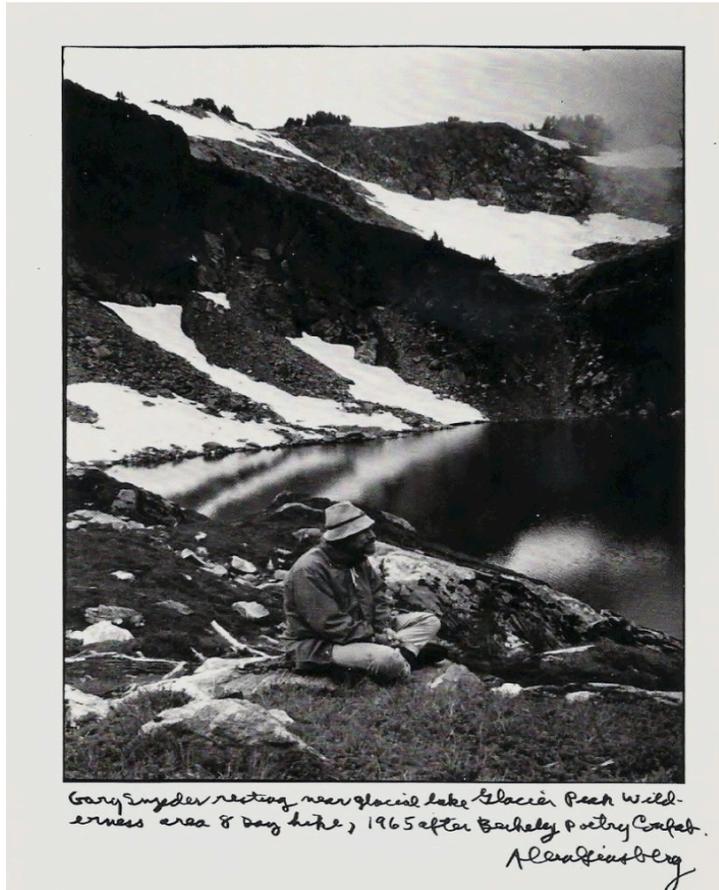
RR: He was the featured poet in the final week of the first Summer Writing Program and he spent his week teaching Fairport Convention's version of the Child Ballad "Tam Lin." I spent a short time traveling with Fairport Convention in 1990 and I was able to surprise them with that story.



Touring with Fairport Convention, August 1990, Oxfordshire, England: I'm in the red shirt, back row, second from end on the right, behind upraised hand (not his).

In our final colloquium that first summer with the staff and students, Gary impressed me with his willingness to moderate some criticism of the program from the students. Gary's sanity just radiated out into the battlefield. I saw him turn frustrated, over-heated students, pent up after four weeks of poetry bootcamp, unleashing all of their grievances upon the faculty, who really had little control over what they were most upset about. He slowed the disagreement down by asking quick, clarifying questions. He also had an ability to ferret out what was not being said and needed to be said, motivations and expectations we weren't aware we or the others held. He would suggest over and over again that once all the facts were known, the complete picture would be seen in all its complexity, from every point of view, and we could decide together—with all of our interests in mind—how to move forward, at least for the present moment. We were a small group, he reminded us. We were poets. Our small number has gathered here because we are brothers and sisters of spirit.

When Gary spoke, I felt I was in the presence of a Native American elder. I could feel the whole room relax. If he was able to speak passionately and at the same time remain calm and open to opposing arguments, then so could I. It was as if he didn't want to win the argument unless *everyone* won the argument, together. Of course, I've never been able to put any of that into practice. It's just not part of my make-up. But I know it can be done.



Gary Snyder, 1965, photo by Allen Ginsberg.

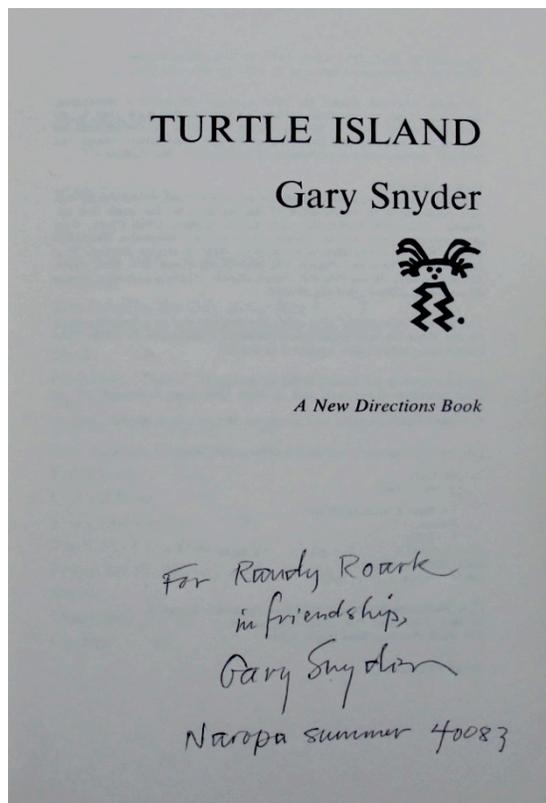
That's what Allen knew when he set up Naropa, I think, that poets had a lot to teach people who wanted to be poets about what was possible in being human, and that the primary teaching occurred in the presence of the teacher by modeling, by resonance. And that it was important to have as much variety as possible, because for everyone who loved Allen, there was someone who didn't. Same with all of the teachers. No one was everyone's first choice.

But Gary was pretty close to everyone's first choice. He did have a reading style that people either loved or hated. It seemed a little stiff to me, but I wish I could connect with the audience the way he does between poems. He's funny in a self-deprecating way. He radiates humility and good humor and smarts and sensitivity, and he makes it clear from

the very beginning that he doesn't share the chauvinist attitudes of the Beats toward women and children. His love poems are always about families.

And Gary's opinions and poetry are always well considered and worth hearing. And he taught me a writing method that I used until I began the notebooks. He writes stray comments and observations onto 3 x 5 cards, and then files them away under headings like "old friends," "nature," "death," "summer." Then later, when he's writing a poem and he runs out of ideas, he rifles through his 3 x 5 cards to see if anything fits. I did something similar with "poetry pools" that I would dip into whenever I needed something to jumpstart a poem that had ended but hadn't gone very far. I would look over pages of stray lines until something seemed to magically fit. It always started when I read a line that would be transformed in some way by putting it into my poem at exactly that place that would change its original meaning. What usually happened was that once I saw one line that seemed perfect for the poem, I started seeing lines shining out half a dozen times on the page. In fact, dipping into the pool wasn't a process that really jumpstarted a poem—it always ended it. The only writing left to do was what I had to do get the lines to fit with each other and the poem. It was like harvesting fruit and making a salad.

But a change away from paper records happened for me when I began the notebooks and the text became the place where I stored those pieces, in their natural order of appearance, that may or may not fit together in the future.



"40083 = 1983"

I will retell one story. In 1983, I assigned myself as Gary Snyder's assistant. One afternoon I set him up at a desk in my office downstairs at the Lincoln Schoolhouse and gave him the pile of student's work he was to review and comment on. I made sure he had everything he needed, that he knew that I'd be back in 45 minutes to take him to class, and asked him if he needed anything. He said no, that things were going fine, thanks, but how are *you*, he asked, his elbow on the huge pile of papers I'd just put on his desk, looking up me with genuine concern, as if he really wanted to know. And I just collapsed at his feet and began talking, without a single thought in my head. I told him that I was tormented. I told him that when I got up in front of an auditorium of people with my handful of poems I looked out into the audience and the room would be so beautiful, this moment would be so beautiful and quiet and still, and I was bathing in all these warm feelings and I just wanted to stand there and start talking but I was shy so I couldn't say anything if I didn't have a piece of paper in front of me. But nothing I've ever brought seems to have anything to do with what makes the moment at the podium, in front of all their open expectant faces, so beautiful, even if it seemed to back in my living room. I told him I was seriously considering burning all of my poems and then *having to* get up and improvise in the moment. Or I would bring up a handful of blank pieces of paper. Maybe like anything else it would take time to get proficient at it, maybe I'd have to really crash and burn a few times, sure, but better to start now, right? I mean, if I want to continue doing this. I can't keep doing it this way, that's for sure. And that's when I stopped talking.

After a polite pause to be sure I was finished, Gary said, "Well, you can do that. You can destroy all of your poems. But you don't *have to*. Think of an actor getting up on stage 200 nights in a row. If he isn't really there, he isn't doing his *job*."

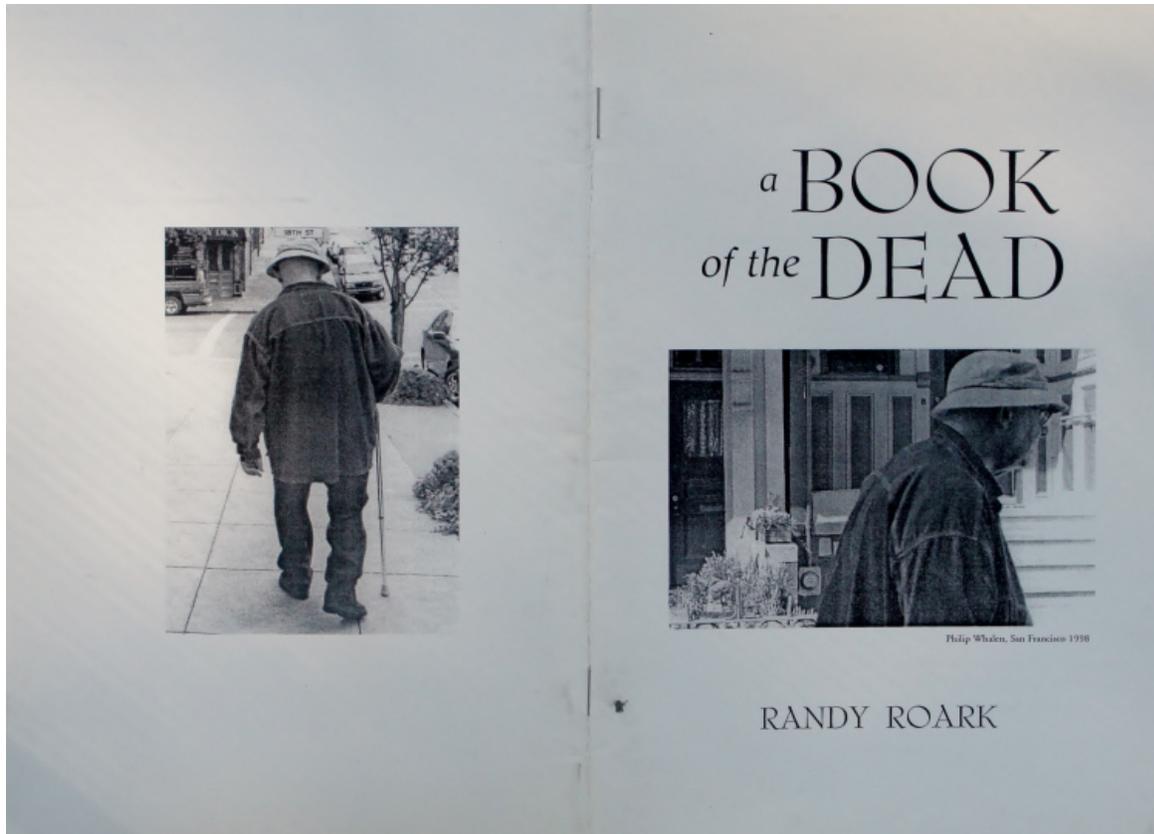
ML: *Are there any memories of working with Philip Whalen you'd like to share with us?*

RR: I assigned myself the job of being Philip's teaching assistant at Naropa my first summer, based largely on a transcript of a class of his in *Talking Poetics*. My job was to arrive early to set up the classroom—which was his living room and kitchen in the Varsity Townhouses, which Naropa rented for the visiting faculty. So Philip would be in one room and Allen would be in the next one and Burroughs would be next door and then Corso and then whomever else was around that summer. There was a pool in the center of the townhouses where most of the after-reading parties happened.

Philip and I didn't talk much after the first couple of meetings. When I arrived, he would already be in his chair, reading something by one of the three poets he was teaching that summer—Hart Crane, Wallace Stevens, and Lew Welch. He would mumble as he read, sometimes humming to himself, rubbing his bald head, delighted, chuckling. He was always wearing blue jeans and a white t-shirt that summer.

I'd set up the recording equipment, make sure Philip had plenty of fresh water, and then I'd take attendance, return homework, collect assignments, answer questions, and record the class on cassette tapes. Then I'd clean up afterward and ask Philip if he needed anything. He didn't have many needs. There was someone to take care of the groceries and clean the room. I picked him up at the airport and would return him to it, and would

drive him wherever he wanted to go. The readings were held on the main campus, about a mile from where the faculty was staying.



a Book of the Dead, with photos of Philip by Kai Sibley while on a walk in his neighborhood in January 1998. Cover design by Sarah Chesnutt, Laocoon Press, May 1999.

On the final day of class, I set up the room and watched the room fill up as time for the class to start came and went, and still no Philip. I didn't know what to do. This had never happened with anyone I'd worked with before except Corso, and that I more or less expected. But not Philip. I was certain something terrible had happened.

I was just about to get up and go looking for him when he suddenly appeared at the top of the stairs, in his black Zen robes, his head freshly shaved and polished, a mala in his left hand, his lips moving in silent prayer. With each step, he'd push a bead over his index finger, and take another step. Slowly the students became aware that something was happening and grew quiet, and those sitting on the floor parted before him. He walked slowly to the front of the room and when he reached his chair, he turned around, snapped his robe taunt behind him, and sat down very deliberately and slowly.

There wasn't an ounce of pretense in what he was doing. But he was demonstrating more than just what it's like to consciously walk across a room. In his bluejeans and t-shirt he

wasn't intimidating, but in his Zen robes he was, but he had the personal strength to hide his power in order not to intimidate us. He had been incognito, more or less. It was a feat of great humility. And then his almost melodramatic entrance for the last class is like the end of "Henry V, Part II," when Harry ascends the throne and puts on the crown and becomes Henry V. I find that very helpful to remember, especially when I'm traveling; that I can be anyone I can imagine myself to be. And that I can hide who I really am, which is something I do a lot now when I'm not traveling.

But Philip made his life more difficult than it had to be, I think. I don't really understand what that was all about. He was gifted at saying the wrong thing to well-disposed people. When I was visiting the Hartford Street Zen Center in 1998, while he was still its director, he was afraid he'd lost their longest-lasting major benefactor, by something he'd said or hadn't said, he wasn't sure. He told me that he had no skill in raising donors, only in losing them. At one of his readings that summer in 1980, he stopped and complained to the audience about their applause. There was nothing here worthy of your applause, he scolded them. They were throwing off his rhythm and ruining the reading, he told them, but it was his irritableness that soured the reading.

At a colloquium on politics and poetry in 1985, Philip sat so far stage left that he was no longer sitting behind the conference table. For most of the afternoon he appeared to be napping, his chin on his chest. But if you looked closer, you could see his lips moving, and a single bead being pushed regularly over his left index finger.

Amiri Baraka was in attendance that week and he was stirring things up, as usual. Amiri polarized audiences. By 1985, I was tired of it. I wasn't going to intervene and take the heat this time. He and Allen were arguing about how many people Stalin had killed. Allen claimed that the most commonly accepted figure was 20 million, and Amiri laughed and accused Allen of being a stooge of the government. "Allen Ginsberg believes a figure notarized by Stalin's enemies on how many people he may have killed? Unbelievable! It couldn't have been more than half of that," Amiri insisted. "It couldn't have been more than 8 or 9 million."

With that comment—that it was *only* 8-9 million that Stalin had killed—the room divided into two factions, yelling to be heard over the other. Things were getting very ugly very fast when suddenly Philip sat up, waving his mala, shouting, "I've been listening to this same fucking argument for the last thirty god damn years. It never ends! I'm sick of it! Everybody's always looking for the bad guy. Find the bad guy! String him up! Where is he? Who can I believe? How can I be sure? Can anyone be certain who's the bad guy? Show me the bad guy and we can kill him and bury him in a big hole in the backyard and put a big stone over him and he'll never get out and we'll never have to worry about the boogey man again. But every time I think I've found the bad guy I look a little closer and all I see is my own face, scowling, angry. The bad guy looks just like me when someone has made me angry! Then I look back on my passions and the words of my passions and the deeds of my passions and I feel ashamed."

Philip Whalen
MEMORIAL READING



Photo by: Nancy Victoria Davis

*"Sweat, voluminous agey brain! Draw nearer and
melt down in Poesy's ravening violet flames"*

Michael McClure Diane di Prima Jane Hirshfield Anne Waldman
David Meltzer Leslie Scalapino Clark Coolidge Bill Berkson

and many others in a memorial
reading for one of America's most beloved poets

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I read "Sourdough Mountain Lookout" at this reading. David Meltzer yelled to me across the auditorium as we were getting up to leave, "Hey, you, yeah, you. Good job!" This is the trip where I wrote my first notebook, *San Francisco Notebook*.

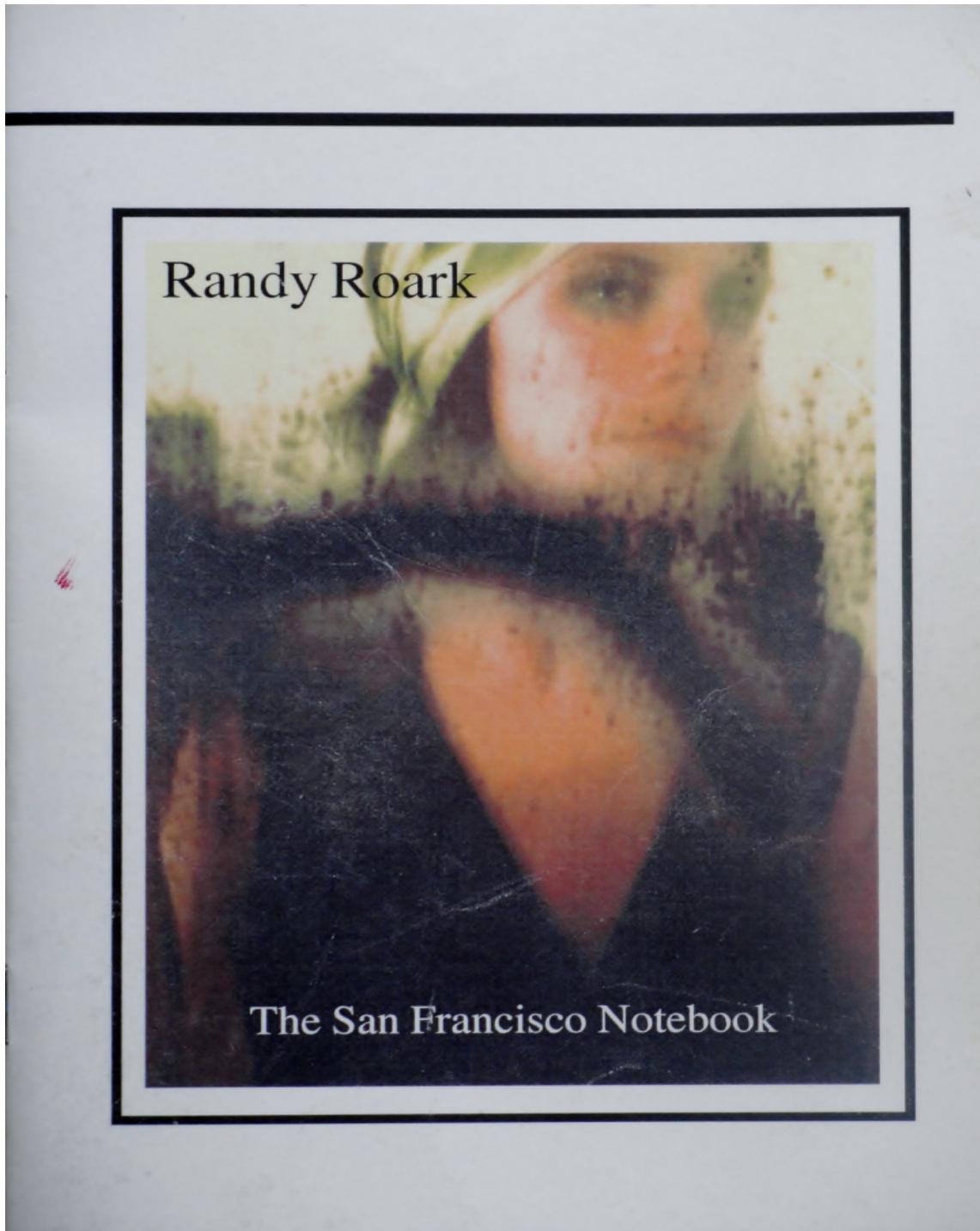
I'll retell another story. During that same summer, I was working in the office when Philip's teaching assistant came in during a break to tell me that Philip had slipped on the concrete steps on his way downstairs to his classroom and scraped himself up a bit, but he refused medical treatment, other than a handkerchief to wash the scrapes off in the men's room.

I went looking for him and found him standing outside the Lincoln classroom, hands behind his back, chin up, looking at a willow tree and humming to himself, rocking back and forth. Philip, I said, concerned, I heard you fell down some steps today and hurt yourself. Are you okay?

"Posh," he said, "it was nothing. Nothing injured but my pride. I teach mindfulness. You'd think I'd be aware enough not to hurtle my huge and swollen bulk unsteadily down a concrete stairwell in sandals when I'm half-blind." He was wearing his full black Zen robes every day that summer. He said his tetanus was up to date—"I'm like a puppy—my shots are scheduled." I made him show me his wrists and palms, his ankles, his knees. They were red, abraded, but not actively bleeding and they weren't swollen, no point tenderness. I let go of his wrists and cautioned him to keep them clean and covered under his robes, but open them up in his room when he strips down to his shorts and t-shirt at night. I told him to keep the areas clean and warned him of the signs of infection. I would have some antibacterial salve and pain reliever delivered to his room later today. Did he have any allergies? Even if you feel okay now, wait until you lie down tonight. Keep them by the bed with some water. You can ice things up tonight if you're sitting or lying down for an extended period of time, but put something between your skin and the ice. I work in the emergency room, I told him, sometimes peace of mind is worth a visit to the doctor. I'm sure Naropa will pay for it. It happened on their property. They're insured. But he refused.

The conversation was over, but for some reason I didn't leave. Finally I said, in preparation for taking off, was he having a good time? "Good time?" Philip snorted. "Good time???? Don't they teach you anything around here? Life is suffering, dear boy. If you haven't figured out number one, there's nothing I can do for you."

I turned red and looked down at my feet and tried to think of something to say to make a graceful exit. My embarrassment lasted about five seconds. Then I felt myself bristle. "No. No! No, I don't believe you! Life is not all suffering. The blue sky's not suffering, a cold glass of water isn't suffering. I thought you were hurt and you aren't and that's not suffering. Life's not suffering. I don't believe that. I don't believe that at all!" And when I finished Philip started laughing, and I looked up and he was gasping for breath, tears in his eyes, his head tilted back, and roaring: hur-rarh, hurh-rrah, hurr-rah-hah-hah!



The San Francisco Notebook, Elik Books, 2004. Cover photo by Kami Wilde. Thanks Andy!

ML: *Are there any memories of working with Gregory Corso you'd like to share with us?*

RR: Most of my memories of Corso are bad ones. My father was a physically abusive alcoholic, so Gregory and Trungpa really never stood a chance with me.



Gregory Corso. Artwork by Alex B. Bustillo.

Anyway, there is one story about Gregory that I love to tell. When Corso was diagnosed with terminal cancer, he expressed a desire to find some more information about his mother. All he knew is what his father's family had told him: that his mother had abandoned the family when Gregory was still an infant and her boat sank and she drowned sailing back to her family in Italy, which is why Gregory never knew his wife's family either. Word of his wish reached Gregory's friend, the very rich Japanese artist Yamagata, who paid to have a private detective track down what could be learned about the fate of Corso's mother. The detective found her living in New Jersey, about 50 miles from where Gregory had grown up. In that moment everything in Gregory's lifestory turned upside-down. It turns out his father took Gregory and abandoned his mother—which is why none of her family were part of his life either—and that his father's whole family conspired to lie to him about what happened.

Everything Corso believed about his life turned out to be false and he found this out right before he died. But I kept wondering, what if Corso had not been a famous poet with a wealthy compassionate friend? How many people go to their graves without understanding the true significance of their own lives? That's what scares me.

9/18/92

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Dear Randy:

Got your card —

Mexico City Blues would fit in
celebratory history of the Beat generation

which ~~is~~ Miles is working on from
tapes (I believe he's transcribed
all of these — what, 5 terms? — and
I do go back to Mexico City Blues often in classes.

I have one essay on Whitman — a
run thru of his entire poetry ~~for~~ — already
done — I think there's a copy in the New York
library of the ~~the~~ memorial volume anthology
: Whitman, The Measure of Her Song, Ed. Jim
~~Perelman~~ Perelman + Ed Folsom + Dan Campion,
1991, Holy Cow! Press. Minneapolis. Don't know
if that's exhaustive, I've taught a lot of Whitman +
the above could be included in any such volume.

Basic Poetry, Reynolds, Williams as exemplar,
also all the Blake. ~~the~~ the WCW series was pretty good
I remember.

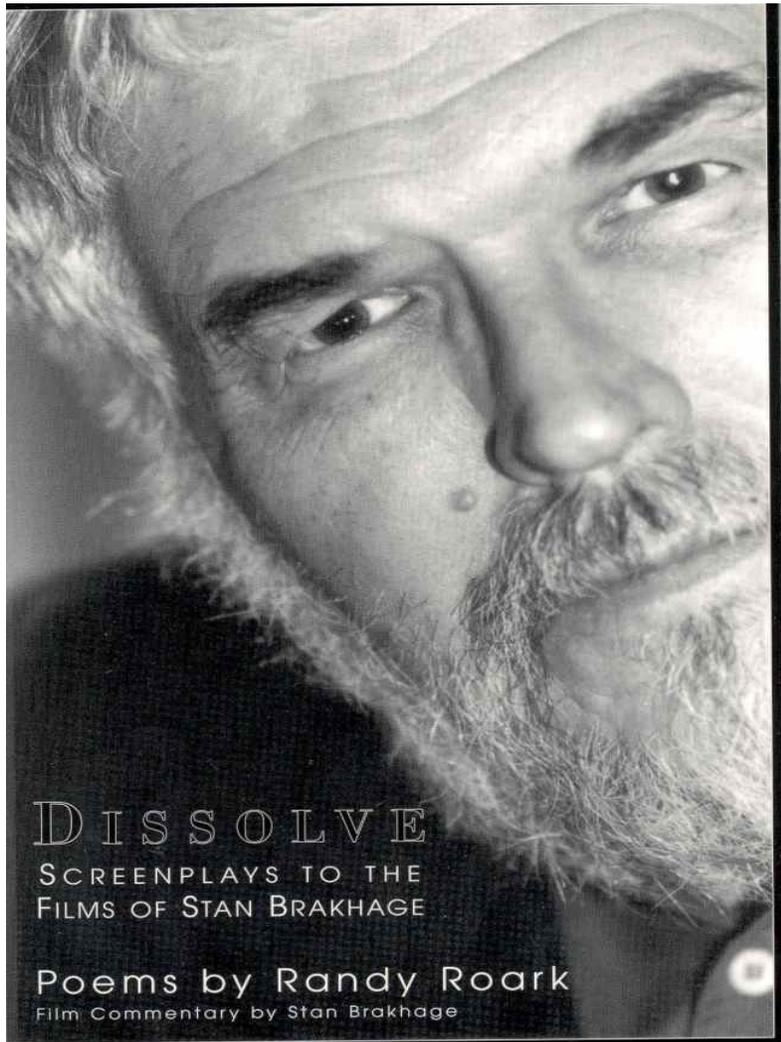
yes take your time + do it as you think best —
I'm amazed your persistence + energy — and thankful!
Love as ever Allen

Letter #2.

ML: You have met with many great poets. It must be hard, but which meets have been the biggest experiences for you?

RR: I liked hanging out with Allen the most. I felt very relaxed around him, and I didn't feel relaxed around very many people at the time. The poets I enjoyed the most as teachers were Robert Creeley and Gary Snyder and Anne Waldman and Anselm Hollo and Ted Berrigan and Clark Coolidge and Diane di Prima. They seemed the ones who were the most in love with what they were doing and the most interested in making new

work, and they were often the most passionate and said the most interesting, thought-provoking things.



Dissolve—a collection of poems written while watching a retrospective of Stan’s films at the Boulder Public Library; cover photo by Kai Sibley, design by Angela Bowman, Cityful Press, 2002. Thanks Darrin!

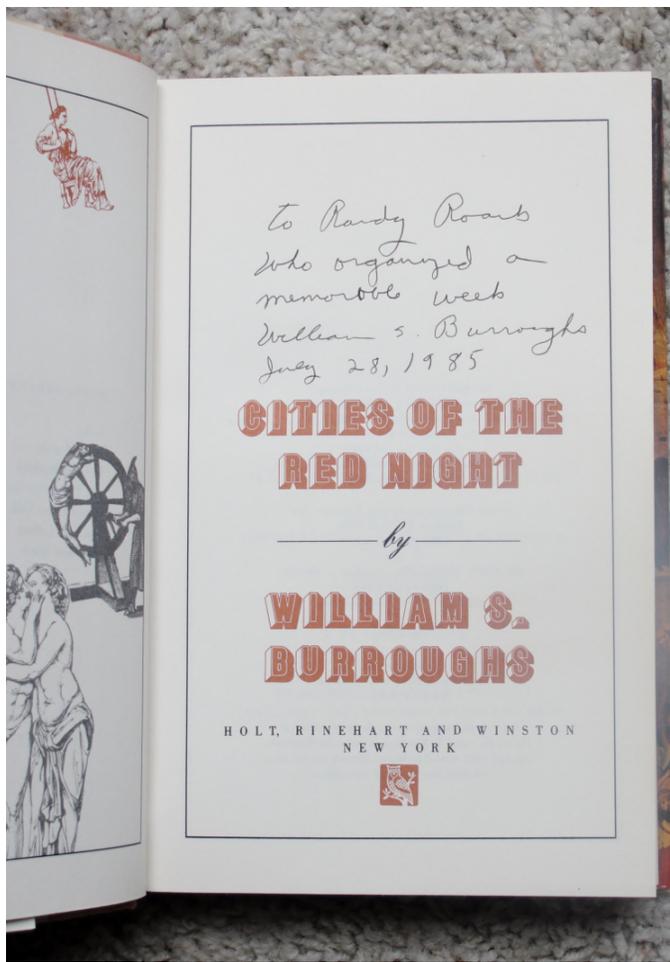
Later I really connected with Stan Brakhage at a screening of one of his films in 1998. I’d come to see one of Stan’s films of Chartres Cathedral and told him afterward how I saw a connection between how Coltrane constructed his solos and the passages in his films that seem to get brighter and faster and then there’s a long peaceful interlude.

I hadn’t come to Stan’s films to find the missing key to my non-narrative assembly dilemma. I’d come because I’d spent a magical week in Chartres exploring the cathedral with Malcolm Miller, perhaps the world’s foremost English-speaking expert on the cathedral, and I wanted to see what Stan would do with the light I knew we’d both seen there.

What I saw in Stan's films that rhymed with what I'd felt listening to Coltrane was that in both, I felt the desire of a seeker trying to use their medium to break free of their medium into something beyond music or film, an experience of transcendence of worldly existence for just an instant, hoping to bring the audience along with him—and how there's an innate sense in us that wants to fly, but that desire will never be met, but I felt in Stan's Chartres films and Coltrane's solos that just the desire to transcend was enough. If either of them had succeeded, it would have seemed a very timid denouement after such an intense effort, I thought.

Coming at the end of his life, when Stan had mellowed out, my relationship with him was much less stressful than the one I had with Allen, but the important difference between my time with Allen and my time with Stan was that I wasn't with Stan to learn how to make films. I was there to learn how to appreciate his filmmaking and his life as an artist. I was learning how to see.

But the only one I really miss is Allen. Still. Almost every day. I know that sounds like I'm exaggerating, but you don't know, I do. I certainly miss him at the moment.



William Burroughs Conference, Naropa Institute, 1985.

And he's not really a poet, but I haven't talked much about William Burroughs. William was the smartest and most consistent one, I thought, and one of the sweetest men I've ever met. He had watery ice-blue eyes and there was this searching intelligence behind them that made me feel very seen and explored. His eyes were always smiling, even when he was performing Dr. Benway or reading from the Red Night Trilogy, all that stench of death stuff.

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TED MORGAN, Pulitzer Prize winner, author of MAUGHAM, speaking on his forthcoming biography of William S. Burroughs.

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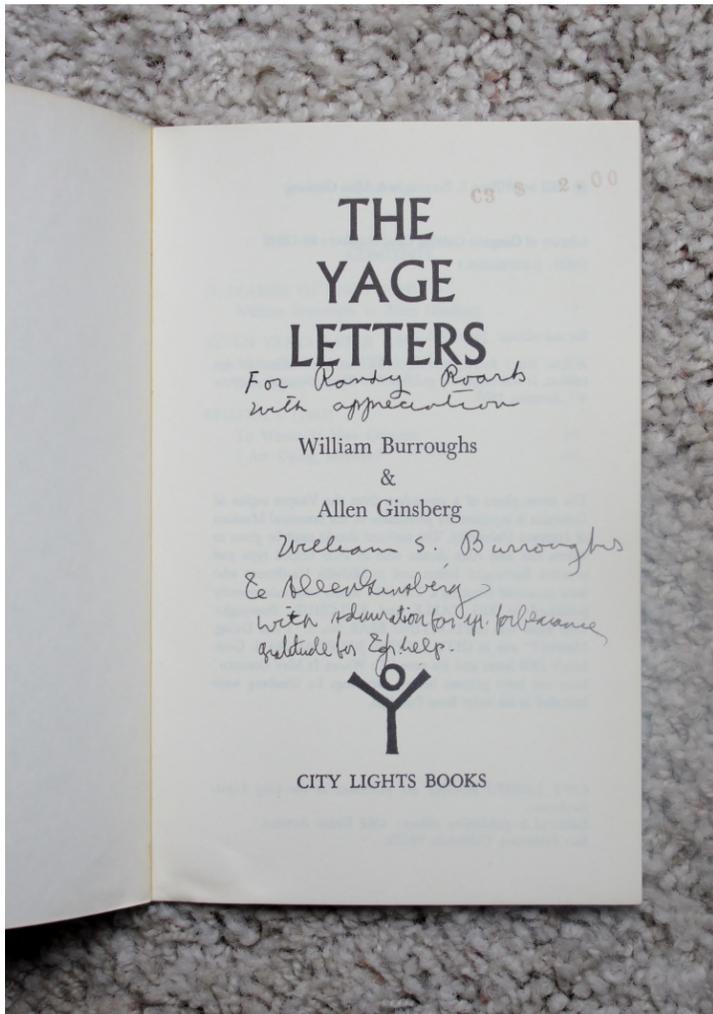
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PHOTO BY JERRY ANDERSON

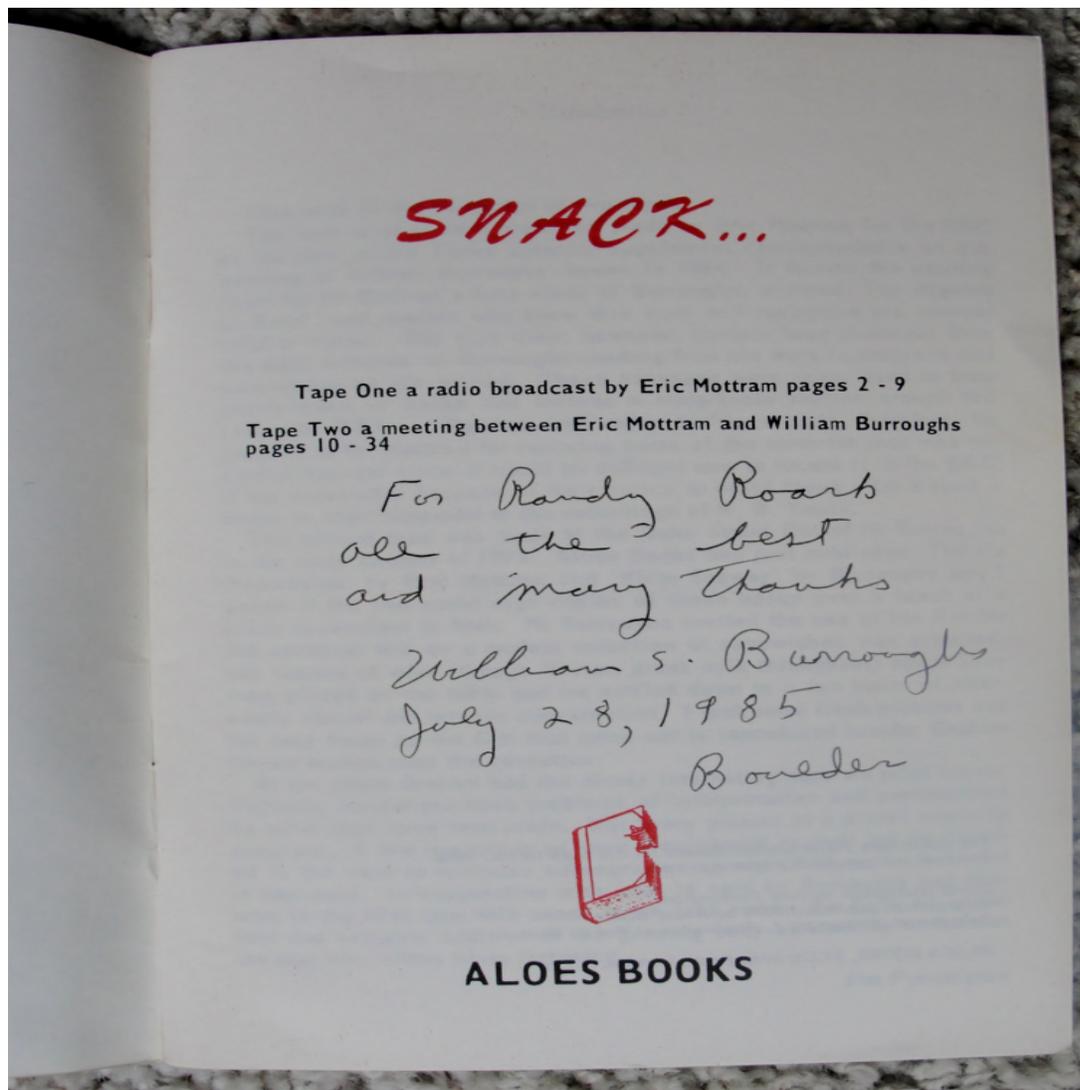
William Burroughs Conference, Naropa Institute, 1985. You can see something of that laughter in his eyes.

I can't say I was close to William, even after I organized a William Burroughs festival for him at Naropa during my final summer in 1985. Ted Morgan wanted to interview Burroughs for the biography he was writing and this would be their only opportunity to meet, but to get Ted out here and put him up we would have to get his expenses added to our budget, which had been locked for almost eleven months and all of our funds had already been assigned. There was no slush fund. I went to Ralph, the finance manager, and told him that for a \$500 honorarium and a domestic round trip ticket (Ted would stay with William), I could get a Pulitzer prize-winning biographer to come to Naropa and present an evening on Bill as part of a William Burroughs Conference. I have commitments from all the other principles who have agreed to appear for free (true). I can get national press on this I told him (I was right) and we can make back our investment and more (I was wrong). But Naropa got a William Burroughs Conference for \$500 and a round trip ticket from New York City.



William Burroughs Conference, Naropa Institute, 1985.

Each night before we began, Burroughs and the panelists for the night would sit on the stone steps in front of Kappa Sigma on 10th Street on the Hill, where the evening classes were held. Burroughs would light up a joint and take a deep hit and nod, smile and pass it on to Allen. We were always starting late, but it wasn't like we couldn't have been on time; we were always just sitting around beforehand waiting for something to happen. And then at some impossible to predict moment Burroughs would suddenly look up and say—in his Dr. Benway voice—“Well, Padre, what say we get this show on the road? No ... time ... like ... the ... present!” And he'd lurch himself vertical and salute on “Present.” Then everything started moving really fast and there was a hundred faces peering up at the dais through the silence. I don't think I've been more proud than on those nights I was the one who walked Bill onstage.



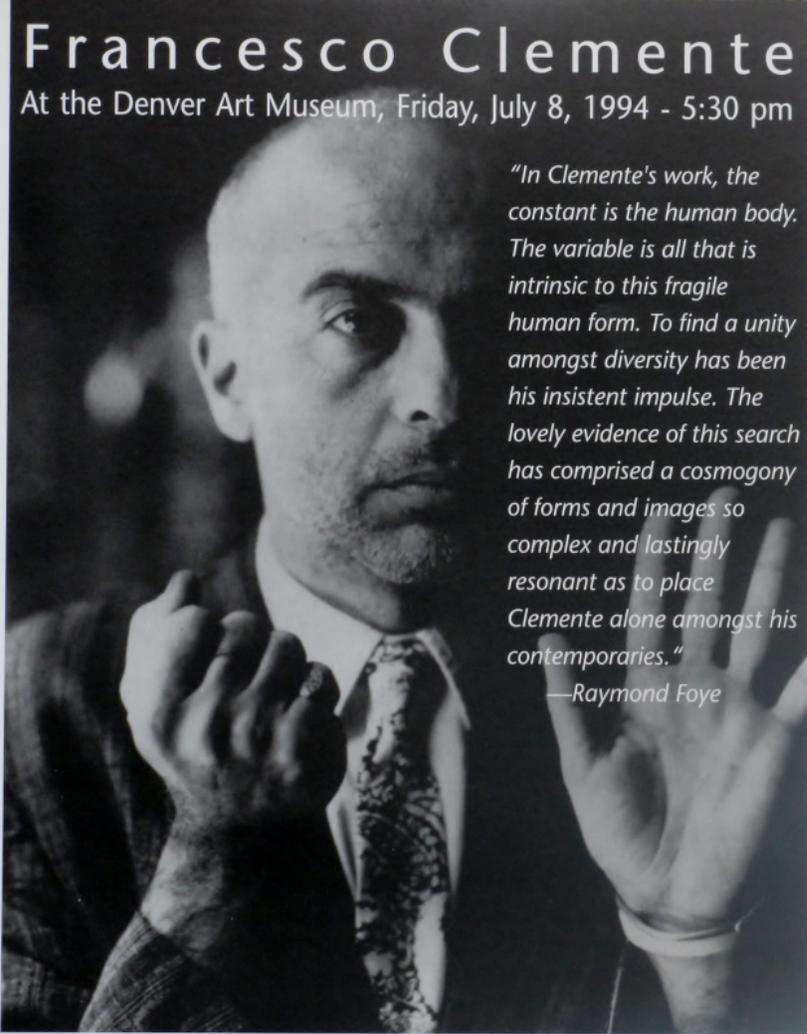
Smack

I've met a lot of really brilliant people, but no one was more a genius for me than Burroughs. I could never anticipate what he was going to say. He would say things that seemed absurd at the time but began to make a wacky kind of sense about two days later. And he was able to be a genius and stay humble even though he was probably the smartest person in every room he was in. And he was funny and generous and kind. But don't cross swords with William!



"Nine Dutch Poets" visit Boulder, 1982.

The only people I've met who rivaled him in their ability to balance their genius with their humanity were the visual artists Francesco Clemente and Karel Appel. As visual artists, they didn't have words (and English was their second language in both cases) so most of their personal communication was done by shaking hands and looking into people's eyes.



Francesco Clemente
At the Denver Art Museum, Friday, July 8, 1994 - 5:30 pm

"In Clemente's work, the constant is the human body. The variable is all that is intrinsic to this fragile human form. To find a unity amongst diversity has been his insistent impulse. The lovely evidence of this search has comprised a cosmogony of forms and images so complex and lastingly resonant as to place Clemente alone amongst his contemporaries."
—Raymond Foye

Become an Arts Patron of the conference *Beats and Other Rebel Angels: A Tribute to Allen Ginsberg* by purchasing a limited edition print created by Francesco Clemente. You will also be invited to attend a private gathering at the Denver Art Museum.

Mr. Clemente will present "The Power of Collaboration," an informal discussion with his friend and collaborator Allen Ginsberg. Arts Patrons will receive a limited edition print, "A Portrait of Allen Ginsberg," created by Clemente to ac-

The pre-publication price, until July 1, is \$850. During the week of the conference, the price will be \$1,000. After July 10, the price will increase to

Francesco Clemente visits Boulder, 1994.

And that's something that Burroughs shared. The first time I met him he modestly dipped his head and shook my hand, never taking his eyes off mine. The first time you meet Bill, it's a bit disconcerting, to be looked upon by eyes that are so lively and focused and curious. And blue.



One of my favorite people in the world, and we probably shared less than two dozen words between us, but I saw him paint a portrait of Kerouac from start to finish in maybe 45 minutes. There was a long period of time when it was just splashes of color on canvas and then—in the last five-to-ten minutes—it suddenly came into focus as the most realistic portrait of Kerouac I've ever seen. It was also one of the most athletic experiences I've ever witnessed.

ML: *What is the “feeling” you miss most nowadays from the Beat “family” and era?*

RR: What I miss most about the Beat family was their willingness to open their houses and lives to us, the next generation’s poets. It was an inspiration to meet people who were artists and that was enough and every conversation was between poets.

FRICITION

VOL. I NO's 2/3

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DOCUMENTS FROM
THE JACK KEROUAC CONFERENCE
BOULDER, COLORADO - JULY 1982

FRICITION 2/3, Documents from the Jack Kerouac Conference, Boulder, CO, July 1982, front, Fall 1982.

INCLUDING
TED BERRIGAN
RAY BREMSER
CAROLYN CASSADY
CLARK COOLIDGE
DIANE diPRIMA
LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI
ALLEN GINSBERG
ROBERT FRANK
ABBIE HOFFMAN
JOHN CLELLON HOLMES
JAN KEROUAC
PAUL KRASSNER
KEN KESEY
MICHAEL McCLURE
JOANNA McCLURE
JACK MICHELINE
GERALD NICOSIA
PETER ORLOVSKY
EDITH KEROUAC PARKER
CARL SOLOMON
CHOGYAM TRUNGPA, RINPOCHE
ANNE WALDMAN

FRICITION 2/3, Documents from the Jack Kerouac Conference, Boulder, Colorado, July 1982, reverse, Fall 1982.

One realization that came from the chance to meet and mix with them is that it became clear that their poems were written in the same voices they used in conversation; there was no separation between their poetry and their actual speaking voices, raised to a

higher pitch. Their gifts in poetry were not by accident. I learned from them that in order to polish my poetry I would have to polish my speech. And to polish my speech, I would have to polish my thought. This was the beginning of an idea that intrigues me even today: is the secret to good poetry simply sincerity and a skilled recording hand? Insincerity must certainly be some kind of anti-poetry. But is sincerity more important in poetry than imagination? More important than truth?

ALLEN GINSBERG
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NEW YORK, N.Y. 10009

9/9/88

Dear Randy:

Thanks for all the Dylan ~~clippings~~
Xeroxes, all that gossip & opinions
charming to retrospect.

I should return your letter.

Which guitarist did you lend
your tapes or records to? I have
faintest of recollections now. Was
it the short guy this summer who
played with Steven. Good God he
never gave them back??? Let me
know I'll check w/Steven.

He was 1 + a great guitarist
as I remember. Forget his name!

I'll write Jim Spearley. Anne
mentioned it too.

Harvy's still living next door to
Naropa. He knows lots about Tape, you
know - if you have magical questions.

Ever Allen

Enclosed some memorabilia.

Phil Wang!
He lives in town
good to Naropa?

Letter #3.

I knew the nobility of the Beats who were still alive, and they were models of engaged, active writers reporting on what they'd learned on their travels, as much as any troubadours in history. I miss being a witness to their passion and creativity and humor and honesty and generosity and differing intelligences. The sense of being backstage, of running away with the circus, not sure where I'd end up and not really caring, but in some small way a member of a tiny literary sub-community of saintly artists looking after one another any way they could.



What Allen drew for me on his last day in Boulder, July 13, 1996: The Skull with a flower in his teeth appears to be wearing Buddha as a hat.

INTERLUDE

In the Summer of 1982, I took a calligraphy and haiku class with Barbara Bash, who even then was a major American calligrapher, and Pat, who taught haiku and Asian poetries and Buddhist poetry at Naropa. I'd been practicing calligraphy for over ten years, so I thought that part would be easy. I didn't like Pat, as a poet or a person, but how bad could the poetry part be?

Pat and I were each other's worst nightmares—the Buddhist zombie vs. the upstart who thinks he's smarter, sharper, cooler than you are. But I figured I could stand a single semester with her. Plus, there was the calligraphy.

My favorite haikus are born out of the tension when our imaginary world intersects with the one that has an illogic of its own. It's the kind of poem you write after your roof burns down and for the first time you notice the stars. But the haiku in this class—I thought—were only about the first half of that equation. They were sentimental, too pleased with themselves, too pretty. When they finished there wasn't any reaction possible other than ooh or aaah. They were boring, and unthinking, too easy, I thought.

But being put in a position where I was supposed to learn something from a poet whose work and opinions I didn't respect was doomed from the start and just got worse. She wasn't giving an inch and neither was I. There were assumptions in these teachings that I didn't agree with—mostly the ones about equating “beauty” with goodness and “goodness” with beauty. This led to work that imitated and misunderstood—I thought—vastly superior work by Basho and Issa. There seemed to be a determined effort to restrain anything surprising or honest and true in the work as too messy. So I decided to counterbalance their sentimentalism with something more tragi-comedic.

Day after day we'd go around the room, and the air would fill with birds and flowers and clouds and moons. Then it'd be my turn and I'd read a haiku about the mysterious silence after a screeching car crash, or the beautiful balance that was restored when the mouse I freed from my cat's paw was caught by a hawk before it reached the sidewalk. When I finished there was always a stunned and puzzled silence. If there was any response at all, no matter what they were saying all I heard was “I don't really like what you just said and I don't know what to say about it so I'll just say a bunch of non-committal nothing and move on.” And sometimes no one was able to say anything at all and we'd just go on to the next beautiful or sentimental haiku, depending on your point of view.

In the next to the last class we were asked to bring the most beautiful thing we owned to class. I brought a 2600-year-old 1” faience amulet of Isis from the 26th dynasty of Egypt, which I bought at the Sadigh Gallery in New York City after I'd saved up a little money.



Isis, faience amulet, 26th dynasty of Egypt, circa 600 BCE, approx. 1" tall.

The guy next to me held up a scorpion floating in a bottle of formaldehyde. He shook the bottle and the scorpion appeared to move. Pat—our teacher—brought a handful of tiger lilies she had “liberated” from a garden she passed on the way to class. She stood with the shears in the center of the room and trimmed the bottoms of their stems into a round metal garbage pail. The trimmed tiger lilies were dripping clear fluid as she put them in a vase. All I could see was the face of the gardener, looking for her lilies and discovering they’d been stolen. I felt like I was in a nightmare inside a horror movie. I thought of that line from Marcel Duchamp: “Sharpen the eye (a method of torture).”

We were asked to write a final haiku about the importance of beauty and art. When it was my turn, I held my calligraphy up for everyone to see and read my haiku aloud. After I finished, no one said anything. There was a collective sigh and the class moved on.

At the end of class, the teachers went around the room, selecting one of our calligraphized haiku for an exhibit they were hanging of our classwork outside the Assembly Hall at 1111 Pearl Street later that afternoon. Trungpa would be coming by tonight to tour the exhibit. This was a great honor.

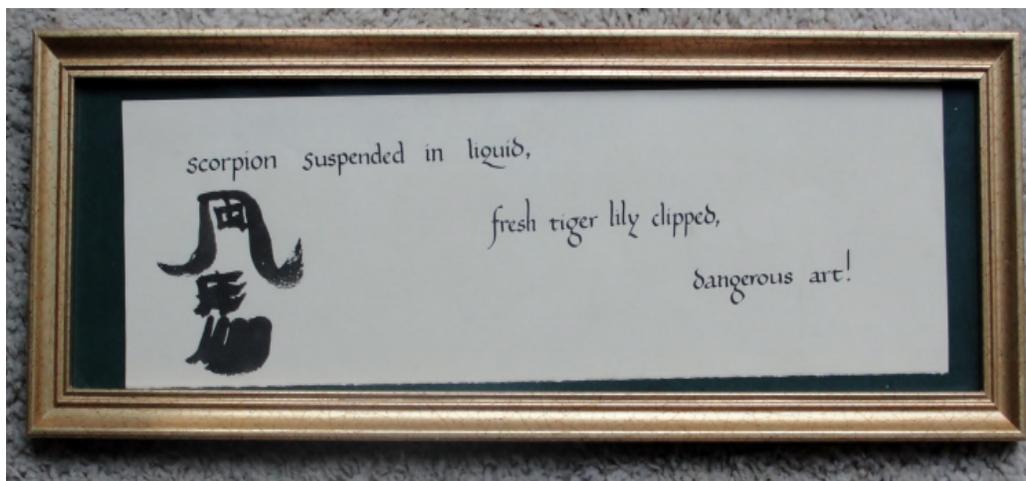
Pat approached my desk and silently went through my entire pile of haikus with two fingers, frowning, and when she got to the bottom without finding one better than another, she took the top one, the one I’d written in class today, and slithered away, without saying a word. I wouldn’t be going to the exhibit tonight, no way.

The next morning I was the first to arrive for class, and the door was still locked. I sat in the hallway with my head in my hands. How was I going to survive today’s class? How could I make it through today’s class without feeling worse than I feel now?

Then some heels clicked around the corner and I looked up and it was Barbara Bash and she was smiling and almost running down the hallway. “Oh,” she said. “You should have been there! Trungpa was going down the hallway looking at each haiku and nodding and smiling and when he came to mine he took out a ballpoint pen and drew an exclamation point. But when he got to last haiku—even though he was already very late for his talk—he made everyone wait while one of his guards went back to the limousine to get his calligraphy kit and some water. Then we all waited as he ground his ink and wet his brush and we were all wondering what he was going to write and when he finished he said “Windhorse.” Windhorse. And guess whose haiku it was?” “I don’t know. Yours? Pats?” “Yours!” “Really?” I didn’t think to ask what Windhorse meant.

Later that day I snuck down to the exhibit and sure enough, there was a symbol painted rather crudely beside my haiku in black ink, whatever it meant.

Word spread through the poetry department and Allen found me. “Well,” he said, “Feel different about Trungpa now? A great honor has been bestowed, poet to poet.” “What does Windhorse mean, do you think?” “A-hah,” Allen mimed, his right index finger pointed toward the sky. “It’s like in the comics when they put a lightbulb over someone’s head. He’s saying people should pay attention to what you’re saying. He’s saying you got smarts, kid.”



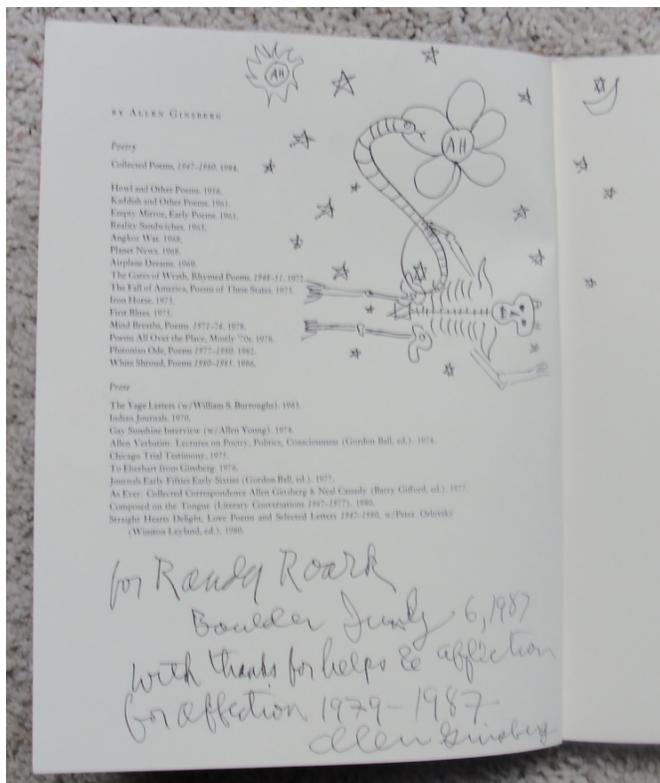
Windhorse!

ML: *When was your first desire to become involved in the Beat literary movement & what do the Beats mean to you?*

RR: My first real desire to become involved in the Beat literary movement came when I learned in 1977 that there was an opportunity to apprentice with Allen Ginsberg at Naropa Institute, a Buddhist university in Boulder, Colorado. He was also teaching year-

round, and the faculty for the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics included Burroughs and Corso and Waldman and di Prima and Philip Whalen and lots of others. I applied and was accepted. I was married and twenty-five at the time, managing the Mystic Seaport Museum's bookstore and art gallery. It took me almost two years to get to Boulder.

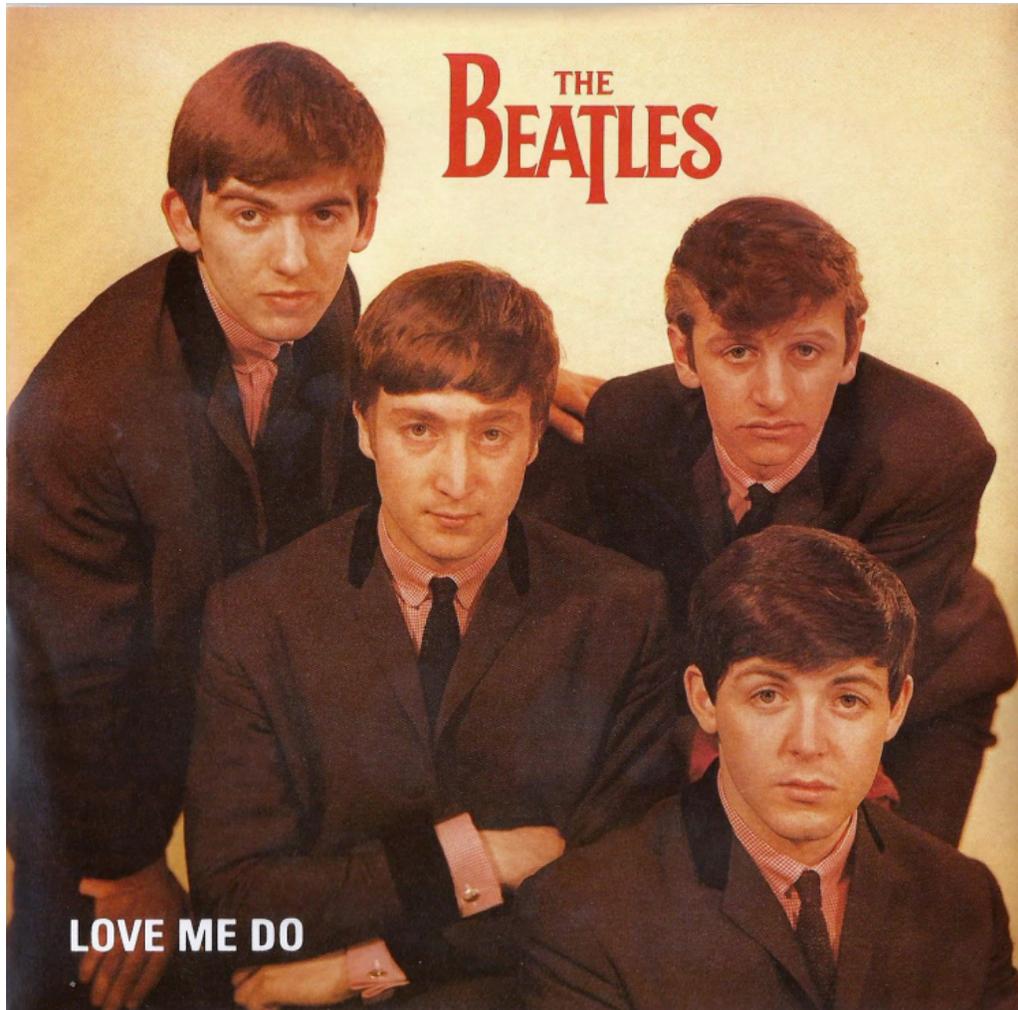
I'd known who Allen was since 1965 or 1966 when my junior high school classmate (thank you Eric!) found out that I wrote poetry and loaned me his older brother's copy of *Howl*. I can't say it said much to me as an 11- or 12-year-old straight boy in rural Connecticut. So much of "Howl" had to do with things I knew nothing about.



The reclining skeleton becomes more common in the mid-80s.

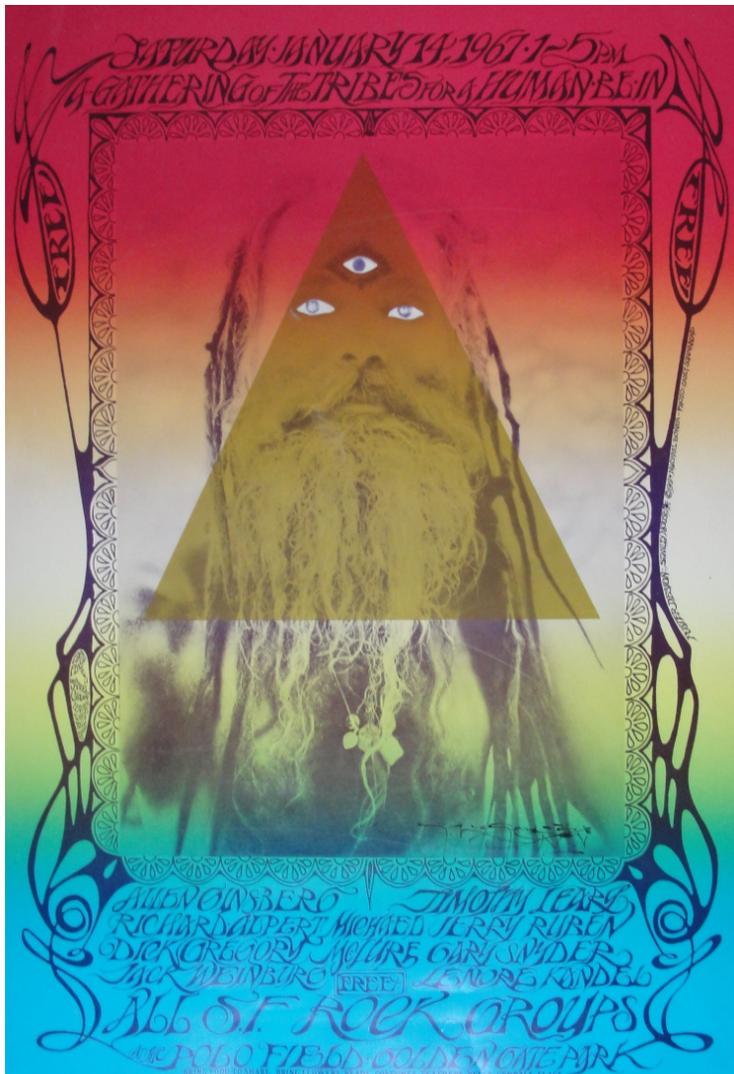
I never wanted to be a Beat. I was born in 1954. The Beats and Elvis were popular with the hipsters in my neighborhood who were graduating from high school when I was just waking up to culture, in 1964 or so. That was the year I bought my first Beatles single. I was in Florida, staying with my grandfather in Fort Lauderdale for the summer. The Beatles were vacationing nearby with Muhammed Ali. The harmonica on "Love Me Do"

was good summer music for driving along the beaches. That was the summer of the Beatles and Muhammed Ali in the U.S.—it was impossible to miss them.



They definitely look more Beats than Hippies here.

Growing up with the Beatles from “Love Me Do” (albeit well over a year after it was recorded—everything seemed to be released at once in the U.S. that summer) to the end was pretty much the dividing line between people born in 1954 and the Beats. Allen was one day younger than my father. I was two years old when *Howl* was published and three years old for *On the Road*. But TV news and “Life” magazine brought Hippies and the Human Be-In and LSD and light shows and Allen Ginsberg and Woodstock into everyone’s living rooms, even in rural Connecticut. It was like the Beats gone Technicolor. I felt part of a revolution in politics and music and writing that was aimed at the future, not so much the past.

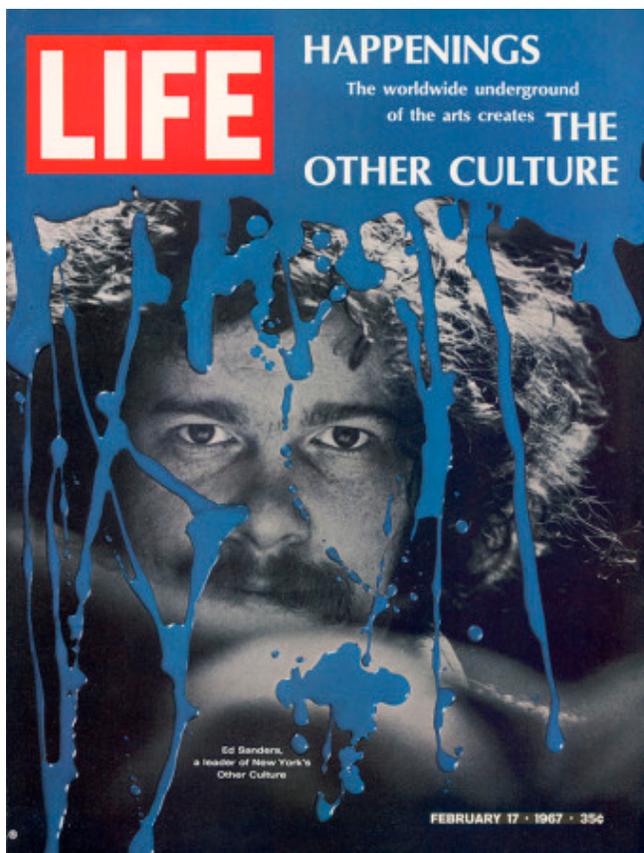


Be-In Poster, Summer of Love, San Francisco, three days before my thirteenth birthday.

In 1967, shortly after my thirteenth birthday, I was reading a copy of “Life” magazine—the one with Ed Sanders on the cover—and as I was looking at these kids dancing with flowers in their hair and brightly colored hand-made clothes with the women looking feminine and the men like softer versions of men, all of them smiling psychedelic naked, I decided that I wanted to live an interesting life. That was the determining moment in my life, really, that’s the through-line—not the poetry, not meditation, not art. Those are just means to an end, the end of having an interesting life, of doing everything I want to do. I didn’t know how, I didn’t know what it would look like, but I knew I wanted to live an interesting life. It seemed like a choice had to be made—either this way or that. And I knew which way I wanted to go. It was scary because everyone told me I was wrong, that I would fail, that I might even be mentally ill. But I was more afraid of succeeding at

failing than I was of failing at succeeding. And I mean succeeding and failing at my definitions of succeeding and failing.

And the more “successful” I got—the outward symbols of success for a poet—the less satisfied my parents were with what I’d accomplished. It took me forever to figure it out, but by the end I finally got it. They had dreams too. But they didn’t follow their dreams. They parroted the things their parents had told them—that they were being selfish, that they would fail, they were kidding themselves, that they weren’t talented. They’d listened to their parents but I’d foolishly disobeyed mine, and they were waiting for everything to come crashing down. Plus if I succeeded, they could no longer blame their parents for their refusal to follow their dreams. So my parents had a lot invested in my failure.



Ed Sanders on the cover of “Life” magazine, February 1967.

Even my friends told me that my plans to go off to Boulder to study poetry with Allen Ginsberg were a mistake. And I didn’t have a single ally in either of our families—including my wife. Finally I just said I’m going, I don’t care what anybody says. At the

last moment my wife—the least happy of anyone about the move—decided to accompany me.

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1/3/87

Dear Randy:

Enclosed a copy of First Blues I'd
printing corrected typos. No, no other songs I
know of - a few since.

I'm slowly negotiating with Caedmon
to put out Kaddish, Blake Sings, & First
Blues records and others. Maybe more. Howl
is reissued by Fantasy, a 1958 reading.

The photo isn't ~~so~~ good as to be
right - Robt Frank pointed out that
Beverice Abbot's City Building photos
go from street to sky - that perspective, grounding,
is important I think I have to try again
when I get a good window.

leaving for Israel day after
tomorrow, back 28 January.

O H - as ever
Allen

Letter #4.

The turning point for me came one day when my father took me to Yankee Stadium. Halfway there he tried to talk me out of moving to Boulder again, *mano-a-mano*. I was married and running a successful bookstore. I had responsibilities. I'd had my chance to go to school. Now I didn't need school—I had what people went to school for. Would I

be able to get as good a job when I got out of this school? Was this the best time to leave it all and study poetry? Why not wait a couple of years when the economy will be better? The economy was tanking—we were in the worst of the Reagan’s recession at the time, with no end in sight. But for me everything was going so well. Did I really need to go to Boulder to study poetry? I could attend poetry classes at either the University of Connecticut in Storrs and Eastern Connecticut State College in Willimantic.

Plus there was all the recent bad press about Trungpa and the school, just as I getting ready to arrive. This was only months after the Jonestown mass poisoning, and Trungpa was recently in the news about an infamous “Party” during a Buddhist retreat. Poet William Merwin and his wife decided not to attend a party, so Trungpa sent some of his bodyguards to force them to attend. Merwin barricaded the door but Trungpa’s goons forced their way in. Merwin broke a bottle to protect his wife and cut one of them before he was disarmed and physically carried—along with his screaming wife—to the party. Once there, Trungpa ordered those attending to strip them, which they did. I can’t remember if anyone present objected, but if anyone did it wasn’t more than one or two. That the students at a meditation retreat allowed this to happen in their presence is bad enough. Merwin’s wife is Japanese, and Trungpa insulted her with racist comments about her body as she stood, naked, in front of the whole assembly. As you can imagine, this is a very shameful thing for an Asian woman. For anyone, certainly, but especially a Japanese woman being insulted by a mainland Chinese man. And Merwin was unable to protect his wife. Is there any more of an emasculating experience for a man?

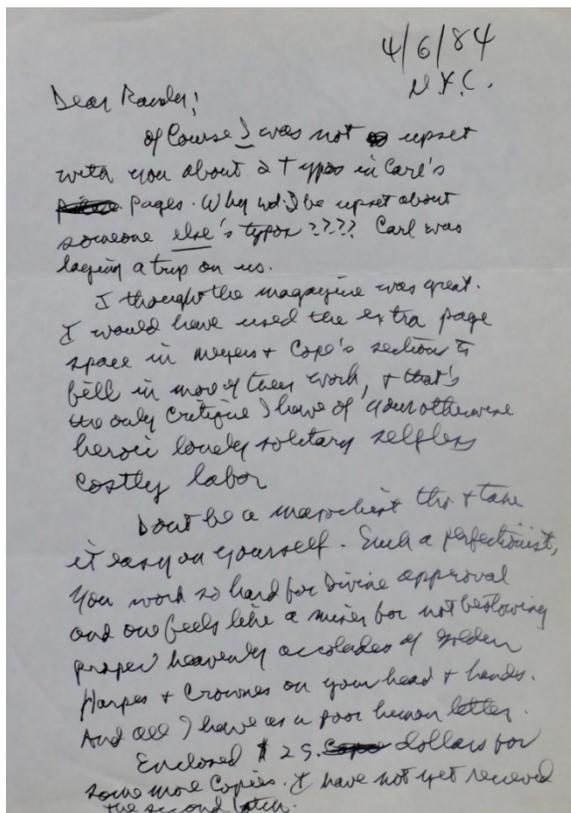
But in all fairness, and at Merwin’s own insistence, it’s important to note that Merwin has never spoken out against Trungpa for what happened that night, and that he and his wife stayed for the rest of the retreat, and until his death Trungpa remained his heart guru.

But the story of the Party got out and resulted in a big scandal, especially in Boulder, where Allen was also embarrassed to read negative comments he’d made about Merwin and Merwin’s poetry that he thought were off the record published in a local magazine. Boulder was already awash with stories about the Vajra Guards who protected Trungpa, who were now reportedly armed. Naropa was right in the middle of the downtown mall, Trungpa lived and partied in the oldest and most expensive part of town. The Mercedes and the Vajra Guards were well documented and intimidating.

And then poet Tom Clark wrote a book called *The Great Naropa Poetry Wars* where he not only regurgitated all of the gruesome facts of the Party, but also accused the NEA of being staffed by friends of Naropa and giving out grants to their no-talent friends. Even Ed Sanders wrote a book about the Party. It grew out of his Investigative Poetics class at Naropa that summer. He had the class chose what to investigate, and they chose the Party. Their published findings included interviews with as many people as possible who were present at the retreat. They used those interviews to document the complete retreat

and reported as many different versions of what happened at the Party and its aftermath as possible.

This was the last thing the poetry school needed, and it sucked in people like Allen and Anne who weren't even involved with the Party. And then—worse for me—the story broke nationally with a cover-story for “Harpers” magazine called “Spiritual Obedience,” by Peter Marin (which I subscribed to at the time) featuring a photo of someone in a white robe with a bullhorn in their lap. Trungpa's Party was one of the more colorful examples of what was being reported in the press following Jonestown. There were inscrutable stories of Sun Myong Moon marrying thousands of strangers in mass weddings in Shea Stadium and Rajnesh and his Rolls Royces and unquestioning devotees taking over a town in Washington State (this was years before the group actually did go rogue). So there was that.



4/6/84
N.Y.C.
Dear Rawley:
Of course I was not ~~so~~ upset
with you about 2 typos in Carl's
~~pages~~ pages. Why not be upset about
someone else's typos ??? Carl was
leaving a trip on us.
I thought the magazine was great.
I would have used the extra page
space in Meyer + Cole's section to
bell in more of their work, + that's
the only critique I have of your otherwise
heroic lonely solitary selfless
costly labor
Don't be a martinet tho + take
it easy on yourself. Such a perfectionist,
you work so hard for divine approval
and our heads like a miser for not bestowing
proper heavenly accolades of golden
halos + crowns on your head + hands.
And all I have as a poor human letter.
Enclosed \$ 25. ~~copy~~ dollars for
some more copies. I have not yet received
the second batch.

Letter #5.

Finally, in exasperation, I told my father that just because other people didn't see this as a great opportunity didn't mean it wasn't everything I claimed it to be. This was about more than studying poetry. This was about an offer I had in my hand to apprentice with

Allen Ginsberg, one of the most important American poets of the second half of the 20th century. And not only that, but I'd get to meet and study with other writers I admire like William Burroughs and Gregory Corso and God knows who else. Ginsberg and Waldman had just toured with Bob Dylan, my personal hero. Anything could happen. I didn't know why there wasn't thousands of people trying to get into this school. And even if it was a complete catastrophe, it was just for two years. My marriage could survive this. I had put Beth through college; now it was my turn. I proved I was reasonable by putting off my plans for two years longer than we originally agreed, but there's no reason to postpone any longer. I'm going, no matter what. I don't want to end up at fifty five wondering what my life would have been like if I had gone to Boulder and done what I wanted to do when I had the opportunity.

When I stopped talking my father quietly said, "Yeah, you're right," and changed the subject. Then we watched my favorite pitcher at the time—Catfish Hunter, in the last year of his career—pitch a couple of innings before getting pulled. After that, whenever the subject of going to Boulder came up at my house, my father always said, "Shut up and leave him alone. He knows what he's doing."

I called my father on his birthday, a couple of days before he died. He asked me what's new, and I told him, and he said, "Isn't it time you grew up and started making better decisions?" And I said, "You know, all I've ever wanted to do was what I wanted to do, what I enjoyed doing, and I didn't want to do what I didn't want to do. I believed that what I wanted to do was really important and that things I didn't want to do weren't important and I only had a certain amount of time so I decided to make certain I got all the good bits in. I'm not saying I'm a model for everyone or that my life is without regrets, but I decided to see what it was like to at least try to have an interesting life. Everyone told me that it'd be impossible but I've lived my entire life—45 years at the time—doing exactly that. Now, I'm not saying that I won't end up at 65, regretting my entire life, sitting on some ledge contemplating suicide, but I can say this: If I get run over by this bus tonight, I'll have lived my entire life exactly the way I wanted. And I've documented what that's been like in my writing. For me, that's a win. I've already won. Everything after this is just gravy.

And even if my end is something tragic, which it very well could be as it's not easy to get old alone—in fact, I already have proof that living alone is dangerous to my health and well-being, several times over. But even if it ends badly, I don't think it will be because of the decisions that I've made, or not them alone. Who knows, I probably would have died sooner if I eventually die of a stroke or heart attack.

My father listened to all of that and said, "Yeah, you know what you're doing. I always think about that time on the bus to Yankee Stadium, when you said you didn't want to end up like me at fifty five, wondering what your life would have been like if you had

done what you knew was best for you, against everyone's advice. That took courage.” And I said, “Dad, I didn't say *like you*. I wasn't even thinking about you. I was only thinking about me.”

That was our last conversation. He wasn't even sick at the time, but he died in his sleep less than a week later, about fifteen years older than I am now.



View North from David Rome's office window, Schocken Books, Madison Avenue and 36th Street, N.Y.C. - March 27, 1985 for Randy Rome Allen Ginsberg

While visiting an exhibition of Allen's photos in Paris in 1990, I was particularly struck by a photograph taken through David Rome's window in NYC (David was Trungpa's personal secretary at the time). As I looked at the photo, I found myself identifying different architectural styles—the Forties, the Fifties, the Twenties, the Eighteen Nineties—and I began to see the view as one would an architectural garden. Later, when I was back in Colorado, I was driving toward Denver on US36 one day and I looked at Denver and I was overcome and had to pull over to the side of the road. I saw Denver for the first time as an architectural garden rising out of the plains. The next time we were talking on the phone I mentioned this experience, and Allen criticized the photograph. As he mentioned in the letter above, Robert Frank had criticized the photo, quoting Berenice Abbott (also Allen's photographer mentor) that if you take a photo of buildings, always include the sidewalk or the full effect of the photo will be missing. Yet about a week later, a signed copy of the photo arrived at my house with a printed card (unsigned) saying “Compliments of Allen Ginsberg.”

You know, there's another connection between Ed Sanders and Uncasville. Six years before he was on the cover of "Life" magazine, Sanders was incarcerated at the federal jail in Uncasville for rowing a boat into New London harbor to protest the launching of a nuclear submarine at Electric Boat. Of course I didn't know about it at the time, and he was released before I began riding past the jail on my way to school in 1965-67. Sanders wrote his first great poem—"Poem from Jail"—in that jail, written on toilet paper, smuggled out by friends a sheet at a time and eventually published by City Lights in 1963.



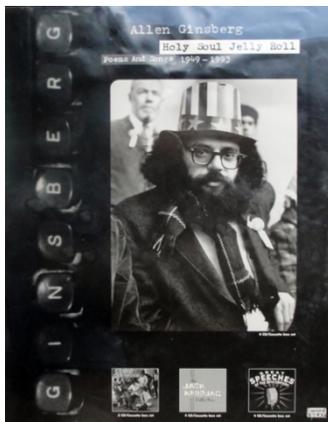
My original copy of *Tenderness Junction*, which I've carried with me through every change I've been through since I was fourteen. Cover photo by Richard Avedon.

Later, when I was a sophomore at St. Bernard's Boys High School, I bought a copy of *Tenderness Junction* by Ed Sanders and the Fugs and Allen sings the Hare Krishna mantra on that LP, so I was familiar with his voice when I was fourteen.



Jean Genet, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Chicago, 1968 photo by Jill Krementz, sent to me by Allen Ginsberg.

But I mostly remember Allen from TV and the *Life* magazine coverage of the Be-In in Golden Gate Park in 1967 and the Democratic Convention in Chicago in 1968. My Allen Ginsberg was the articulate, clear-eyed, joyful almost silly poet in the Uncle Sam hat, not the Beat poet. My Neal Cassady was the Prankster in *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, not the hipster saint in *On the Road*. *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* was my *On the Road*.



Uncle All

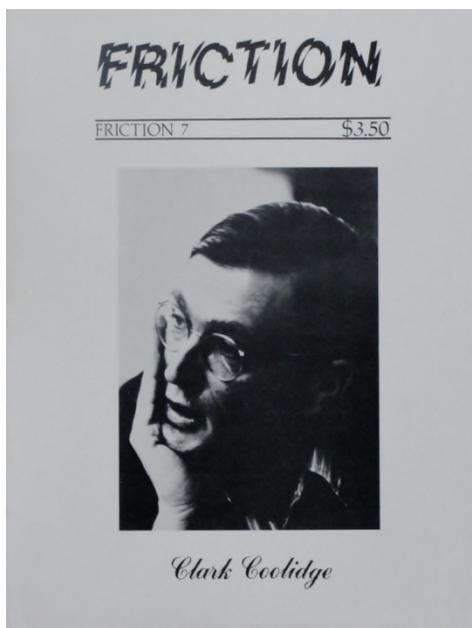
I came to the rest of the Beats very late. I didn't read *On the Road* until 1974 or so, when I was auditing 20th-century American novels with Sandy Taylor at Eastern Connecticut State College. At one point in that book, Sal and his married friend are driving east from coast to coast, and they're traveling on the wife's money. The guys are annoyed because the girl has to go to the bathroom more than they do and in Salt Lake City, I think, she's had enough and insists they stop at a hotel so she can sleep in a bed. The two men wake up early and their idea of a joke is to sneak off with all of her money, leaving her to face the hotel bill alone. Ha, ha, ha. All I could imagine was what it must have been like to wake up in the morning and realize that her husband and her "friend" had snuck out on her with all of her money and her car and left her to face the manager about the hotel bill. At that point I threw the book across the room in disgust. Ten years later a teacher at Metro State College in Denver wanted Allen to come to talk to his class about *On the Road*. Allen suggested they talk to me instead and gave him my number. I told the teacher I hated the book and told him why. Okay, he said, come and tell them that. So I figured I should at least reread the book before I spoke about it and when I did I thought it was one of the best books I'd ever read. And that bit in Salt Lake City? It just flashed by, like a speed bump. I knew what happened. I knew she'd be okay. But the *novel* didn't need her any more.

Other than that I didn't read anything by the Beats except by happenstance until 1977, when I was accepted at Naropa. In the next two years I began reading everything I could by the Beats. I ordered one of everything in print by everyone who was teaching at Naropa, which was a much broader list than just the Beats, although almost all of the living Beats were teaching there at least once a year—Allen, Burroughs, Corso, di Prima, Orlovsky. I also got to meet and form a deep connection and correspondence with Carl Solomon, and got to meet other Beats and San Francisco poets like Herbert Huncke, John Clellon Holmes, Edie Kerouac-Parker, Carolyn Cassady, Robert Frank, Ferlinghetti, Micheline, Michael McClure, Nanao Sakaki, Joyce Johnston—Kerouac's girlfriend at one time, and the musician David Amram, who scored the Robert Frank film of the young Beats, "Pull My Daisy."

But I was actually more drawn to the work of some of the other non-Beat teachers there at the time, like Philip Whalen and Gary Snyder and Gregory Bateson and Meredith Monk and John Cage and Chogyam Trungpa. And later Ted Berrigan, Anselm Hollo, and Clark Coolidge. I wasn't impressed with the dance department. My wife was a very serious dance student, and we were together at a really wonderful time for dance—the early Seventies to the mid-Eighties. Plus before we moved to Boulder, we lived down the road from Connecticut College, which had a very lively modern dance scene at the time. Maybe they still do. I got to see Judith Jamison dance "Cry" with Alvin Ailey's company at least twice, and we also saw Pilobolus's second tour—when onstage nudity and dramatic acrobatics and their surreal visuals really were new. And we were on the circuit

for the Dance Theater of Harlem and the Martha Graham and Twyla Tharp and Balanchine companies, and we were close enough to visit the New York City Ballet, and I'm forgetting half a dozen companies, I'm sure. Anyway, Naropa's dance department was all about contact improvisation and I preferred the technical and dramatic dances I found in modern dance and ballet. I could appreciate the concept of a dance school where the students were encouraged to experiment with their intimate relationship to their bodies and others while remaining in motion, on a dance floor, in front of friends and strangers, but for me a little goes a long way.

I've only recently realized how important two specific readings by Clark Coolidge at Naropa were to my writing and performances ever since. The first one was a lecture on Kerouac that Clark gave at the On the Road Festival at Naropa in 1982, and the other was a talk he gave completely woven out of lines written by Beckett in the order in which they were written, mixing Beckett's poetry, drama, prose, letters, and speeches.



FRICTION 7, The Clark Coolidge Issue, Summer, 1984.

I could hear several different facets in what he was reading, like the faces of a diamond. By preserving the chronology of the writing, you could hear how Beckett changes over time. At first he's seeking, and not finding. Then slowly over time—after World War II and his work in the French Resistance, after he found true love, after he'd been stabbed and survived, after he'd had success, especially after the Nobel—it's as if he relaxed,

stopped searching, and suddenly the whole world with all its beauty rushed into the vacuum, which was even more painful for him than searching and not finding because to have the whole world given to you means that's what you're going to have to lose. Life for Beckett became a beautiful pain.

Clark chose passages he loved and he read them with all the clarity of great passion. And, if you were familiar with Beckett's writing, you could hear what Clark was doing, where he was getting these passages, how he was jumping around, changing contexts, what he was using and what he was leaving behind.

"So, You're A Poet" Productions Presents

DADA FESTIVAL



featuring:
Euphyrosyne Bloom
Lee Ann Brown
Darrin Daniel
Ethelyn Friend
Anselm Hollo
Peter Michelson
Tom Peters
Siena Pinney
Todd Pinney
Randy Roark
Shira Segal
Kai Sibley, slides
Barbara Jean Slopey, ASL
Chris Jones, piano
& more

Commemorating the
Eightieth
Anniversary
of the Opening
of the

CABERET
VOLTAIRE

reading from:
Apollinaire
Antonin Artaud
Hans Arp
Hugo Ball
Andre Breton
Blaise Cendrars
Arthur Cravan
Vicente Huidobro
Velimir Khlebnikov
Vladimir Mayakovsky
Eric Satie
Kurt Schwitters
Gertrude Stein
Tristan Tzara
& more.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19TH, 1996
8PM
PENNY LANE COFFEEHOUSE
18TH AND PEARL

\$3.00

Produced by Randy Roark
for Dangerous And Difficult Art Productions
Sponsored by FRICTION Magazine

The DADA Festival in 1996. The first official Dangerous And Difficult Art Production.

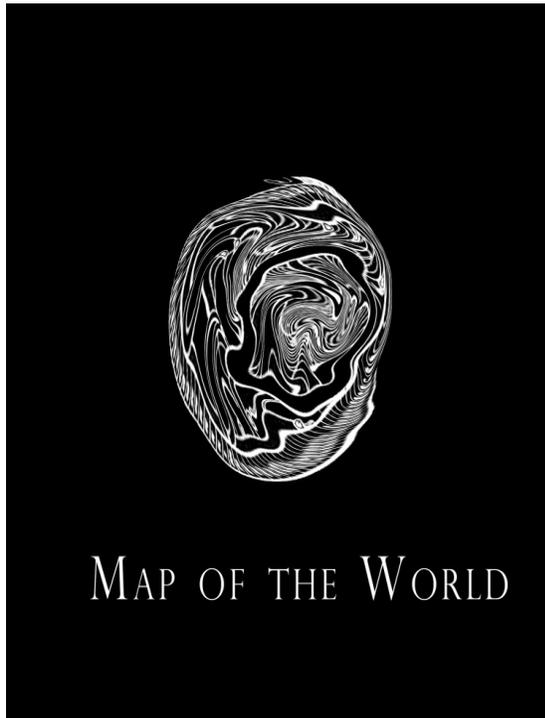
And I learned something from that reading that I tried to make use of with Dangerous And Difficult Art Productions. I noticed that when people read work they've chosen by a poet they love, they read with their whole being. So I organized a series of events in celebration of certain poets or poetry movements, and people would read other people's work. I thought it would inspire people to read their own work with the same passion, but nothing ever came of the experiment.

From Clark's first talk, the one on Kerouac, I felt very powerfully what happened when his prose and Kerouac's prose and poetry were jammed against each other. It created an odd experience in the reader. There was a clearly a voice moderating the discussion but it was constantly undermined by the exuberance of Kerouac's voice, which would keep busting through. That's echoed in my own use of two voices that come into and out of focus in so much of my writing. I wasn't conscious until now that I stole it from Clark, but including two often contradictory voices allowed me to open the writing outwards—to use one voice to comment on another, say, so it wasn't just megalomania that you're listening to. And if you do that enough, when you do just present one voice, like in the poems in my work that are written "by" certain historical personages like Emily Dickinson or Lucia Joyce, it's more powerful. And sometimes the piece is about the person reading the poem, you're talking directly to them, appealing directly to their state of mind. Plus the different sensibilities and rhythms and voices between poetry and prose break up the numbing pace of prose and the tiring flash and dazzle of poetry. It's more like writing a play, I imagine, feeling into when each voice should interrupt the other. With a voice, what they're thinking is often more important than what they're saying. Like a play, a piece of writing exists between the different voices on the stage or in the piece of writing, and in my work it's often about two or more voices inside the same head—it's rarely mine—trying to come to some sensible middle ground, taking each reality into consideration.

In the second piece what I recognize in my own writing is its process of generating writing that I've always claimed to have invented on my own, which I've called "distillation." It came to me on the Island of Iona in October 1990. I had visited the island because the monks of Iona had preserved a great amount of Western civilization in their library, which they hid in their stone towers during the Viking invasions.

While on the island, I ran out of books, so I bought a book at the abbey bookstore about Irish myths that I assumed would be interesting but it wasn't. But, since it was written very early in the 20th century, there were some very interesting verbal constructions that were delicious, and I began underlining them, wanting to remember them. When I got back to the U.S., I got the idea to type them up. When I did I realized I had about 60% of a poem in a voice completely different from my own. And it was a long poem form since it was a long book and there were lots of these phrases. As I read the raw material over, I began to see that it was a long poem composed of shorter poems. And I've continued to

use this process of “distillation” in other situations to create works out of my reading, almost all of them in the long-poem-composed-of-shorter-poems form—including a history of dada, a history of art, long works on alchemy, shamanism, and dream language.



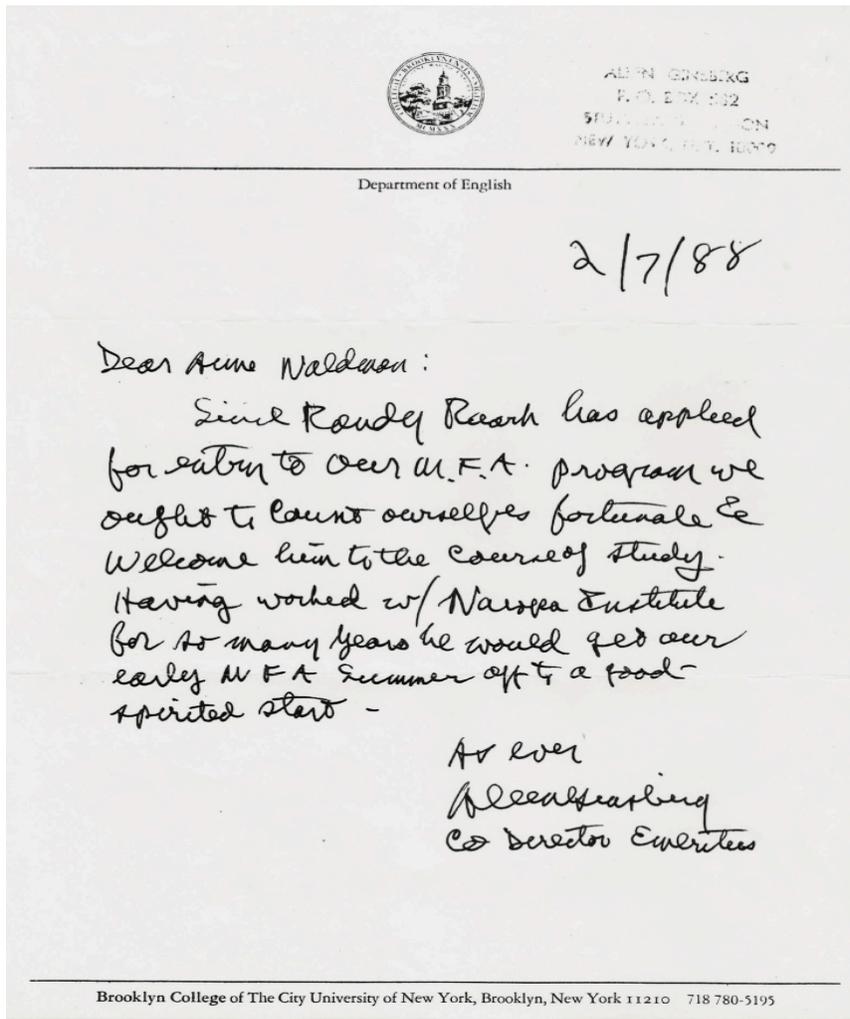
Map of the World; collecting long poems on shamanism, the language of alchemy, and dream language; cover design by Monika Edgar. Laocoon Press 2005.

This form of distillation is something that Pound also used in his *Chinese Cantos*. But in Clark’s presentation, every word made sense, even if you didn’t know the source material. Anyone could follow the piece as it was, which you can’t say about the *Chinese Cantos*. Later Anselm Hollo wrote a series of poems distilled from Ted Berrigan’s classroom lecture transcriptions via this process as well. I’m not sure where he got the idea from. Maybe he thought it up on his own.

The Beats who I enjoyed the most as a reader were Corso and Allen and Diane di Prima, and the non-fiction writing of William Burroughs. Their poems made sense—they said something in a beautiful and deeply felt and intelligent way—and that’s always been the kind of poetry that means the most to me. The biggest influence on my own poetics has been Brion Gysin’s cut-up method—which I learned literally at the feet of William

Burroughs—and Pound's and Clark's distillation process. I'm sure Allen's constant berating of me for thinking too much and presenting too little had the most effect of all.

For my first few years in Boulder, Allen lived and taught more or less year-round, and when he moved back to NYC in 1983, a lot of the excitement went out of living in Boulder for me. But he would come to Boulder to teach at least twice a year. I got my BFA in Poetry from Naropa and the University of Colorado in 1983, and I continued to work in various capacities for the Summer Writing Program and Naropa until I turned my back on the school in 1985, vowing never to return.



When I told Allen that Naropa was requesting letters of recommendation for me, he said "Let me write one."

I returned for my MFA in Prose and Poetry in 1988 as a work-study student in their audio archives. I graduated with my MFA in 1991 (thesis: *A Reader's Guide to Thomas Pynchon*). After graduation, I began transcribing Allen's poetry lectures, and I continued

that project until he died. I ended up transcribing all of his poetry lectures and interviews from 1974-1983; the 9-hour interview with Hal Willner that became the liner notes for Rhino's box set "Holy Soul, Jelly Roll" (an introduction to a book about Harry Smith was excerpted from that interview as well); and all of Allen's lectures on William Blake, including the ones at Brooklyn College after he left Naropa; and everything he recorded on a 1983 trip to China—his university lectures, whispered surreptitious interviews with dissidents; journal entries; and recordings made—including interviewing his shipmates—on a boat ride down the Yangtze River before the dams were built. Many of these transcriptions are available on-line via the Ginsberg Trust.

Allen Ginsberg Journal Rolling Thunder Oct 28-1975
 ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ to — ⑥

oct 28

"A Crystal ball's on the piano - Is Dylan leading us on top of the mountain? Is there a God? or are we moving out thru vast calm open Godless space? Jack Kerouac's Grave is in Lowell, we'll sing over his bones. We land in America tomorrow, at plymouth rock, to discover ourselves in our kingdom." - For the Daily Paper.

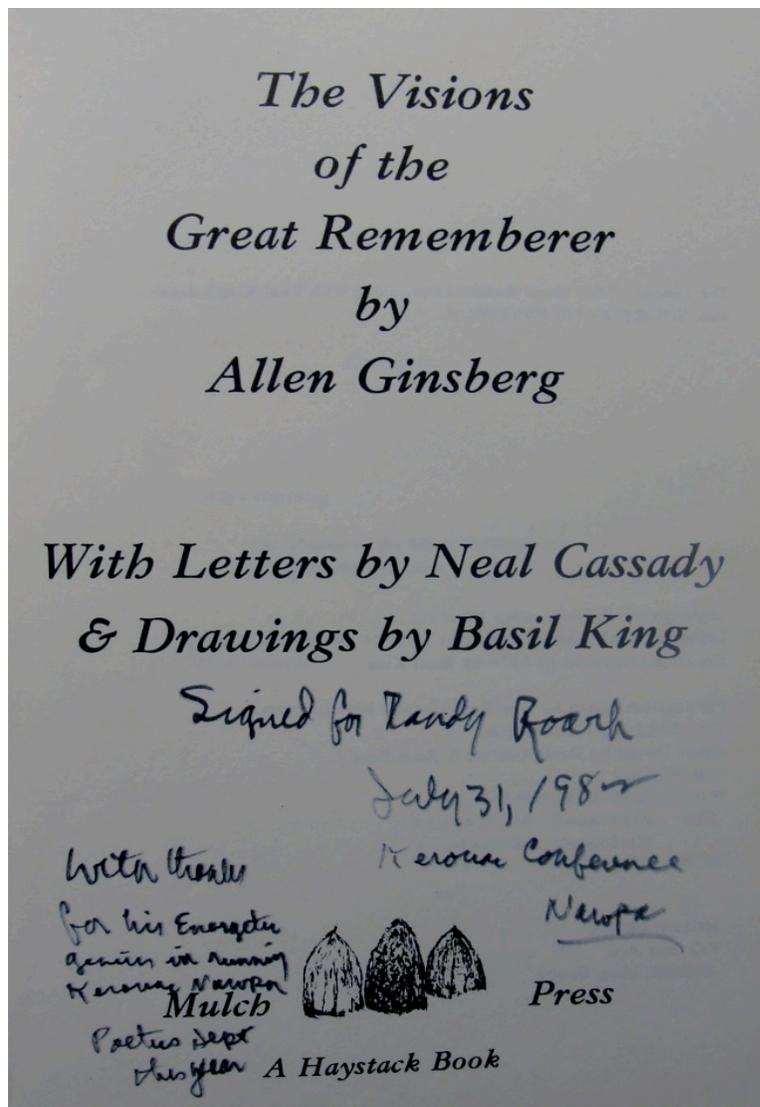
oct 29

A. Well how do you like yr party
 D. It's your party, it's not mine...
 A. Well is it giving you pleasure?
 D. Pleasure? Pleasure? No not at all, I wouldn't want that would you? That's too dangerous...I do what I do without thinking of pleasure.
 A. When did you come to that state?
 D. Couple years back...I mean, at one time I went out for a lot of pleasure,, all I could get because see there was a lot of pain before that - but I found that the more pleasure I got subtly there was as much pain, and I began to notice a correspondence, the same frame.- I began to experiment and saw it was a balance - so now I do what I do without wanting pleasure ...or pain - everything in moderation -
 A. Remember what the Lama told me 63 "If you see anything horrible don't cling to it if you see anything beautiful don't cling to it..." What about Love, then?
 D. Well it depends whatcha mean, love - It has all kind of meanings -
 A. Yeah okey No problem, but what about the other polarities - Do you believe in God?
 D. God? You mean God? Yes I do...I mean I know because where I am I get the contact with...It's a certain vibration - in the midst of - you know I've been up on the mountain, and)

Syll here

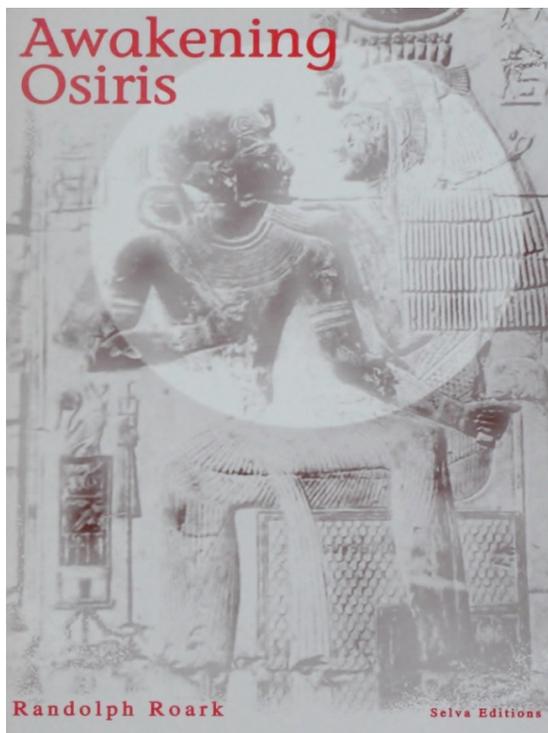
Transcription of a page of Allen's notebook while on tour with Bob Dylan and his Rolling Thunder Revue, October, 1975.

I also typed up about a dozen of Allen's journals over the years, including the years following the Party. Part of my job was to bring to his attention any poems or "particularly good writing" I found in them. Then once a week we'd meet and go over my transcriptions, and he'd look at my poems and tell me what was wrong with them and me. Then he'd read me some poetry—Reznikoff and Williams and Shakespeare I remember most of all—and give me next week's work assignment and some writing instructions. After the first semester, I became his teaching assistant, doing everything I could to make his life easier, including preparing for his classes, attending to the necessary administrative stuff, recording his classes and indexing his recordings for the archives, and by 1982 I'd begun working for poetics department.



"...With thanks for his Energetic Genius in running Kerouac Naropa Poetics Dept this year, 1982."

Even after I became aware of modern poets like Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso, I was more interested in the lyrical and story poems I found in the standard big poetry anthologies I'd been ordering from Scholastic Book Services ever since I was old enough to read. I especially enjoyed Donne and Chaucer and the Medieval and Arthurian romances. I liked the long form for poetry, I liked how the story changed as time moved along. The long form was the only way I could see to get a lot stuff to harmonize. My first published book—*Awakening Osiris*—is based on the *Metamorphoses of Apuleius*, better known as *The Golden Ass*, and I turned my poem into a book-length incantation for the 1001 masks of Isis that ends where it begins. My long form poem on the history of art—“Mona Lisa's Veil”—also ends where it begins. My history of art is one that connects prehistoric art with modern primitivism.



Awakening Osiris; cover by Laura Haertling, Selva Editions, 1996. Thank you Joe!

The first time I realized the beauty of an open-closed system was with Yeats' *A Vision*. Yeats vision is of a wheel where “body” is at the top and “spirit” is on the bottom. As long as you're alive and growing, you are on some point of this wheel, somewhere on a journey from the spiritual to the physical, or from the physical returning to the spiritual, but never stepping off the wheel, always moving away from one pole and toward the other. And any desire to “transcend” the wheel-like quality of life, would actually be a

form of insanity. To step off the wheel at any point would only end your evolution, it wouldn't cede you any authority in return for becoming rigid. Instead, we should embrace this cycle of life, seeking out the spiritual only to one day experience a fleeting idea that life is passing you by. So you get married, have a family, get a degree, and then one day you feel that something essential is slipping past you and you return to your studies or the church. The thing is to keep on the wheel, to keep changing, to keep leaving and returning, because that is life. To stop changing is to die.

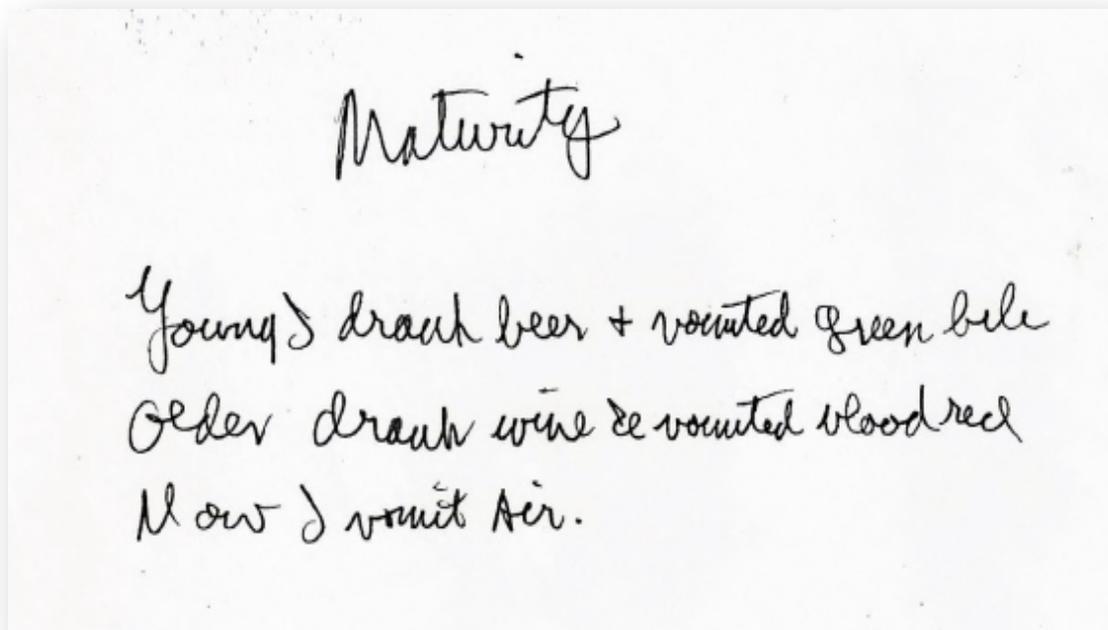
Once I applied this idea that every distinct moment is just a single slice of a much larger pie, balanced by a piece on the exact opposite side of the wheel, I began to see every individual thing from its larger perspective, as getting from here to somewhere yet unseen. But I've walked this way so long now that I'm always waiting for the propelling dramatic event, the one that will turn all of this certainty into its opposite. For me a single event or a single poem is like a Magritte lamppost without a shadow: you know something's wrong before you know what it is. And the hardest thing to notice is what's missing. It's difficult to get any kind of clarity on what's absent.

Until college the only modern poet I'd read with any excitement was Leonard Cohen. I loved the life he portrayed in his poems and wanted to live a life like his. I was a straight middle class rural Connecticut kid—the self doubt and egomania and lust and vague spiritual longings I read about in Cohen's poetry were much more exciting than anything in *Howl* for me—especially Cohen's *The Spicebox of Earth*, which my first girlfriend bought for me in 1970 (thanks Kathy!). I was a junior in high school and the book was the perfect text for the man-boy I was, exploring those early sex-soaked days of my first intimate relationship—this articulate celebratory voice urging me to go, go, go! Gather ye rosebuds while ye may! It turned out to be really good advice. They should teach more of that in school!



Ezra Pound's grave, Venice, Italy, Summer 1990.

Ezra Pound said we should have mentors but not ones whose work is so great that it intimidates us into silence. I've had teachers who have intimidated me almost into silence (Anne Waldman and Anselm Hollo come to mind) but Allen wasn't one of them. When he pushed me, he only provoked me to write more, better, sharper. Plus, the more he insisted my poetry be a certain way, the clearer it was to me that I would have to find a different way or I'd never know how much of my writing was mine and how much of it was his. I didn't know at first what my writing would be like, but I knew it would have to be completely different from his. But Allen will always be the most important person in my life, no question. After Brakhage's death I realized that my apprentice days were over.



Allen Ginsberg, manuscript journal page photocopy [cropped-ed.].

I literally don't know who I'd be today if Naropa didn't exist. What an amazing experiment, what a moment in time! It was just a couple of years with Allen and the whole gang. Anne is still there, and the school is thriving, but I feel so blessed that I was the right age and at the right position in my life to be able to come out to Boulder and study with the people I did. I am so grateful to Trungpa and Naropa and Allen and Anne and Diane for making the life I had possible.

7 sp Love Minus Zero
 perfect rythms again, whistles (~~flutes~~) scoring the syncopation against words.

Don't Think Twice -
 Breaking up the phrases with extreme exasperation from overmuch practice-- playfulness, freedom, accuracy, in reggae.

Maggie's Farm - eliminates terminal repetitions of refrains-- old declaration of political independence, gutbucket saxes against squealing violins "They say sing while you slave/ I just get bored."

One More Cup of Coffee
 delicate ended conversation congas drums & instruments

Rolling Stone
 massive symphonic paen of civilization loneliness-- "When you got nothing, you got nothing to lose" another great rolling stone!

I Shall Be Released
 Zigzag Christ tone descending from the "waaall"

Heard April 28, 1979 Sunday } *put at end*

Is Your Love in Vain
 Simplehearted completent from man at extreme realization of his own destiny & wanting desire lover. *secure secure*

Going Going Gone
 Salvation's his preoccupation.

Blowing in Wind
 Tender authority to this anthem; with chimes

Just Like a Woman
 Pronounced delicately

Oh Sister
 Lost the melody, found the syllables destin? destin? Ah hum - oh huh! n'uh huh!

Watchtower
document *gives* hold the document, or tonic, whatever @ sing *Gunterfont*
 " life is but a joke "

Transcription of Ginsberg's notes upon first hearing Dylan's *Live at Budokan*, April 1979.

But I'm older now than Allen was when I met him. They say it's difficult to grow in the shadow of a tall oak and I may be kidding myself but I feel that I've gone a considerable ways since my days with Allen.

O HARPER, HOW LONG!

O Harper how long ~~can~~ we continue this Harsh Screaming!
How Thine instrument' has come to be like ~~become like the~~
your the sound of Cars Crashing!
Thy voice ~~has~~ become like the sound of glass broken on an
~~the~~ asphalt floor

O Muse why ~~are you~~ so broken tongued! *Muse* Thy song the
~~bang~~ elank of garbage cans dumped on ^{the} pavement
at Dawn

Muse Thy words the sound of silver dollars ~~Clanking~~ *clanking* into the
your hollow tin buckets of Las Vegas Slot Machines!
Thy syllables the ~~dead~~ toneless voice of Television
Announcers nodding their heads ~~over~~ *on* Atomic War!

High School boy, ~~thy~~ *your* pleading voice become the nasal
whine of a Big Car Salesman's *nasal whine!*

~~Thy~~ Imagination stuck, like chewing gum on the Subway
Platform, turned black, ~~like~~ an old Jew's
mushrooms

your Thy story the whine ~~and~~ muffled ~~in~~ the bus exhaust on
the Slumlord's corner

* Your *Mary* ~~like~~ the slick elevator ~~that~~ drops and slides
100 stories in the Twin Monolith Buildings
down

* ~~—~~ 'Twas a dream end, where addressing Burroughs at
nite in a bottle-strewn lot,

* I sang aloud uninhibited, voice loosened ~~to~~ inspiration
"Thy voice become the sound of broken glass on an
asphalt floor!"

O Harsh Politician ~~thy~~ *restrain* antisexual ~~song~~ *the* (noise) of
Beerbottles broken in the lower East side
Streets!

O Puritanic woman ~~thy~~ *mean* command like ~~the~~ *the* voice of a
~~hysterical~~ policeman in the midst of indifferent
mobs of boys

Sometimes Allen liked a poem enough to work on it. I don't know if "OH HARPER, HOW LONG!" was ever published or not.

I was also blessed to be living in the same town as Stan Brakhage during his last years. I'd known Stan since 1980, and I loved his guerrilla film screenings with an 8mm projector in one hand and an extension cord in the other. He just needed a wall, preferably white. He'd rest the projector on his knee if he had to. I've seen films with him in college dormitory hallways.

Randy Rourke manages the near-impossible: that eye's-sight and tongue's wind-of-word exist quite commonly as being-at-one in all of his verbal working... (by this statement I do not mean "description" - he eschews description in the normal sense -; I mean he's managed a particular magic where the spell of words and vision's un-nameable "spell" coincide in the mind of the reader because of the, most often, verb/noun arrangement of his language).

Stan Brakhage

Nov. 12, 2000

Stan Brakhage blurbs *Mona Lisa's Veil: New and Selected Poems 1979-2001*, Baksun Books, 2001. Thanks Jennifer!

But in the early days Stan was so intense and unpredictable that I mostly avoided him, and sadly that eventually extended to his screenings. He was a rager and so was my father, and he wasn't safe to be around either. Stan would solicit questions and comments

after a screening and invariably someone would ask a question—and usually a very innocuous one or one that attempted to be flattering—and Stan would misunderstand and just go off on them. I'd have to get up and leave. Then, following his cancer treatment, he became so soft and welcoming. Sometimes a comment would begin to get him riled up, but he no longer had the energy to get really upset. Once again, it was strictly a matter of good timing on my part that I was free at the time of Stan's greatest generosity and openness.



A rejected piece of Stan's hand-painted film.

One of my most powerful art moments was when Stan stuck his hand in his pocket and pulled out a roll of film in a paint-splattered plastic bag. It wasn't what he was looking for, so he put it back in his pocket. What was that, I asked. Oh, it was a piece of black leader he was carving. He carried it around with him along with an Exacto knife in a leather case for when he had a minute or two to work during the day. Would I like to see it?

I nodded and he handed me the bag. I opened it and took out the film. "Open it" he said. There was a thick piece of black electrical tape holding the leader together. I peeled the tape back and held the first couple of feet spread out against the light. The differing depths of the cuts determined how much light got through. This would be how the film was seen. But I turned it over and looked the surface itself. Stan had sliced the leader sideways, carving into the black. Without the light going through it, it was a soft sculpture, a shallow bas relief, cliffside rice paddies on a Balinese scroll.

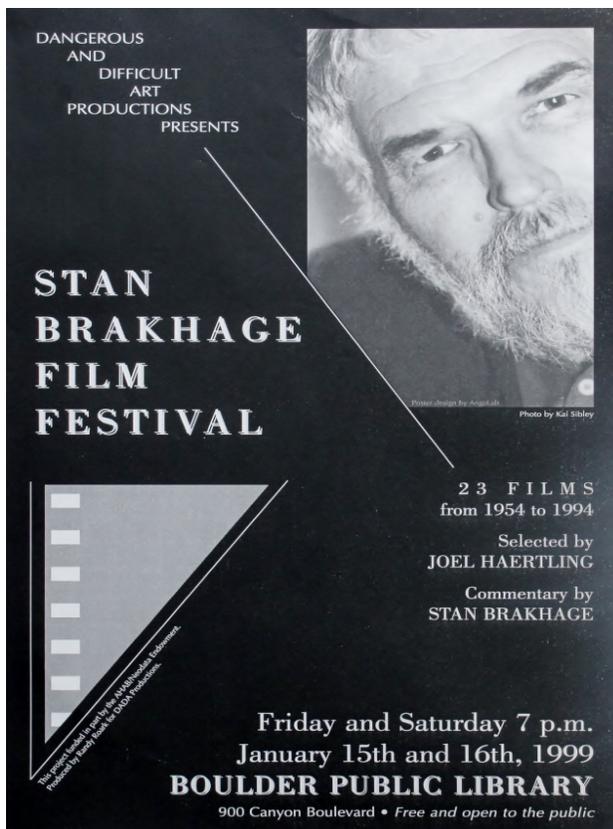


Stan Brakhage, hosting a Sunday Salon, mid-90s.
Photo by Roger Underwood.

Every Sunday night he was in town, Stan would show an hour's worth of film in the film study's private projection theater at the university, usually including one of his own shorter films. The audiences varied, but there were a lot of regulars, including some who drove up from Denver every Sunday and sat near the front, next to Stan.

At the end of his life, Stan was an assistant professor in film at the university and his students were the tenured film professors who were technically his superiors. The difference between an assistant professorship and a tenured position is the reason why Stan was still working after 65, after cancer, and why he finally moved to Canada—for the health benefits. I was ashamed for the state of the arts, that Stan Brakhage was forced to keep working to maintain his family even though it was killing him. That seemed a bit harsh for anyone; I'm not saying that Stan Brakhage deserved special treatment as a genius. I bet it's even worse if you're not a genius. But it's like they say about confining Ezra Pound in St. Elizabeth's with raving lunatics. Can you imagine a sensibility so refined in such an environment? But Stan never complained about his situation—at least to me. I know he was more worried about what would happen to his wife and their two young sons after his death.

After the films on salon nights, anyone who wanted to stay could follow Stan to a back room, where we would discuss what we had seen, or anything else people wanted to talk about. Those salons were a great opportunity to get educated about film for free, to see new films, the kind of films that change your ideas about film, then later to sit across from Stan as he freestyled on whatever came to mind, which was always the most entertaining part of the evening for me. For me he'll always be feet up on the desk, hands behind his head, his roaring laughter. I couldn't believe how much he knew, how he could speak so deeply about so many things. His friends were not only filmmakers but the New York painters and the Sixties poets, like Creeley and Coolidge and Whalen and McClure and Ginsberg.



Stan Brakhage Film Festival, 1999, *Westword* magazine's Art Film Festival of the Year for 1999; designed by Angela Bowman, photo by Kai Sibley.

For almost four years I was able to educate my eye with a visual artist who not only rarely used words in his films, but almost never used sound. It was the exact opposite of

writing, and yet Brakhage was a poet in film as his friends were poets in words. I wanted to learn how he structured his films, visually; how he organized them into “films.”

I also found the form of film very exciting. The after-images are the perfect objective correlative—in Eliot’s sense—for the presence of absence. Film is so ephemeral. It doesn’t really exist unless it’s projected and seen by a human eye because the after-images and the persistence of vision are almost as important as the film itself. It’s one of the reasons he resisted broadcasting his films on TV—because they were designed to be projected across a silent darkened room, onto a broad reflective screen. The TV flattened out his films, changed their colors, cooled them down. The radiance was gone. They were made of color now, not light.

That’s why I would group Brakhage’s films with conceptual art, because they are about the process of seeing, which is, of course, the primary means for anyone in a film theater for coming to know the world. But how often do the sighted examine the process by which they come to know the world, and in this way, where the lights will come up and you’ve all just shared a very powerful silent and private experience in a public theater? On the sidewalks outside the theater, no one is thinking exactly like any one they meet, ever. Only at the end of a film or a play or a concert or a reading are you likely to be feeling exactly like those around you.

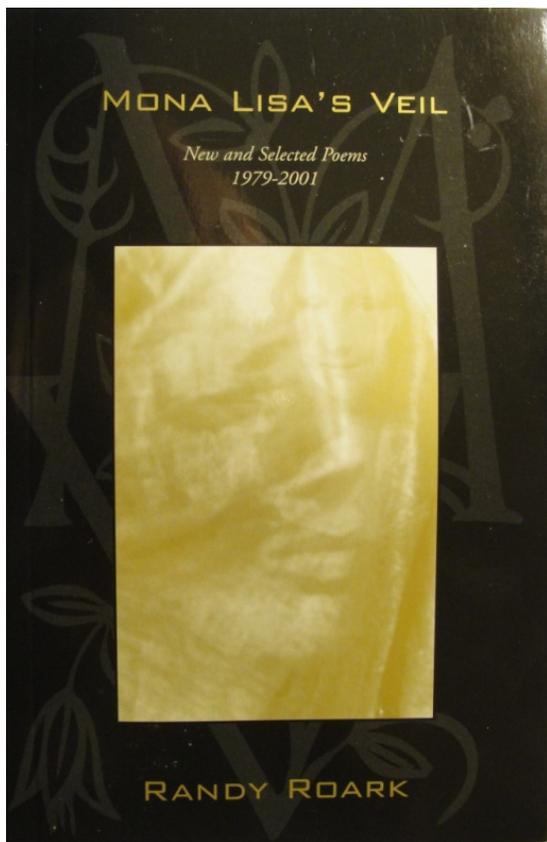
What I learned from Stan is that he thought in images, he saw shapes, he saw light. People were kind of reflective surfaces in his film. For him color had as much of an effect as a minor or major key for a musician. In fact, that first deep experience I had while watching his film on Chartres, the one where I was listening to a lot of Coltrane and beginning to identify some of the main themes in his music, or his style I guess you’d call it. I was getting a sense for how Coltrane was constructing his solos. It seemed to me that he’d start low, like rooting himself and his solo in the earth. And from there he would make repeated attempts to take flight, to break free, and there would be several spikes near the end where it really seemed like he was going to succeed where before he had failed. I mean, that would be the Hollywood ending, right? The one you’re waiting for, half in anticipation, half in dread.

And I saw something similar in Stan’s work, so I told him what I saw in his films and why they made me think of Coltrane and I asked him if any of this was making any sense. That was the conversation that launched a conversation that lasted until very near the end.

Stan loved to talk and I loved him for that, especially after the morphine, when he became even sweeter, more tearful, more thankful, more joyous. That’s why I don’t mind these interviews about the past, because when I think of Stan I’m flooded with happiness and love, so it’s fun for me too.

Watching Stan's films I came to understand non-narrative film in a way that I've never managed with non-narrative poetry. His films reminded me of Franz Klein or Pollock paintings, but they moved. So it would be like a seeing a hundred Franz Kline paintings in quick succession every minute. And then in Stan's last decade the techniques became so complex they were like Pollocks if there were Pollocks as big as a film screen, made up of a dozen paintings every ten seconds, each one different but each one clearly related to the previous one and the next one to follow. How did he keep it all in mind, I wondered. How did he create, assemble, edit, process his films? How much of the film was forethought and how much of it was left up to the making? (The answer to every question—I learned—was "it's all more or less accidental.")

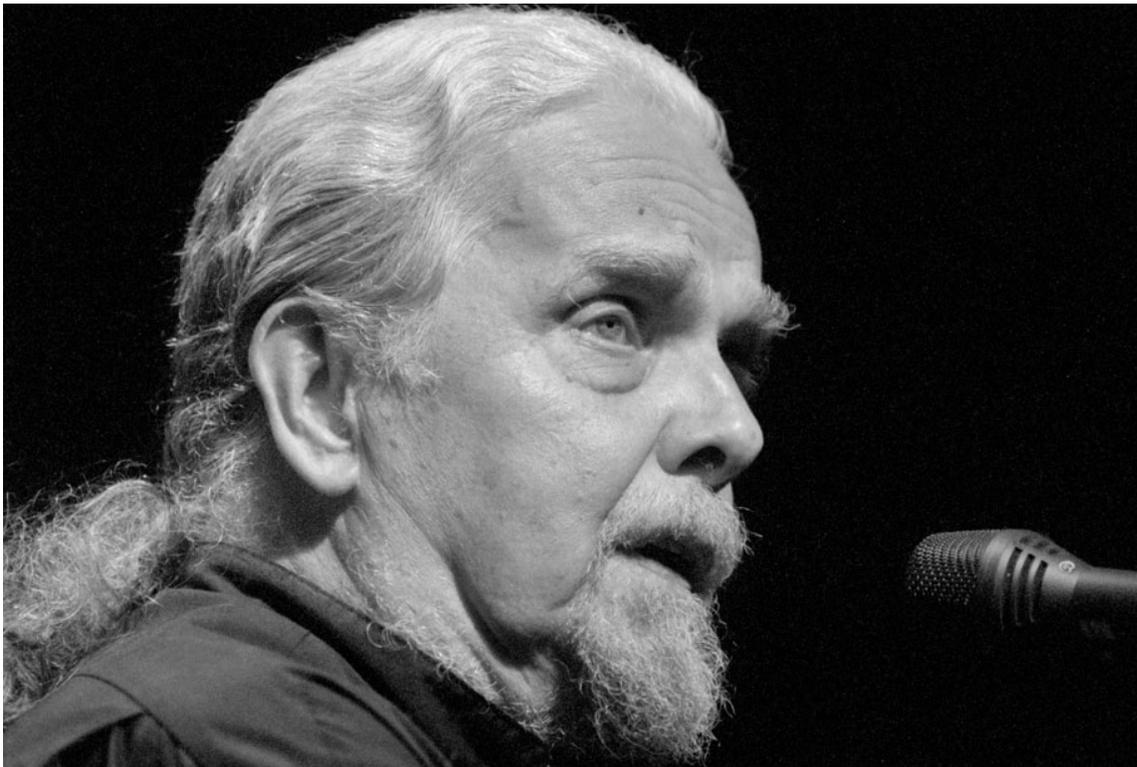
I was reading Simon Schama on Rembrandt at the same time (thank you Jonathan!) and when I go back to what I wrote at this time it's as if my black and white writing suddenly becomes Kodachrome. I've toned it down quite a bit since then, I hope, but that's the time of "Mona Lisa's Veil," my history of the visual and plastic arts, and all that comes after.



Mona Lisa's Veil: New and Selected Poems 1979-2001, Baksun Books, 2001, cover design by Sarah Chesnutt, incorporating "Black Isis" by Ira Cohen.

And then Stan died and I've been working since 1998 for Sounds True, producing and recording and editing audio by many of the leading spiritual teachers of today. Right now I have a relationship with American Buddhist Jack Kornfield that's almost exactly like the one I had with Allen, except now it's as author and producer/editor, not as poet and student/secretary. And instead of transcribing lectures, I'm turning Jack's audio archives into anthologies and recording original programming and developing books out of his recordings with him.

And I continue to write—although I work more happily in prose these days than poetry—and I feel like I'm doing my best work right now. Others may feel differently—I hear that Anselm Hollo was one—and that's to be expected. I probably feel the same about their work.



Anselm Hollo (1934-2013).

But not Anselm's! Ask anyone. I've been saying that Anselm is the best poet writing in the English language since Creeley's death. What a collected poems he'll have! He was an inspiration to me from the first time we met at Naropa in 1980. He was a crazy Finn who knew more about English and poetry than anyone I knew. He taught Dada that first semester, and he introduced me to the writings of Hugo Ball and Marcel Duchamp and

Kurt Schwitters. I wouldn't have read "Sharpen the eye (a method of torture)" except in that class. That's where I also read Duchamp on how the great artist's greatest artwork is how they choose to use their time. It would be impossible to over-estimate the importance of Anselm's writing class and his literature classes—and later his classes on the European poets—in all of my subsequent writing.

Anselm is the only poet I've ever seen called back for three encores. I don't know of anyone who didn't love Anselm and his poetry and his readings. Yet he's always remained—it seems to me—a poet's poet, writing outside of the limelight. He once told me that he'd probably met every person who'd ever bought a copy of one of his books. That vision of the poet as someone who gets the work done, without regard for whether the world values the work he is doing, has been one that I've made into a sort of cloak to wrap around some of my more experimental work.

I also relate to what I saw as his slow and steady approach to life, and how he always had at least two things going on, on top of his writing—teaching and translating—and how it all fed into his work, as my work does for me. His work seems all of a piece; the poet of his last years sits so comfortably beside the poet in his youth.

Editing other people's writing is the best education for working on your own along with, I imagine, translating poems into different languages. I was afraid that becoming a producer and editor at Sounds True would drain me of my creativity, but it turned out the exact opposite. It's like exercising regularly—you get stronger, not weaker. Writing is like typing—the more you do, the faster and more accurate you get. Writing is a muscle.

I don't blame Anselm and others for preferring my earlier work. When I was studying Pound in Brunnenberg Castle in 1990, and then afterward, as I traveled on my own for six months on a series of literary and historical pilgrimages from Italy to France to the British isles to Greece and Egypt, my interests in my chosen literary forms more or less coalesced. It's been the half dozen or so practices that I continue to explore since I graduated from Naropa: 1) mashing together varying styles of prose and poetry; 2) mixing "masks" and first-person monologues, and intentionally blending the two; 3) how far can I go into fiction before it's no longer non-fiction; 4) how far into non-fiction before it stops being fiction; 5) crafting poetry using the cut-up or assemblage methods from my readings and overheard conversations that people won't realize are generated from cut-ups or assemblage; and 6) using travel to generate writing.



THE NAROPA INSTITUTE

2/21/90

John Gory
English Department, University of New Orleans
Lakefront,
New Orleans, LA 70148

Dear Prof. Gory:

Mr. Randy Roark, an old and valued student & teaching assistant of mine at Naropa Institute, tells me that he's submitted application for Studies in Ezra Pound program under your administration. It immediately occurred to me to send a note, howbeit late, recommending him to your attention. Working with him over a decade I've been gratified by his archival thoroughness, clarity, energy, faithfulness to theme & work, and extraordinary facility in intelligent transcription & study - he types an astonishing 180+ words per minute, among

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[Signature]

Allen Ginsberg writes a letter of recommendation to get me into program where I can study in Pound's library at Brunnenberg Castle, Dorf Tirol, Italy, along with Mary de Rachewilz and Olga Rudge, page 1.

other virtues and accomplishments.
A really intelligent man, absorptive brain,
handy technician of scholarship, he'll
surely be a great asset to your program.

I recommend him to your attention,
as I've written. If Mary de Rachewitz
or Olga Rudge are at all involved in
selection of candidates, please tell them
that I admire Mr. Koark and think he'll
be a fine presence for their teaching
or research. They'll likely remember
our acquaintance.

yours truly

Alfred S. J. Berg

Member, American Institute of Arts & Letters
Co. Director Emeritus, Naropa Institute.

All of my travel writing is to me one long, oft-interrupted piece. It's the same guy, traveling. Nothing is itself by itself—every incident is the culmination of everything that has gone before, and a bridge to everything that follows. The work grows as I grow. Life is more imaginative than my imagination. Real life is more unpredictable than any dream, and there's very little waking up. Once you begin, everything begins to change. And if you work in the long form there will be moments that couldn't possibly be understood until something happens maybe two years in the future. And in the short form those moments of coming to understand the bigger picture are incomprehensible—there's not enough context to earn them. But those would be the most important moments, the ones where you connect the dots, when you get a glimpse of the bigger picture, the bigger picture beyond your own personal experience, the kind of thing that might actually have something to say of interest to another.

The premise of the *Decalogue* is that to the extent that I can document my life honestly, at some point even I won't be able to miss the larger implications and patterns. And as friends began dying, I realized that their stories continued to change after their death as well, and they'll never know it. And so you have to give up not only recognition in this lifetime but eventually—win or lose—in the next!

And you realize that no matter what, one day you and everyone and everything you know will mean no more than what the loves and hates of the average Civil War soldier or Medieval serf means to anyone today. But that is the bargain from the beginning; you can't spend your way out of this one. You will be forgotten, and everything you know and love will disappear, and it likely doesn't mean a thing. Maybe your name is on a building, but that doesn't mean anyone will know a single thing about you.

Then that's balanced by a feeling of, But you're alive today! And then there follows, What does it matter? Then it follows that it doesn't matter, and yet it does, somehow. Then it matters more because one day you and everyone you meet will be completely forgotten. But even as I come to the end of the list I think, well, what's next? What's going to come next and turn the tables upside down and I'll have to start all over again, adding one more bigger picture to the expanding story, sometimes contradicting what I was so sure of just a moment before?

Plus even if you win—which is doubtful—you'll probably never know it. But if you leave a novel that people still read and are moved by? If you leave a poem worth reading? Even Ozymandius is immortal because of a poet, not history. But even Shakespeare doesn't know he's Shakespeare. Van Gogh could have never dreamed of how things turned out for him.

Most people—myself included—prefer Pound's earlier work to his later *Cantos*, but looking at Pound's own copy of the huge history of China (written in French) where he

took notes in pencil on the endpapers that would become the “Chinese Cantos,” I came to believe that this form of notation in Pound is how he remembered what was important to him in his reading, distilling out of his notations a poetics of the essential, the objective correlative, the transposition of words on a page into an experience or thought or image inside the reader. It’s as if Pound’s poems are written on an abacus or one of Burroughs’ scrapbook pages. From an early age Burroughs kept a series of notebooks where he’d paste images cut from newspapers and magazines, adding drawings, written words, matchbooks and other found objects. When one two-page spread was finished, he would turn the page and start the next one, documenting the next chapter of his life. He dated them as if they were diary entries, although I also know that Burroughs kept a written journal as well. Burroughs said he’d sometimes get ideas for writing from the collages. He would begin to see stories connecting the figures and the landscape.

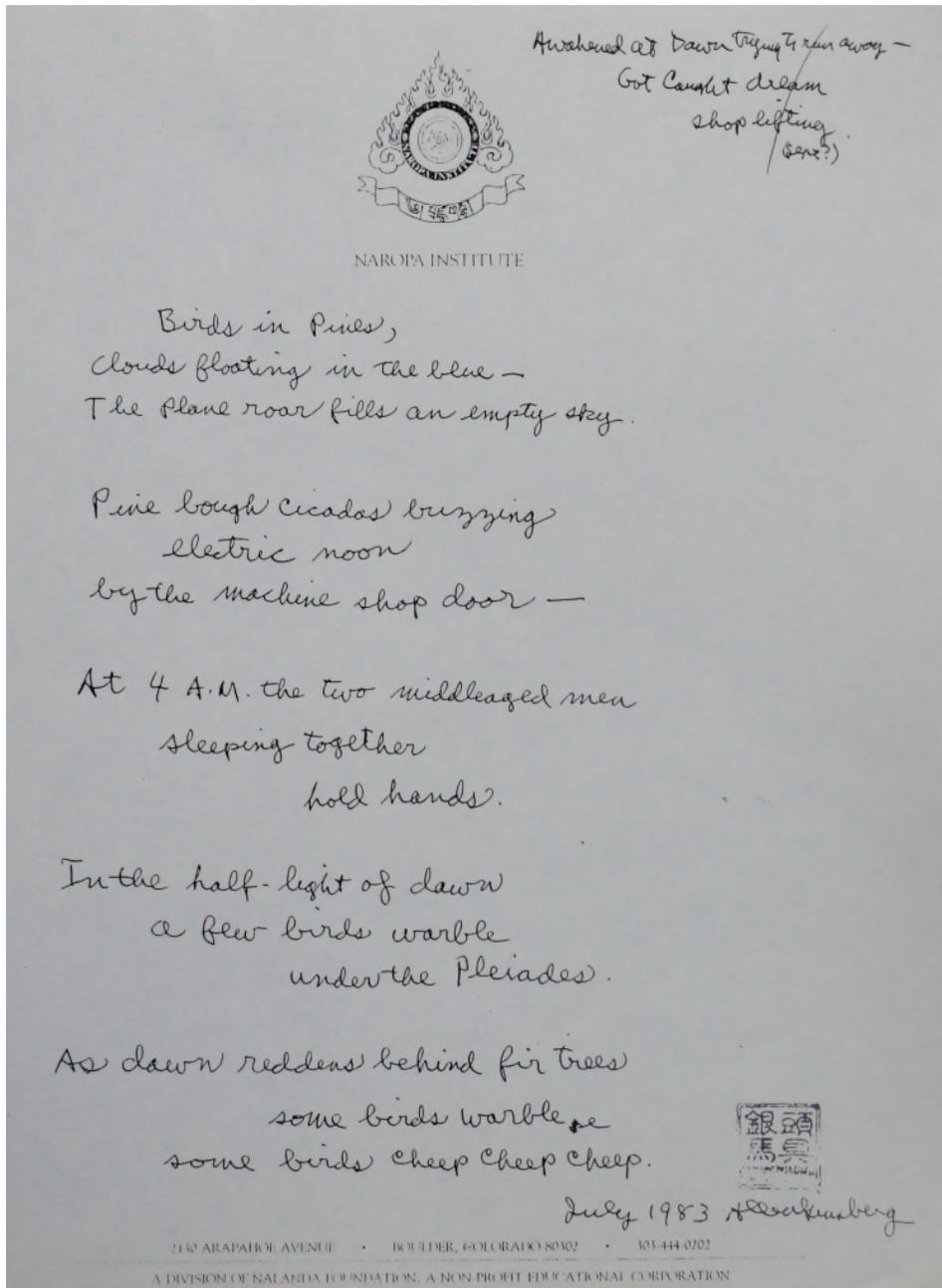
With Pound’s *Cantos*, if you could understand his runes—if you were a Chinese history scholar in the case of the Chinese cantos, say, or an Adams scholar for the Adams cantos—then you could follow the story. If not, good luck. Burroughs could be obscure as well. He once said that if he could he’d go back and re-edit books like *The Soft Machine* and the *Ticket That Exploded*.

Mary de Rachewilz said something that has stayed with me and probably infiltrated my writing as well. She said that people say that Pound’s silent period was at the end of his life. But he wasn’t silent at the end of his life, she said, he was senile. Pound’s truly silent period was during the time he was writing the Chinese and Adams cantos, when he literally shut up and let the words come through him from other texts. It was like Pound was channeling ancient Chinese history as an oracle might hear the divinations of Apollo, or he was mining Adams’ letters for a contrary history of the founding of the United States to the one we’re taught in school (still).

For Pound, his poetry became a personal encyclopedia, a journal, chronicling what he became interested in, in the order that it came into his awareness, preserving the messy chronology of his experience, much like what I’m attempting in the *Decalogue*—to write moving forward, not writing in retrospect or in control of the tale, but in the messy way life is lived, forwards, surprising us, until we look back one day and realize that everything was just fine, that everything worked out after all.

For me, writing is one way of documenting my actual experience—the content and sensations of my life, including my mental life, my emotional life, my physical surroundings, everything I become aware of. Going to China and India is my version of Pound’s history of China. Pound’s walk through the landscape of the troubadours in 1912—before Adidas and REI—is really the model for the poetic walkabout, along with Wordsworth’s more abstract wanderings. Pound walking across southern France alone in 1912 was crazier and more difficult than anything I’ve ever attempted.

I've found the notebook form, over an extended period of time, in this case ten, or I'm guessing now it's more like eleven or twelve years, turns out to be a canvas large enough that I can find a place for just about anything, which is what Williams found in *Paterson* and Pound found in the *Cantos* and Waldman with *Iovis*. The "travel work" in this way can continue to expand over the years, until the very end. Why not?

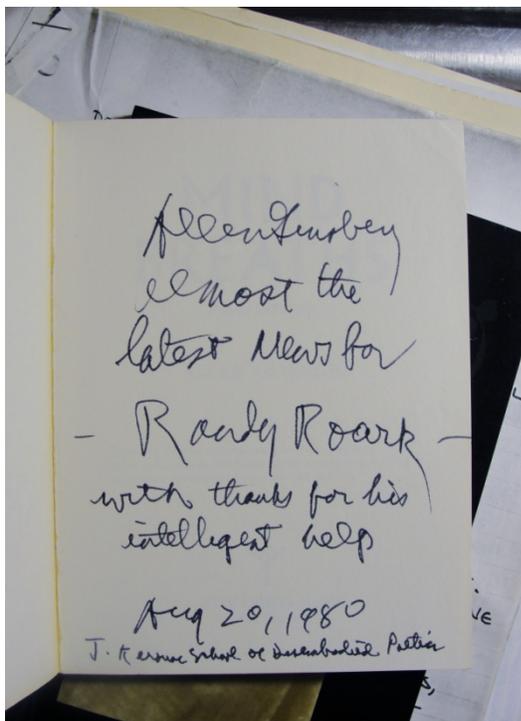


When you publish a literary magazine, sometimes you go to the mailbox and find a sheaf of brand-new poems from someone like Allen Ginsberg.

ML: How do you describe Randy Roark's poetry and progress? What characterizes your philosophy about poetry and life?

RR: Right now the most excitement for me is in writing the *Decalogue*. The other eleven Newtopia columns each year are from the *Decalogue*, a collection of travel writings that I began eight years ago. The idea for A Poet's Progress is from John Bunyan's 17th-century poem, *A Pilgrim's Progress*. In it, Bunyan explains that our life is a test set up by God and everything in it is significant. He then maps out the general path of humanity, where we are confronted with certain identifiable challenges—like lust, and jealousy, and anger. The purpose of our lives is to purify ourselves, so we can join God and the saved in heaven.

A Poet's Progress is my attempt to see if by taking away the Christian model, would there still be an identifiable map, with recognizable landmarks? There's certainly still lust and jealousy and anger. Right now I'm just trying to get it all down so that the backlog doesn't get overwhelming. And the whole point of the work is that I forget things, so I like to write as close to the source as possible. I'm enjoying what I'm learning about a long form that's as structured and unstructured as mine is. As I began writing more and more prose, it became clear to me that prose had a more visceral impact than poetry, which surprised me. I could say more outrageous things in prose than in poetry.



Inscription to *Mind Breaths*.

I still write or more accurately compose poetry, mostly when I'm deep in some reading. When I'm reading really good writing—like when I re-discovered Goethe last year in preparation for a boat trip through Europe—it stimulates my sensitivity to language, and I hear more poetry and ideas worth writing down than usual. Then I'll go for long periods of time with nothing happening at all—like since that trip to Europe up until two weeks ago, when I suddenly started writing again, based on work that came out of attending thirteen plays and an art exhibit of Mark Rothko's over a ten-day period. It was my way of trying to capture all that I was experiencing.

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SUNDAY AUGUST 4: 4PM, OPENING PICNIC AND RECEPTION
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MONDAY AUGUST 5: 10AM-12AM, CLASS WITH JEROME ROTHENBERG
2PM-4PM, CLASS WITH SIMON ORTIZ
7PM-9PM, CLASS WITH AMIRI BARAKA

TUESDAY AUGUST 6: 10AM-12AM, CLASS WITH JEROME ROTHENBERG
2PM-4PM, CLASS WITH ALLEN GINSBERG
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2PM-4PM, CLASS WITH AMINA BARAKA
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THURSDAY AUGUST 8: 10AM-12AM, CLASS WITH JEROME ROTHENBERG
2PM-4PM, CLASS WITH NANA O SAKAKI
8PM, READING FEATURING ALURISTA, MEI MEI BERSENBRUGGE,
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FRIDAY AUGUST 9: 10AM-12AM, CLASS WITH MEI MEI BERSENBRUGGE
2PM-4PM, CLASS WITH ALURISTA
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JEROME ROTHENBERG	NANA O SAKAKI

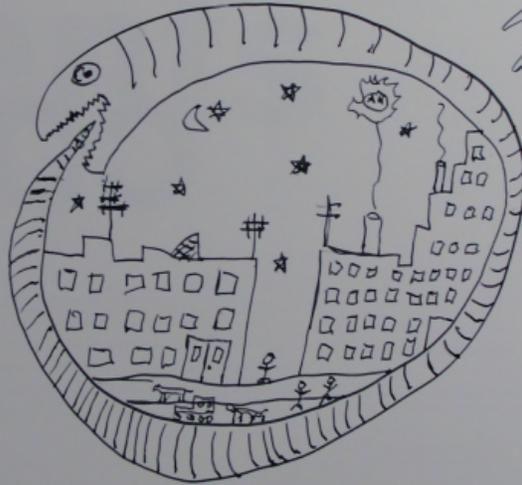
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I was proud of this conference too, during my last summer at Naropa, 1985.

I didn't have any conception at the start that I'd have anything approximating a book at the end of the first year, but even after it turned out that I did, I doubted that I'd have enough for another one. But by then I'd developed the habit of writing down whatever caught my attention, and that habit has continued up until the present day. I honestly don't know what would make me stop the project even at the end of the tenth year other than a relationship. Sometimes I think I'm trying to get everything down before I meet someone and give the writing up to spend time with them.

DEAR MR. GINSBERG -

Allen Ginsberg



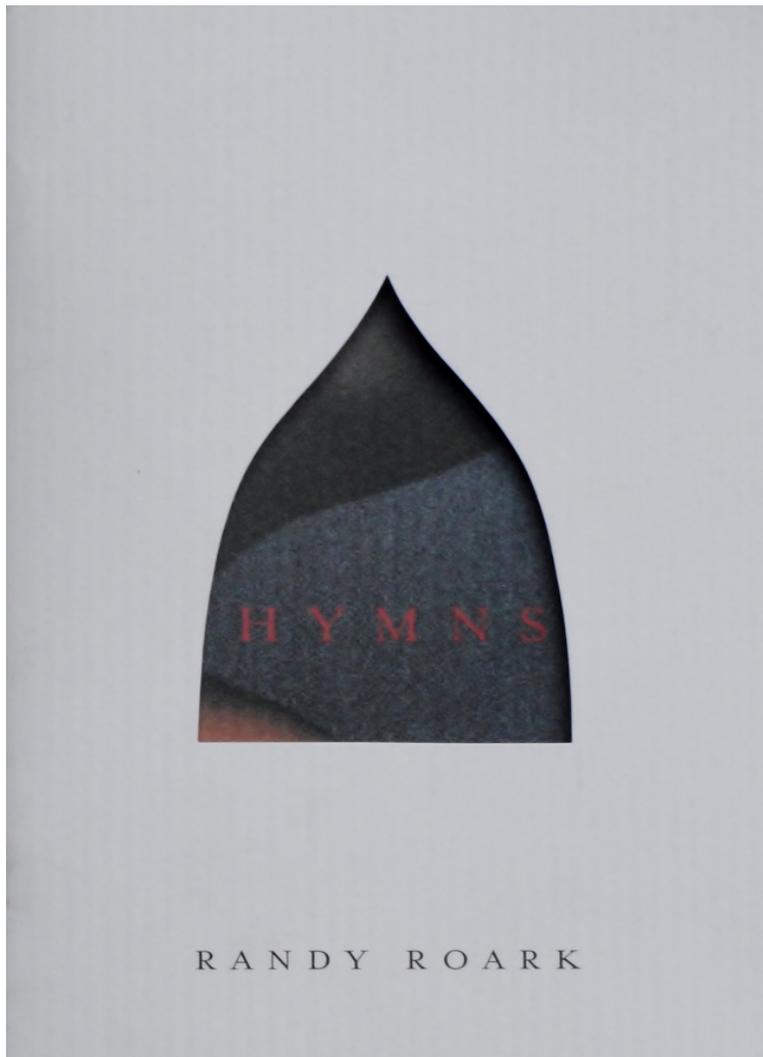
for Randy Roark
July 11, 1995

a photographic memoir of the beat era
allen ginsberg · introduction by michael kohler · chronicle books · san francisco

The Ouroboros, July 11, 1995.

ML: *Which is the most interesting period in your life and why?*

RR: Probably the closest I ever came to a perfectly balanced life was from 1995 until 2001 when everything in my life seemed golden. I was running six miles a day at least five days a week and I was in the best shape in my life, which also improved my moods and my creativity and my relationships with women, and I was working three 12-hour shifts in the emergency room, which gave me four days off a week, and I worked nights so I made good money, and at the end in 1997, I'd worked there for seventeen years so I was at the top of my pay grade and got almost two months of vacation a year.



Hymns, front cover; Dead Metaphor Press, 2000. Thanks Richard, RIP!
Design by Amy Hayes; photos by Kai Sibley.

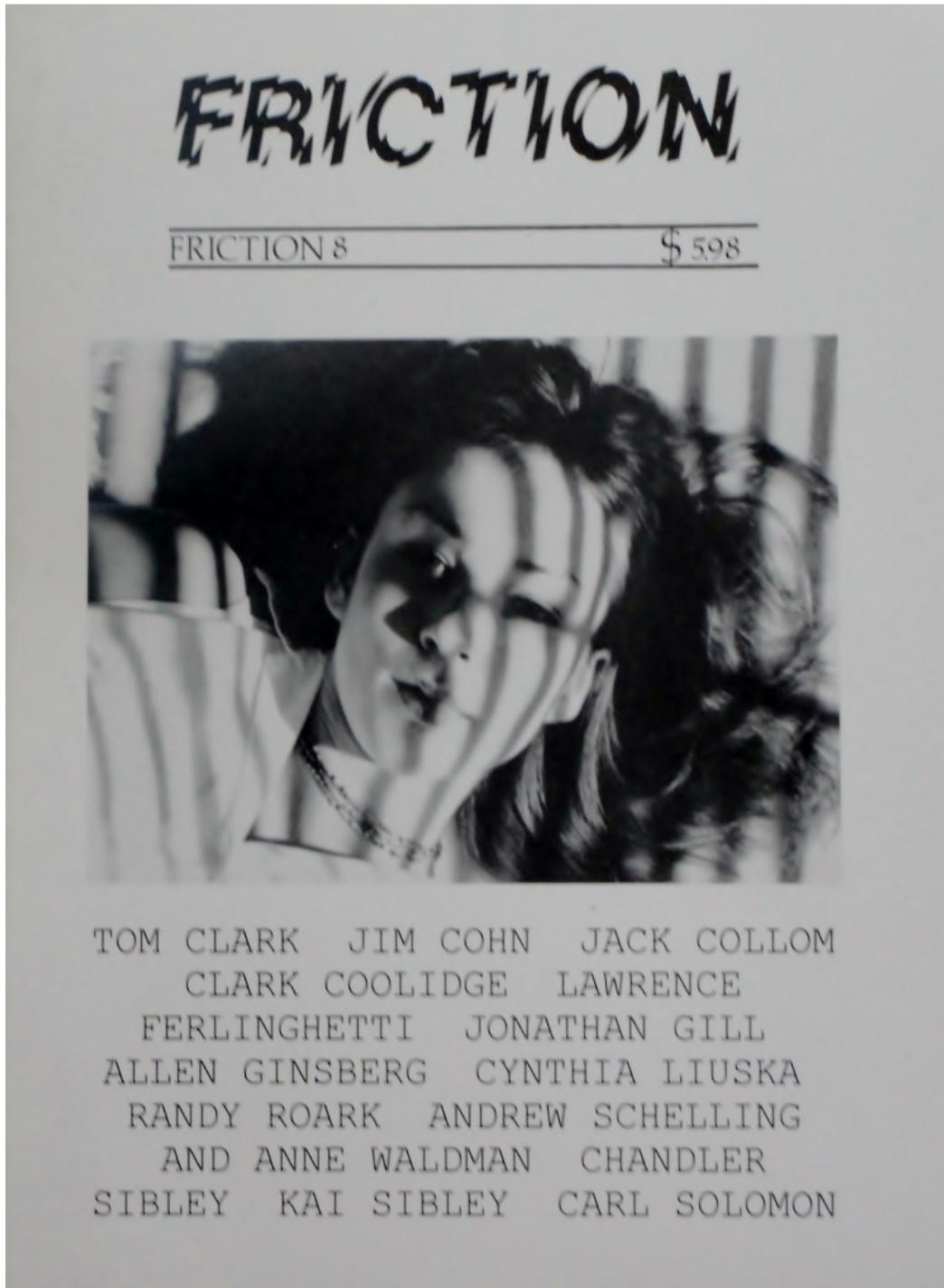
Working in the emergency room satisfied the service part of me, the part of me that wanted to be in service to others. And on weekends I was transcribing Allen's poetry

lectures, so that was the student part of me—I was learning. And I was also editing and annotating the lectures too, so that was exercising the scholarly part of me. And I was excited about my own writing. Without that, I think working for Allen would have been smothering. And I was also making the most money in my life up until that point, so I had more money than I needed, and I was able to secure one of my dreams, which was to own a house, in my case a townhouse in Boulder. And I was living alone, so my emotional life was stable, and there was a considerable amount of feminine energy around me. I was in my 25th year of meditating twice a day. And I had met the photographer Kai Sibley in Mante, Mexico, in 1995. We'd both arrived at an orphanage on the same international bus. She was part of a church group, and I was part of a hospital group. We spent a week rebuilding the orphanage, then my hospital group took off into the mountains to run clinics in several of the mountain communities while the Christians went to the beach.



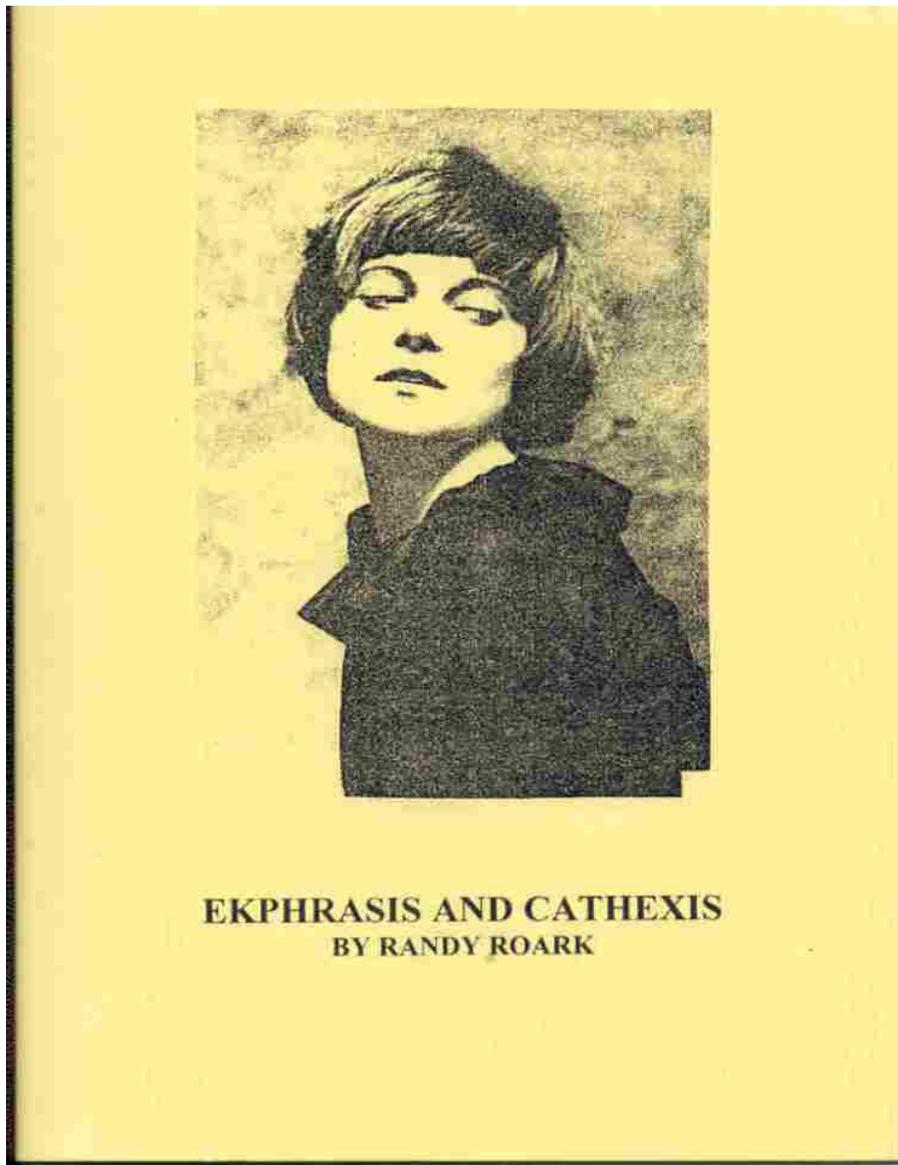
Kai and Randy restore an orphanage in Mante, Mexico, 1995. Photographer unknown.

By the time I got back to Boulder I was so charmed by Kai and her enthusiasm around taking photographs that I re-started "FRICTION" magazine more or less to put one of her photos on the cover.



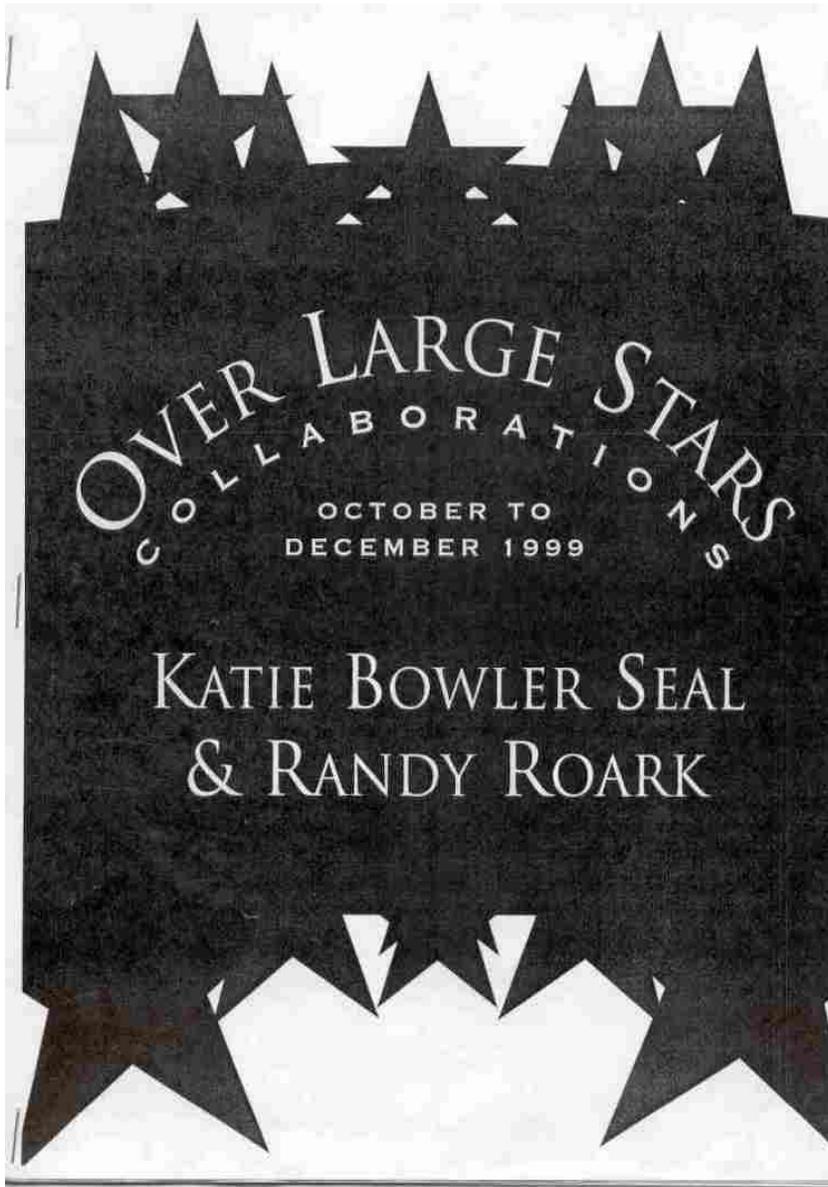
FRICTION 8, July 1995. Cover photo by Kai Sibley.

And then after the success of a performance of *Ekphrasis and Cathexis* at Tom Peters' Penny Lane reading series—the first time I worked with Kai projecting slides while I read—I started DADA Productions—Dangerous And Difficult Art Productions. Several times a year I would choose a focus—like Dada, or Louis Zukofsky's *A*, or Surrealism, or Bloomsday (at the Boulder Book Store), or the centennial of Lorca's birth (at the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art)—and produce a free arts festival, inviting anyone I could think of to perform.



Ekphrasis and Cathexis, Laocoon Press, 1995.

Working with Kai was my first experience of the consciousness that comes into being when two artists truly collaborate—a shared consciousness that’s different from either of you alone or any combination of the two. It’s an actual separate mind. You become telepathic in that you think with each other’s thoughts, as well as your own. My only other experience of that was in 1999 with the poet Katie Bowler. In six months Katie and I created an incredible body of poetry and prose, all from life. Up until then I’d never been able to successfully collaborate with another writer, but with Katie we immediately began writing at a very high level and never wrote an uninteresting poem.



Over Large Stars. Cover design by Mikell Yamata, Laocoon Press, 2000.

Another golden period in my life was 1986 to 1991. That was a time of great domestic bliss for me, of living with someone I felt lucky to be in love with. After my marriage broke up, I went in therapy really deeply to figure out what went wrong so it would never happen again, and this woman was the next person I dated, so I was at the very top of my game. There were a lot of real breakthroughs in that relationship because I took huge chances and learned some very important things about myself and relationships. This was only my second serious relationship; I'd been more or less married since I was eighteen. I've had important relationships since Cynthia, but no one has ever gotten all of me except her and my wife. I can't even imagine having a third relationship as important as either of those were to me. But I also feel satisfied. There's no longing for a third.

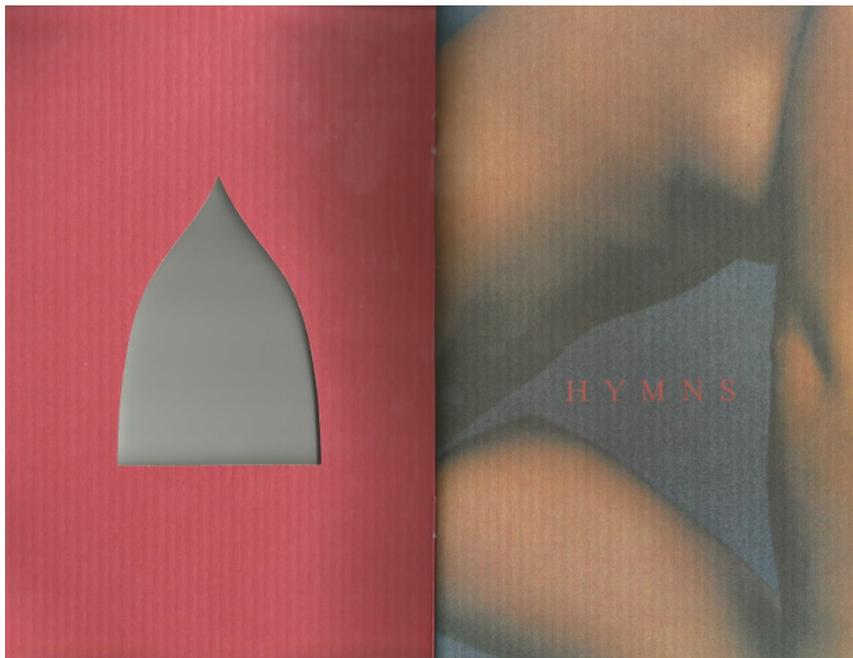


What does 28,000 pages of transcripts of the poetry lectures of Allen Ginsberg look like?

I also liked being married, which was 1975 through 1985. That was a very important relationship for me. We were eighteen when we moved in together, me right out of a physically and emotionally abusive childhood. I did a lot of healing in that relationship. It was stable. And we were so young we were honest with each other and told each other

everything. Neither of us were virgins when we met, but *The Joy of Sex* had just come out and we went through that book together, page by page, from the beginning to the end, trying everything. That was an amazing experience to share with someone, to learn about the full range of sex with one person. It was my first and as far as I knew at the time only marriage, so I threw everything into it and I think she did too and we deeply lived that experience. I never imagined it would end, until it did. Same with Cynthia. I have trouble doing what has to be done or saying what has to be said to keep a relationship together.

But I know that the period I'm in right now is the happiest and most important period of my life, bar none. I've got enough money, I've got a creative outlet, I have a creative job, I'm comfortable, I'm healthy, I'm occupied. If everything crashes tomorrow—if I get fired or laid off or I quit—I can make a comfortable transfer over to early retirement, barring unforeseen catastrophe. The odds are getting better every day that I'll have a reasonably comfortable retirement. And most importantly I'm writing something that excites me. *The Decalogue* is already by far the biggest thing I've ever accomplished with the biggest vision and it isn't close to being finished and I'm still excited about discovering new ways of writing and I can feel myself getting better if only more experienced in the form. I feel blessed. People feel sorry for me because I'm not in a relationship but I'm not in a relationship by choice. I feel blessed that my happiness doesn't rely on a relationship, that my own happiness is enough. That I can entertain myself.

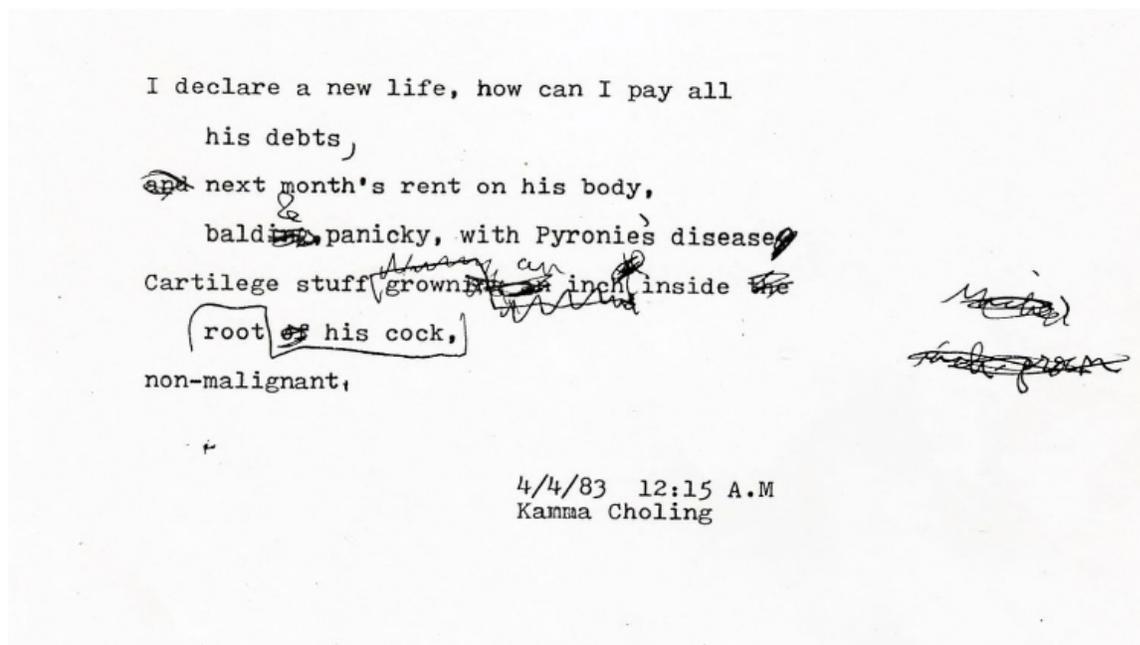


Hymns, front cover opened. Design by Amy Hayes; photograph by Kai Sibley.

ML: *What experiences in your life make you a good poet?*

RR: Well, even presuming that I'm a good poet, I think it's likely hubris or delusion to think I have an answer to that question, but I believe I do.

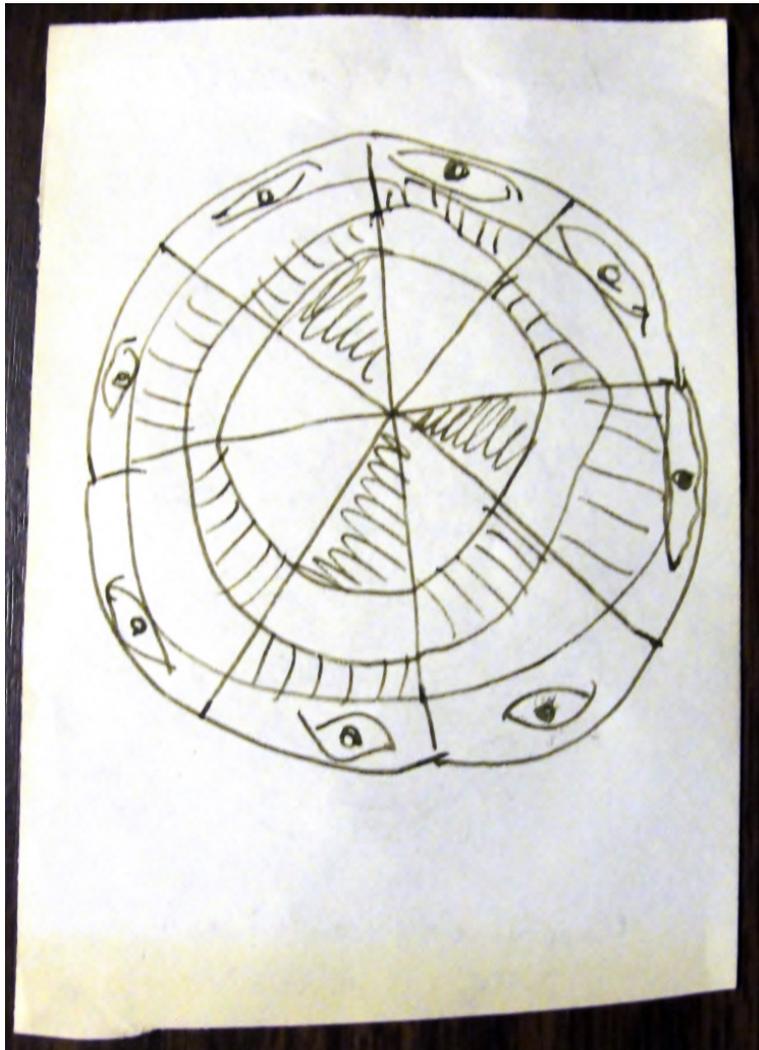
My homelife was dangerous and I escaped through compulsive reading. I had to out-think my father, who was dangerous, so I became hyper-vigilant, which is both a blessing for a writer, and a curse in personal relationships. In other words, my early life in a dangerous environment gave me the gifts of being observant and a quick adapter, but I never learned the skills necessary for a positive long-term relationship. So I'm into long-form poetry but I'm unsuccessful at long-term relationships. It's apparently a trade off and I'm not unhappy with the hand I was dealt.



Manuscript poem from journals with Allen's penciled changes.

There was music playing at home a lot of the time, and it was mostly Broadway soundtracks or ballad singers like Frank Sinatra. There was always a radio on in the kitchen on a school day morning and I'd walk to school singing whatever tune was playing as I left my house, and I began to create new lyrics to the songs as I walked to school. I only bussed to school for 7th and 8th grade, to St. John's Junior High School, in Montville. I think it was invaluable to have extended daily experiences of quiet and solitude and walking. And creating the music and lyrics in your head, not listening to them through earphones. I don't know how common that is today.

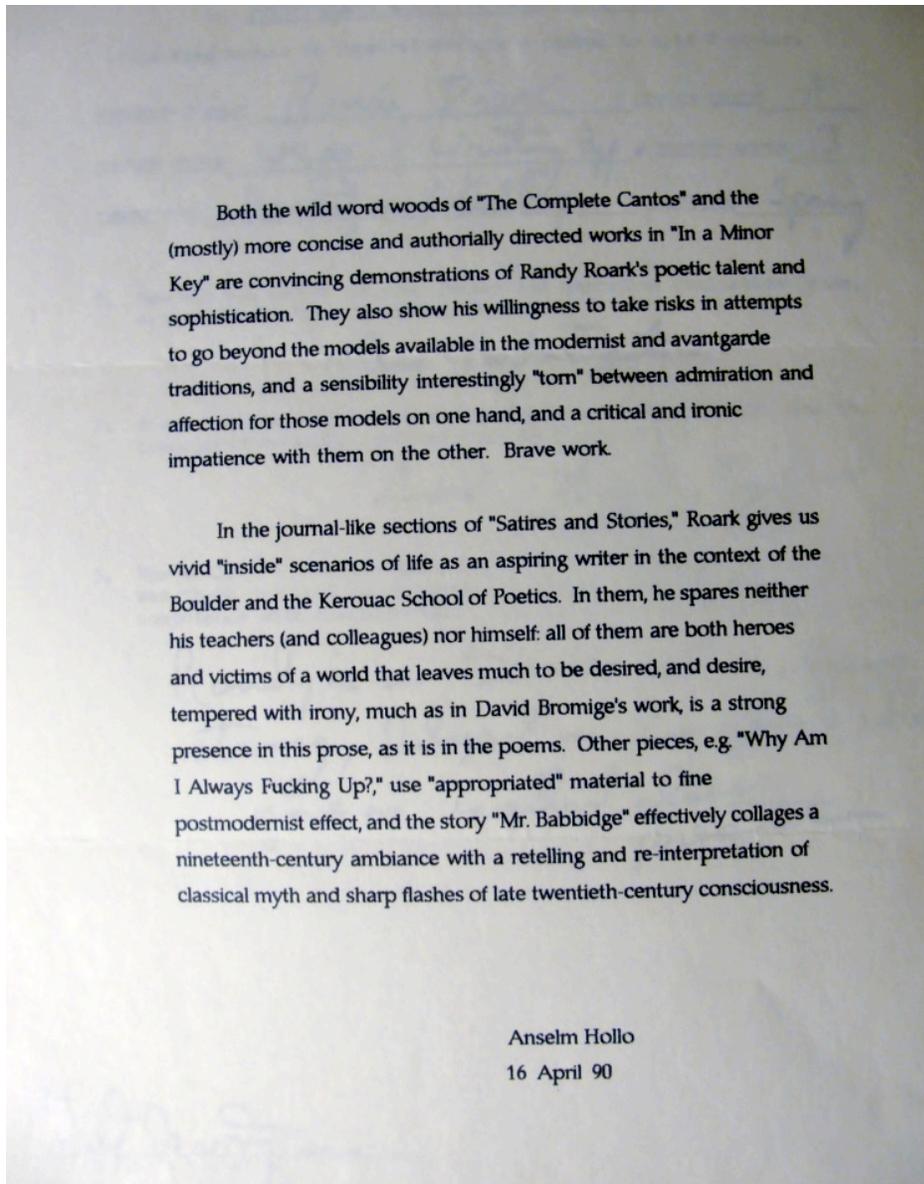
Then at the age of seventeen I was in a bike accident where I broadsided a van at a high rate of speed and did the whole out of the body thing. Ever since then I've always been both here and not here, with one foot always on the other side, knowing this is only a temporary reprieve, knowing a little of the great nothingness ahead. So that changes everything. It's like I'm looking back at every moment from a hillside in a grave.



Reverse of "Portrait of Mr. X, Y, Z", 1990.

And then there was meeting Sandy Taylor of Curbstone Press at such a young age and being embraced by him, and then being able to come out and apprentice with Allen at just the right moment, and then the years of studying at Naropa Institute and the University of Colorado and more than thirty years of nearly constant writing. I'm happy that I'm still writing, and that I'm writing now more than ever. I'm finally getting the hang of it. No matter how good or not I am in cultural terms, I have never been writing better than I am

now, whether or not that's faint praise. Personally, I'm more satisfied with both the experience and result, and I don't need an audience—I really don't. I prefer not to have an audience—for an amateur writer, anonymity is freedom. You amass your work without concern for the public's tastes. Malcolm Gladwell writes about the magic number of 10,000 hours, and I passed that figure a long time ago, so I've got no one but myself to blame for my writing from now on.



Anselm even preferred my mid-period work. This is his review of my graduation manuscript. I lost him with what I thought was my breakthrough work, *Awakening Osiris*. I thought that was really something new; Anselm didn't agree. "I don't need another book about the Goddess," he reportedly said.

ML: *What does the Music and Poetry mean to you & what do you learn about yourself from the Music and Poetry?*

RR: I'm at a severe disadvantage with music because I can't play a musical instrument. It's not through lack of trying. I've studied the violin, piano, guitar, the recorder, hand percussion, harmonica, the five-string banjo, lap steel guitar, voice, and composition. Nothing's taken. I don't understand how to make music. My enjoyment of music is in the listening.

"So, You're A Poet" Productions
presents

A PERFORMANCE OF SELECTIONS FROM
**LOUIS & CELIA
ZUKOFSKY'S
A24**

T And it is possible in imagination
D I raise these three / My mother his low mother?
S This story was a story of one time.
P Bless / Infinite things - /

T in diverse speech of all graphic elements.
D / *(soft in the face in a fit)*
S And a writer's attempts / not to fashion his time
P So many / Which

T to let it become / a movement of sounds.
D / *time, amp.*
S someone has to sounding his mind in it.
P confuse imagination / Thru its weakness.

T It is
D / *It is*
S I did not want to break up my form
P To the ear / Notices /

this musical horizon of poetry
I could eat three pounds of steak all by myself.
by passing / in well-known place names / and
Or harmony /

that permits anybody / who does not know Greek
/ *Mean . . . or . . . in . . .* / *Whom setting?*
/ *(high voice, in parentheses keeping a secret)*
/ *days* / *in the busy years that I had lived*
/ *Delights / Mrs. to mother - /*

[A-24] 566 567 [A-24]

featuring

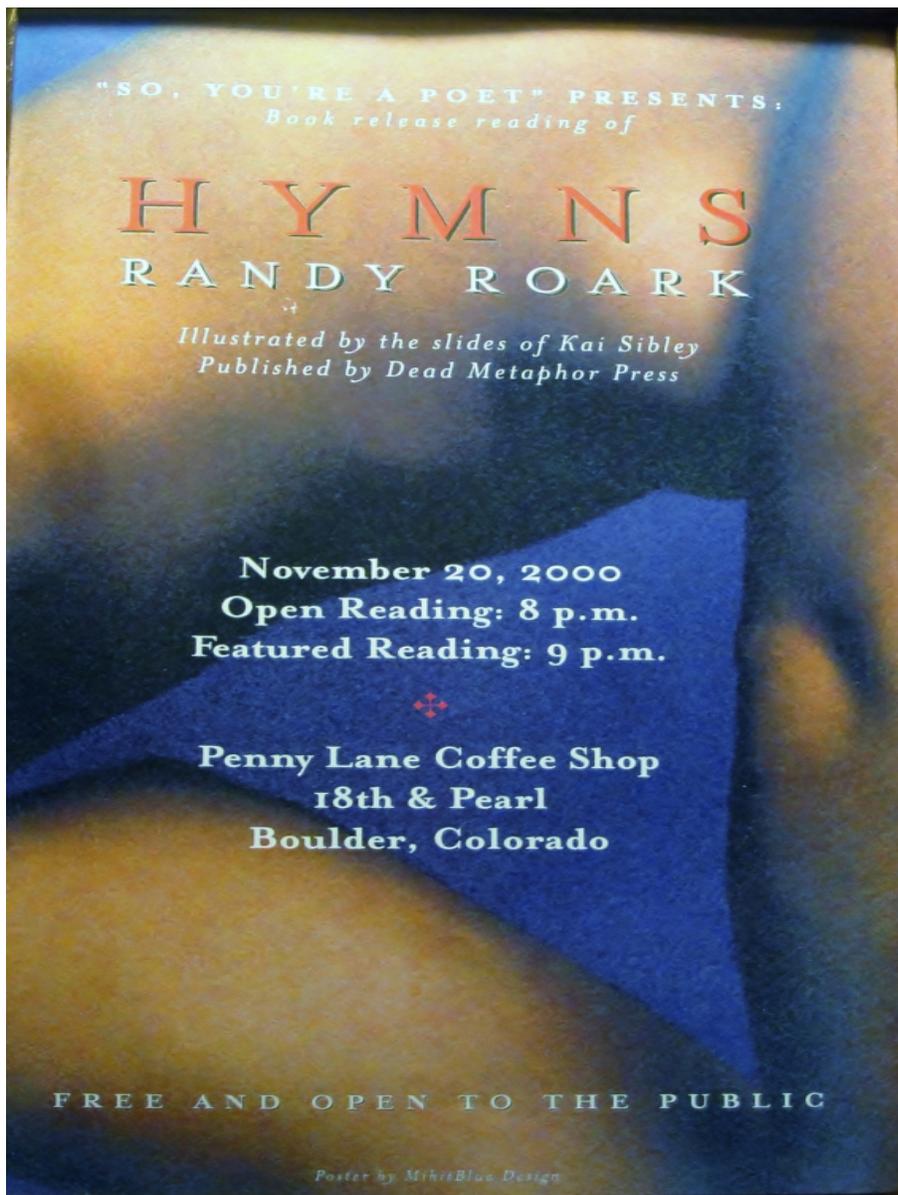
**LEE ANN BROWN ETHELYN FRIEND
TOM PETERS RANDY ROARK
and
CHRIS JONES -- PIANO**

Produced by Dangerous And Difficult Art Productions
Sponsored by FRICTION Magazine

Monday June 24, 1996
9:30PM
Open Reading begins at 8PM
Penny Lane Coffeehouse
SW Corner of 18th and Pearl

It was important to me that I co-credited "A-24" to Celia.

In my editing process, one of my passes is to read a poem as fast as I can without listening for its meaning but solely concentrating on its sound, looking for any point where the text stumbles or snags. I have actually taken “not” out of a line if it makes a better sound, even though it reverses the meaning of the original. Apparently the sound is more important to me than the sense. And I’ve learned that if I have to accommodate a strong statement in opposition to my actual feelings that surprise is always good for a poem. Which is sort of a delicious, naughty contradiction to my insistence on the importance in art for authentic emotion.



“Hymns” in performance. Poster design by Amy Hayes, from a photo by Kai Sibley.

ML: *Which was the best moment of your career and life and which was the worst?*

RR: The worst is easy. I was asked to teach a class on Bob Dylan at Naropa Institute during the Summer Writing Program in 1994. But I discovered as I began to put the syllabus together that I wasn't really interested in teaching Bob Dylan or his lyrics at all, but one thing that did interest me was the difference between the live version of "Tangled Up in Blue" that he released on *Real Live* from the 1984 European tour, and the original recorded ten years earlier for *Blood on the Tracks*. I wanted to talk about the lyric as a means of transferring genuine emotion over to the listener by re-experiencing the genuine emotion in performance through the map of the text (as on *Blood on the Tracks*)—that it isn't a matter solely of authenticity in the writing but it was necessary to re-experience the emotion yourself when you're performing. I wanted to play the version on *Real Live* as evidence of a performance gone painfully awry. I played the two versions for the class and asked if anyone noticed anything different between the two performances. It all went downhill from there. David Crosby was there, four people who had recorded with Dylan were there, Raymond Foye was there, Anselm was there, it was the only time Allen ever saw me teach. It was a disaster. But I will say this in my defense: What I was ridiculed for in that class—claiming that genuine emotion was important in the performance of a poem—was what Anne and Allen chose as their subject for their class in 1996, the last summer Allen taught at Naropa.

One of my best days was when I was out running and came up with the idea to begin integrating Kai's slides at my readings. That one run initiated the most creative and happy period of my life. I hadn't read in years. I'd retired from poetry, as far as I was concerned. I'd moved on to other things. But one day Tom Peters asked if I'd read at Penny Lane and I said yes and then I regretted it almost immediately. I went to my writing—years old at this point and scattered—and nothing sounded good when read aloud. My taste had outgrown my work. I realized I was going to have to create an almost completely new body of work. There was one piece that I would love to read—*Ekphrasis and Cathexis*—the only thing I had that I thought was interesting—but it was composed of my notes while looking at several visual works—a painting of Merlin and Nimue by Edward Burne Jones, a photograph of Dadaist Emmy Hennings, and two images from the Beatlemania museum—one of the young girls screaming during Beatlemania and then a short clip of John Lennon talking to reporters after learning of Brian Epstein's death. That's what ekphrasis means—to describe a primarily visual experience in words.

**"So, You're a Poet" Productions Presents
Dangerous And Difficult Art Productions'**



**A SURREALIST PARTY
AND READING**

**In Honor of the 75th Anniversary of Andre Breton's
"First Surrealist Manifesto"**

featuring

**Crystal Brakhage, Reed Bye, Jack Collom,
Susan Edwards, Tom Peters, Kayanne Pickens-Solen,
Patrick Pritchett, Sue Rynhart, Joe Richey,
Randy Roark, Andrew Schelling, Katie Bowler Seal,
Shira Segal, Kai Sibley, Geoff Waltrip,
Richard Wilmarth and Laura Wright**

MONDAY, OCTOBER 11, 1999

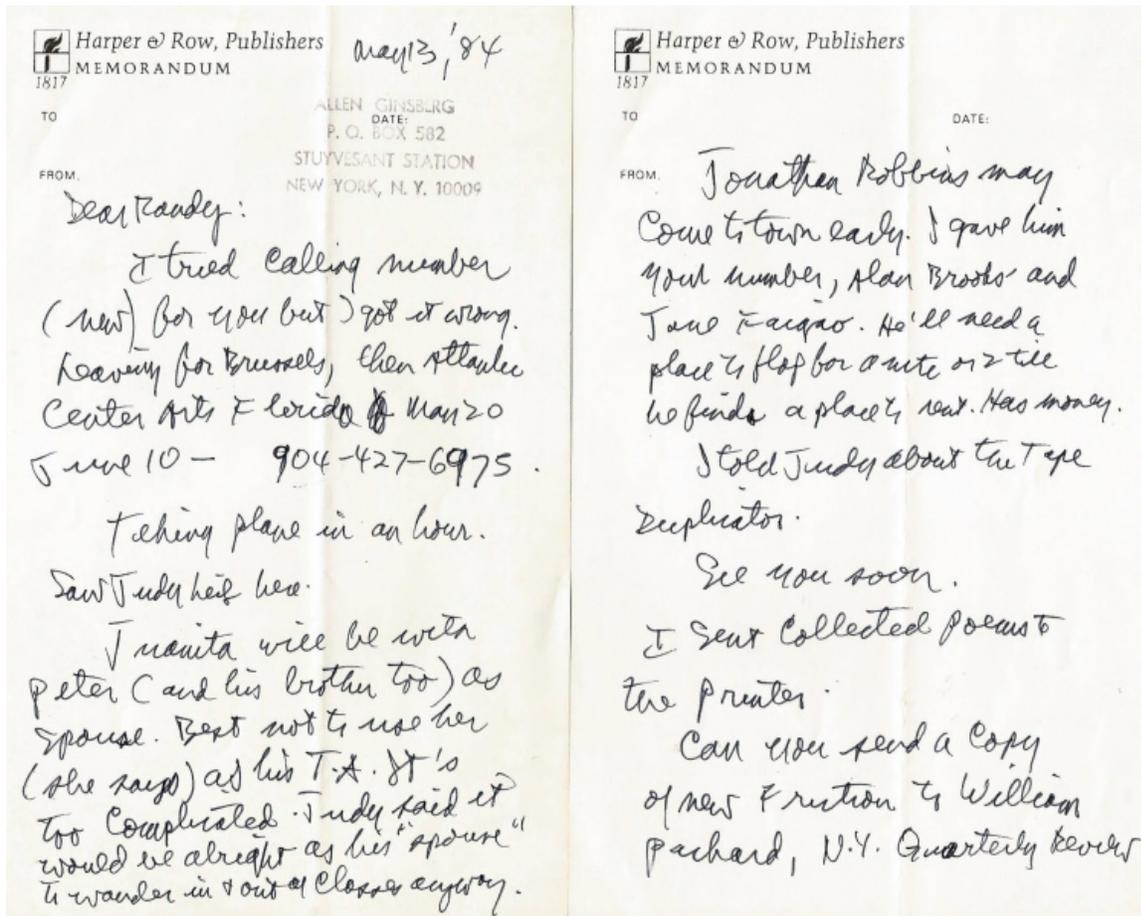
8-11 PM

PENNY LANE COFFEESHOP

18TH & PEARL

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

If only they could be looking at the images while I was talking about them. I thought of holding up a copy of the image and then a thought surprised me. I had just gotten back from Mexico and was looking for reasons to work with Kai, who was a photographer. Maybe she had a macro lens and could take slides of these images and project them as I read? She did and we did and it was great, and a very fruitful period of my life began. We created over two dozen text-and-slide performances, and performed as a duo at the Book Fair in Denver, at the Poetry Circus in Taos, during the Boulder Arts Alliance's Twelfth Night Celebration, at Naropa, at Penny Lane, at the Laughing Goat.

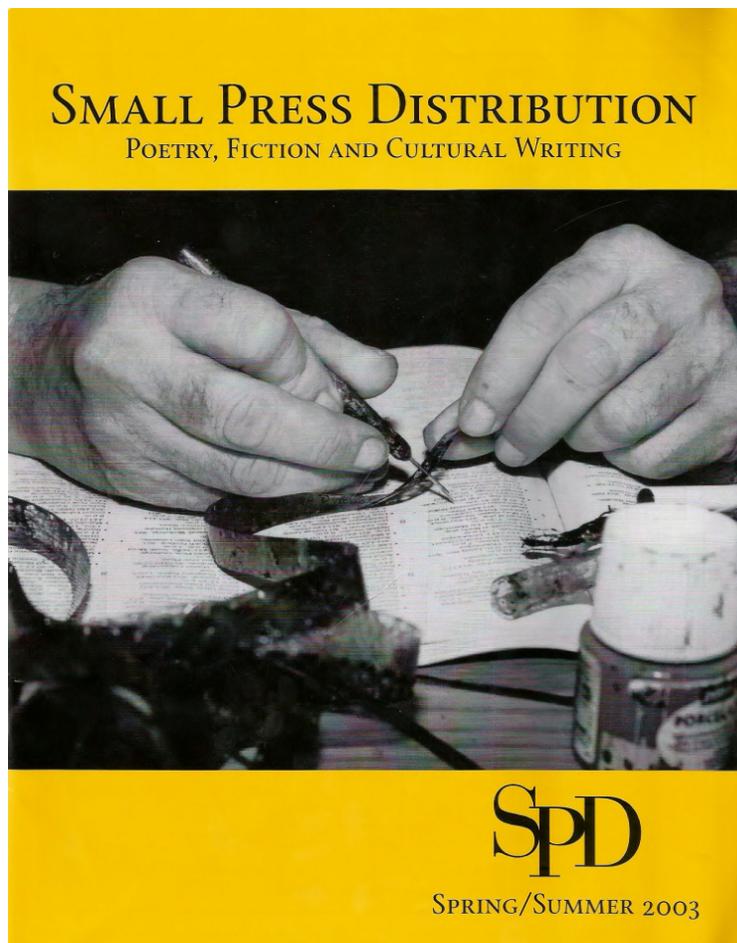


First two pages of a letter from 1984.

ML: *How you would spend a day with James Joyce?*

RR: In 1990, on that first trip to Europe, I got a room in Dublin and stayed there for almost an entire month reading the collected works of Joyce in chronological order. On that trip I also read all of Yeats' poetry from Dublin to Sligo and Gort—where he spent

the last years of his life in the Tower. I also read all of Beckett while traveling the islands—the Orkneys, the Shetlands, the Scilleys, the Arans, on ferries, on trains, on buses, mostly in the rain. I read all of Thomas Hardy in Dorchester, all of Fowles in Lyme Regis where he was recuperating following a stroke and where the events of his novel *French Lieutenant's Woman* took place (and where I also hunted fossils in the cliffs nearby with other tourists). I read all of Flaubert and Joan of Arc in Rouen, read Proust in Paris, read all of the Greek dramatists sitting in the Dionysian Theater at the foot of the Acropolis, read the Greek poets in Delphi and on the Hill of the Muses in Athens, and the Greek philosophers on sailboats traveling island to island in the Aegean. I read all of Dante in Dante's wife's childhood home in Florence. I read the *Book of the Dead* and crawled into the center of a pyramid in Egypt. That was the trip I also traveled for a couple of weeks with a group put together by Nancy Covey—the wife of guitarist Richard Thompson. We traveled a bit with Fairport Convention, a bit with Richard and visited Robin Williamson and other traditional British folk musicians.



My book *Dissolve* makes the cover of the SPD catalog, Spring/Summer, 2003. Thanks Darrin!”

I also lucked out to be in Chartres at the same time as the world's preeminent English-speaking Chartres scholar. I challenged him and he was able to give two tours a day for six days and never repeat a story. I gave him an extra twenty, which was a lot of money to me at the time, already traveling for over six months solo through Europe. That was why I went to see that film by Stan Brakhage, the Chartres series, because I had been to Chartres and had seen the light inside and outside the cathedral in all sorts of weather, at all times of day, and I wanted to see how Stan—who loved light and had been to the cathedral as well—would present that light in film.

I had bought a hand-sized piece of raw “Chartres blue” stained glass in 1990 from the official glass making shop that has been in operation continuously since the building of the cathedral began in 1198, so that I could recall that particular blue whenever I wanted to. I brought that piece of glass with me to the film as well. When we were finished talking about Coltrane's solos, I pulled out the piece of glass and Stan held it in his hand as if it was giving off heat.



A piece of Chartres Blue stained glass.

But the highlight of that trip was when I decided I would stay in Dublin to read all of Joyce when I discovered that Joyce's nephew lived in town and gave tours on Joyce and Dublin to tourists. During his time off, we would go to his office, where he was trying to create a James Joyce museum. In the evenings I would read from one of Joyce's books and then after breakfast I'd walk to the places I'd read about the night before. In the afternoon there was a tour of Dublin with his nephew, and then I'd accompany him back to his office for lunch, where we'd share each other's lunches and afterwards I would explore the contents of his file cabinets. He had collected unpublished interviews, memoirs, writings, photos, including the only known—and still unpublished as far as I know—interview with Joyce's father. Then he'd go back to the visitor's center to pick up his next group, and I'd go back to my evening reading.



James Joyce's nephew, Ken Monaghan, Dublin, 1990.

It felt so luxurious, staying in Dublin long enough to read all of Joyce. My original plans had called for me doing exactly that, but when I got down to refining my itinerary to my budget, I'd regretfully scratched it as too expensive and not a good use of my time. But then I found his nephew, so staying longer was the right decision. The only book I didn't reread was *Finnegans Wake* as I'd just read it before I left for Europe, as my senior thesis for my MFA was on it. I used Joseph Campbell's *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* and it was easy. I wept the last page and a half, unable to stop reading or crying. Then, of course, you start it all over again.

But I did read the rest, which was pretty much new to me, other than the stories "Araby" and "The Dead." Even *Portrait* was new to me. I read it all in chronological order—the poetry, the plays, the short stories, the novella, the novel, the rough draft of the novella, and several biographies. I was concerned when I was reading *Ulysses* that my neighbors might call the front desk and report me because I was laughing so hard. I guess I'd like to walk through Dublin with Joyce, to see how people reacted to him, and get him to tell me stories.



Pound's castle in the foreground in Dorf Tirol, Italy, and the castle above it, Schloss Tirol, which was the inspiration for Franz Kafka's *The Castle*."

ML: *What would you say to Ezra Pound?*

RR: I'd try to get him to talk. I don't think there's anything Ezra Pound needs to hear from me, but I would give anything to hear him talk.



The students of instructor John Gery (behind and below everyone in the exact center of the “V”) traveled from Brunnenberg Castle, Dorf Tirol, Italy, to track Pound's references to Venice, July, 1990. Here we are at the front door of Pound's apartment when he lived in Venice. I am still friends with fellow student Jonathan Gill, in the upper left hand corner of the photo, in the white t-shirt. We walked a portion of Ezra Pound's walk through southern France on its centenary in 2012.

ML: *What would you like to ask Alan Watts?*

RR: Actually nothing at all. I've listened to dozens upon dozens of hours of his audio archives in order to create several very large audio anthologies and I feel that I know Alan Watts' mind very well. I really admire his sensibility, but I don't have any pressing questions for him. I feel like I've probably heard his best stories already. I guess I'd ask him what death is like.

Nuclear Moratorium Petition hung in 437 E 12th Street Hall,
signed by me & others &:

"Gregory Corso, World's End 1 Apollo Avenue"

A "Renaissance of Political Beauty"-- Gregory's prescription
for Italy May 23, 1979 3AM

May 15, 1979

What is thy selfhood that awakens every dawn, teeth
aching or accomplished in meditation
belly full of chicken spiced with olive, in a
shelf 4 flights up from Asphalt Street
suspended with the fire escape above the narrow
living space lined with garbage pails
sidewalk cemented to the Church steps.

Buddha in space,
Cans of leafy greenery hanging from the window frame--
Who am I wakened famous, perishing mortal
with swollen gum
free of cigarette smoke in my lung first
time in three months,

Aged 53?

Out of Brooklyn
explosions of rocketship into space,
earth seed you wanted, vulgar!
Spread dimension our own everywhere
dying overcrowded with bricks & paper,
Plastic Universe!

-- stirred up in the
air, color, form, transparency, intelligence
the Buddha meditation, rainbow minded
emblem stuck on the dirty window
to 12th St.

Wake and all space is yours
for a second till you die.

Brutal reality,
air coming thru the window under the
rotten frame-- muggy grey sky
thru dusty glass.

May 17, 1979 - 6AM Dawn

Space is All!

A page of Allen's 1979 journals, ending "Space is All!"

And that reminds me of something else I want to say before this is over. I want to acknowledge the grace with which Allen met his death, and my mother too, blessings to my sisters and niece. I'm sure that I'll rely on visions of those good deaths to help me through my own death as well.



Allen's Ashes in the Belly of the Dharma Lion, Red Feather Lakes, Colorado.

[Original interview with Roark, conducted by Michael Limnios of Athens, Greece, for his Mixalis series of interviews with the Beats and students of the Beats, appeared in October 2013 at the online Blues GR site in two parts. Part 1 can be found at <http://blues.gr/profiles/blogs/interview-with-poet-author-and-producer-randy-roark>. Part 2 can be found at <http://blues.gr/profiles/blogs/interview-with-poet-author-and-producer-randy-roark-part-2>). An expanded version—with the Prelude and Interlude included here—of this interview originally appeared October 2013, in Newtopia Magazine (<http://newtopiamagazine.wordpress.com/2013/10/16/a-poets-progress-poetic-apprentice-life-lessons-from-ginsberg-snyder-and-whalen/>). Used by Permission of the author.]