

SERGE GAVRONSKY

The apartment on Avenue C was a clean house with an elevator and no cockroaches. And, facing the single bedroom: a diChirico red brick walled warehouse in front of which one could walk around naked. There was something positively Uptown about the place! Anne-Marie and I did not have a “pad” and no, we did not throw our mattress on the floor or stay up nights smoking pot. (What’s more, I did not get invited to Elaine deKooning’s parties. And no, I did not fuck around on my wife.) I had to earn my living and taught remedial reading at 500 Fifth Avenue in a sub-sub basement where the air was piped in along with Muzak. I was also trying to finish my doctoral dissertation.

A few blocks away, Meg Randall’s place. Her baby son eating cigarette butts. She coddled his hand. She’s packing. She was packing in her mind. “We’re going to Mexico,” she said. “This country’s out of its mind; you’re going to blow up the world.” She went on her odyssey. From danger to danger. We stayed on 10th street for the readings. And the bomb...?

New Year’s Day party at Carol Bergé’s on Second Avenue. Was it 1964? My daughter Adriane playing ball with Allen Ginsberg. Someone made the strategic mistake of introducing him to me as someone with Columbia ties. All of a sudden Allen said to me, “Say hello to Lionel” (or Diana or whomever), and then (I’m reeling as I remember!) he listed esoteric works of mystical writers that I had never read and he well knew this! India under his cuticles. A library pass so

often used that now the books had become the blood of his being, the flesh of his mind, the extension of his arms. The ball dropped – before my daughter could get to it, Peter Orlovsky grabbed it and handed it to her.

ex-pat Margaret Randall published Latin and Village writers in her bilingual poetry journal from Mexico before returning to the chaos she'd left in Manhattan to teach



STEVE CANNON

Keep in mind, this was a low-income, low-rent neighborhood, like Brownsville and East New York are today, with lots of folks who had nothing. The beautiful thing about the downtown scene was we thought of ourselves as **one big family** of more than five-hundred; we were all together, along with the political types. Every artist was as political as most who called themselves activists, and we all knew each other. In spite of our fistfights and arguments, we went along to get along. That is what made New York City the spot and even what made it the destination it is now.

Now all the gentrifiers are here and no one talks to each other. And now that cell phones and smartphones and the internet are here, that profound sense of community seems to be slowly disappearing. For the most part, the young folk's scene is moving to Bushwick and elsewhere in

Brooklyn. But that's in trouble too, like the galleries moving from Soho to Chelsea. The yups moving in are pushing out the young artists because today it seems like everyone in New York City is supposed to buy in.

But as an artist who was here at the beginning and who knows what has made this city great, I would love to see how the new generation of yuppie youth would fair at that original party full of artists and outpatients from Bellevue that saxophonist Marzette Watts and I threw in '62. Maybe that would make them drop their cell phones and start talking to one another. Or maybe they would just take a video and post it online, for the NSA to file away. Who knows?

—“one big family” of activists, actors, dancers, musicians, poets, visual artists, writers, et al.



MARGARET RANDALL

Yes we did march around somewhere and yes it was cold we shared our gloves because we had a pair between us and a New York City cop also shared his big gloves with me --strange, he was there to keep our order and he could do that and I could take that back then.

We were marching for the Santa Maria, a Portuguese ship whose crew had mutinied. They demanded asylum in Goulart's Brazil and we marched in support of that demand

in winter in New York City, back and forth
before the Portuguese consulate
Rockefeller Center 1961.

I gauge the date by my first child
--Gregory was born late in 1960--
as I gauge so many dates
by the first the second the third the fourth
and I feel his body now again, close to my breast
held against cold to our strong steps of dignity.

from Meg's poem dedicated to lover Rhoda, "The Gloves"



ROBERT BRUCE NEWMAN

The solo exhibits at Gain Ground Gallery drew conflicting reviews from local art critics. The first, my **Rooms with Electric Mirrors**, showed the obedience in which you moved through eight mirrored chambers with different themes. The next exhibition, by John Giorno, consisted of a parachute-canopy under which you sat on cushions with other gallery-goers and listened to an audio collage of planetary and psychological babble. The third, John Perreault's **Word Room**, had you enter a tiny space that projected slides with cut-up word arrangements on all four screens at once while a sound recording played suggestive word permutations. And then came **Room Piece** by Vito Acconci, which stretched the performance artist's living space into Gain Ground, creating for you the impression that gallery, city and home space were all one.

In 1970, a planned exhibition of my **Power Throne** was cancelled elsewhere, and I opened it at Gain Ground. In the show two priestesses in ruby dresses sat you in the power throne and placed

on your chest a red velvet sash concealing an electronic stethoscope. You heard your heart beat coming from four speakers in the walls of the chamber. The sound system (by Phillips Electronics) was designed by Norman Dolph of Columbia Records, and emitted an immediately perceptible feedback field. Then priestesses placed headphones (by Koss) over your ears. After a minute a voice, in harmonic compression (by Bell Labs), entered the electronic mix of your heartbeat at twice the speed of normal speech:

WHO KNOWS WHAT'S WORKING, MIRACLES RED ALL LIVE IN YOU...
WHAT RUNS YOUR ORGANS GLEAMING WITH WHAT THEY DO...
WHO KNOWS WHAT ELECTRIC LIQUIDS CREATE IN YOUR HEAD...
THE UNIVERSE IS EMPTY WITH WHATEVER BEAT YOU HAVE...
HAVE YOU EVER FELT YOUR HEART VIBRATE SUPERNATURAL TISSUES...
YOU MUST BE THE ONE WHO'S ALIVE IN YOUR HEART IN THE THROBBING...
THE BLOODFLESH OF YOU MAKES ITS CORONARY MAJESTY, SO WHATEVER YOU
CAN CATCH YOUR HEART WITH YOU BETTER GET.

—after graduating from Yale, Norman Dolph arranged early disco at The Dom, professionally recorded The Velvet Underground, and mapped soundscapes for art installations



RONALD TAVEL

One November evening in '64 while I was reading, Andy Warhol appeared with a small entourage, in search of voices he would need now as he shifted from the making of silent to sound films. Gerard Malanga, at that time the artist's right-hand man, had asked him to fall by at my reading. Andy listened to me with patience and when I was finished

sent the proverbial embossed card to my table asking me to join him at his. When I made my way through the crowd to where he was sitting, he smiled, suddenly shook my hand and, without further ado, popped the time-tested, Wanna be in movies?

Later he explained it was a certain voice-over-sound he was looking for, someone to read, preferably the telephone directory, while his “screenography” of Jean Harlow, to be christened HARLOT, unreeled. He told me that whatever I chose to read or perhaps improvise should not be even indirectly related to what was to be seen, but that my hushed underbreath would function instead as the appropriate accompaniment to the whatever on-screen. It was as an actor of sorts then that I entered underground cinema and not a writer: that was still several months off.

And so my serious involvement with the Manhattan poetry scene came to an end and my days of acting, directing and scripting began. My writing of poems fizzled as well as the pressure on me to produce more scripts more and more rapidly and often lengthy essays documenting them increased. I tried to keep up my attendance at the readings, and my friendships with the poets to whom I was now rather close, but when in the summer of '65 and as a direct spinoff of my involvement with film, I opened **The Theatre of the Ridiculous**, there was no longer much time.

***The Theatre of the Ridiculous* has since become its own genre of surreal, shocking, hyperbolic or gender-bending stage performance**

HANNAH HARRIS
(photo unavailable)

I knew at a very early age that my mother, Marguerite, was different. She could be the sweetest, most loving person. My father met her at a club in the Village when she was still married to her second husband when he made up his mind he was going to marry her. In those years she slept in old evening gowns. She was forty-six and already a grandmother. After I was born she went through something called a “change of life” which meant that she was having a nervous breakdown all the time. That was supposed to explain the way she behaved.

When I was three or four she wrote a poem to me, “Little Birdeen”. Then she started something like a poetry class for little girls and the object of the “Poetry Party” was to memorize a poem each week and the best reciter would get a prize. What with her corny poetry, my father’s penchant for sculpting nude snow sculptures on the front lawn, and the fact that we avoided any church, it was difficult being their kid. I think some parents sent their kids to see what the Harris weirdos were up to.

a few lines from Marguerite: “Little birdeen,/Ah, my little white dove,/
Come nestle here,/In the boughs of my love”



KIRBY CONGDON

In the new poetry scenes on the East and West coasts, there were few power-hungry doers and shakers. There were individuals who got readings going, sometimes got posters made, and who negotiated for time and space at the coffee houses. No person, however, could claim authority or other control in any social or literary way. Those who did have control were involved with scholastic publications, none of which could afford to recognize the more democratic plateaus of the great unwashed. A definition of the professionally-recognized literati could be: those who can only afford to admit you exist when they are sure you no longer need such recognition. I find this is still true today.

The Coffee-House Movement and the Mimeograph Revolution were necessary antidotes to this narrow, egotistical and paternal tradition that was so much in power in setting literary standards in the two decades after World War II. I am not opposed to standards, taste, and sophisticated judgments, but if, in getting these, overall literary activity itself is ignored or denied, it keeps us culturally provincial.

We who read at the coffee houses were keenly aware of scholastic skepticism, if not antagonism, toward our grass-roots movement. I remember one **swarthy writer** deriding a poet who read her poem from a magazine in which the poem had been printed. He felt it was not only playing it

overly safe in one's exposure to public reactions, but that it was pretentious for the poet to assert that she had had work accepted under professional auspices. Does it matter who was correct?

the fleeting and ever-cool poet Jack Micheline



CAROL BERGÉ

One theory has it that writers evolve because people ignored their ideas or misunderstood them when they were young; they became **readers**, people who went to books for company and solace; hence they turned early to putting their thoughts on paper. As Guy de Maupassant had it, “An artist needs opposition.” **One writer** of the East Village group suggested going to Woolworth's to buy a tin wastebasket and then paper it on the outside with a collage of rejection slips they had received, and then lacquer it, and give it to a young writer who is just coming up.

On a practical basis, many connections toward publication came from the coffeehouse readings. Someone – a fellow writer, an agent, an editor – would hear a piece read and approach the poet, playwright, or novelist afterward and offer an invitation toward publication in a magazine or to share their talent in a group performance piece. That spontaneous connection was every writer's dream. And the venue where this occurred was the catalyst for transformation from the dream to reality.

the idea to decoupage a wastebasket is universal and unattributed



STEVE KOWIT

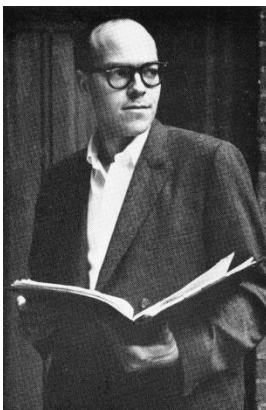
Among the most magical people who'd drop by my apartment those days was the sister of Cassidy's other roommate Kenny Rubin.

Barbara would come by my place with her girlfriend Rosebud and we'd sit around and chat. Barbara was one of the great underground filmmakers of the era and one of the mainstays of the Kerista

Movement, the free love society that apparently still exists.

I would have liked to have gotten close to Barbara but I was a little intimidated. The Kerista thing probably scared me off. Many years later, up in his Broome Street studio, Lenny Silverberg told me that Barbara had become an orthodox Jew, gotten married and died in childbirth.

*friends of Allen Ginsberg and filmmaker Jonas Mekas, Barbara Rubin is also the woman massaging Bob Dylan's neck on the flipside of his 1965 electric/acoustic album **Bringing it all Back Home***



ALLEN KATZMAN
(photo of twin Don)

Dear Carol,

Have had a busy two weeks. It seems the Spring of '85 is my year to surface socially again. After 10 years of hibernation, I feel like Rip Van, everything familiar but strange. Only younger versions of ghosts seem to haunt this place now. I was back down at 10th Street & Avenue A at a place called The Life Café (Blake was right—everything is imaginatively alive) –Tuli and Jim Brode read. Tuli is still his beautiful self, and even

younger-looking. A young poet named John Godsey (?) asked me to start **EVO** again. “Yeah?” I said. “Ya got \$100,000?”

He mentioned that everything down here seemed like the 1960s again, except for one important missing ingredient. At first I thought he meant the spirit was missing. But when I thought about it, what it was was a mythological naivety. Last week Jim Brode and I were talking about the St. Marks Poetry Scene and he said, “Those people who run it now think it all started with Anne Waldman. They forget that Paul Blackburn brought it over from Le Metro. In fact, they no longer remember that a poet named Joel Oppenheimer nurtured it after that.” History gives short shrift to poets like Anne Waldman. Joel is sickly now, and feels forgotten, as Jim’s statement seems to imply.

One more thing. I joined the Poetry Society of America recently. I attended their awards ceremony last week. Twenty-five years later, it was the same funeral. Serge thinks the history of the DeuxMegots poets is going to break like a dam once everybody realizes how everyone is bored with what they’ve been recycling for the last 10 years. I’ve started to write about the time I read with Paul Blackburn and W.H. Auden to raise money for Marion Tanner’s brownstone on Bank Street, a haven and halfway house for struggling artists and street people back in the 1960s. I told the story to Serge when I ran into him on Broadway and he thought it was wonderful.

from 1965-1972, the “sleazy” East Village Other competed with the established Village Voice



NORMAN DOLPH

Back in 1966, I had started what was the first mobile disco in the New York area, for all I know the first one in America... That's how I first met Warhol. I had done parties for him and parties for his dealer, and that sort of thing. And propitiously in those cases rather than taking cash, I took a little picture. I've always been an art collector, and I am now, and so I would do opening parties and loft parties and all kinds of things in exchange for works of art. When they did the thing at **the Dom**, they used me to do the sound in between the

sets of the Velvet Underground. The Velvet Underground would have fairly long sets, as I recall, and I would play disco in between for twenty to thirty minutes, something like that. So that is how I first encountered the group, doing the in-between music at the sets at the Dom.

At the Dom, it was really effective in terms of the layout. You had an impression of a light show as something totally revolutionary independent of the music. But the music was clearly without precedent. I don't think I or anybody had heard anything like it. My own reaction, it would have to be just, "My god, what is this?" Because the whole experience, between the music and the lights and Gerard Malanga with the whip...he would carry around a 16-millimeter projection, a huge actual projector, and shoot images on other people and on the wall. If the word "psychedelic" had any meaning at all, that's what it was.

*the Dom was at St. Marks Place in the East Village; it was the location of "The Exploding Plastic Inevitable"; much more on this topic can be found in Richie Unterberger's book, **White Lightning/White Heat: The Velvet Underground Day-By-Day** (Jawbone Press, 2009)*



BARBARA RUBIN

Moving pictures belong to the Muses-- like painting, like poetry, like music, like dance, like any other art. Big or small, good or bad, expensive or cheap, "Cleopatra" or "Flaming Creatures"---- they all belong to the muses. They are all attempts to give man something beautiful. Licensing of works of art is immoral, silly and unconstitutional.

That's what we want people to know.
The main reason for licensing shadows is (they say) to protect people.
from obscenity in films.
That is very nice hypocritical reasoning.

We are grown-up people and need no civic and bureaucratic mommies and daddies to protect our
morals any longer.
Do not baby the people.
It is beautiful to be a child; but it is pretty sick to be childish!!

Let all lives be free.
Let all art be free.
Let all expressions be free.
Let man blossom.

*Barbara's flyer, "DECLARATION FOR THE FREEDOM OF
THE BLACK AND WHITE AND TECHNICOLOR SHADOWS
(2mm, 4mm, 8mm, 16mm, 35mm, 70mm, 150mm, 1,000mm,
1,000,000mm)," featured a pen & ink butterfly, and promoted
a demonstration at Radio City Music Hall that was organized
by Film-makers of the People on May 23, 1964*

**This excerpt is culled from pages 2, 13, 17-19, 21-27 &29 of my 180-page manuscript, as
designed for a 12 x 12" book. Interested agents, publishers and others may reach me at the
website address, or email thespookyart@outlook.com.**