

A SMALL SLICE OF BERKELEY POETRY IN THE SIXTIES

Richard Krech

Berkeley has had a vibrant poetry scene since the 1940's with the "Berkeley Renaissance" a circle of poets that came to include Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, Robin Blaser and Landis Everson, among others. These poets had connections to the University but much of their poetry enterprise was conducted in private homes. One of the best known publications of this period was *Circle* edited by George Leite and Bern Porter. This Berkeley based poetry magazine began in 1944 and had ten issues. Contributors included Henry Miller, Kenneth Patchen, e.e. cummings, Kenneth Rexroth, Philip Lamantia (then 16 years old), Duncan, and others. Another early poetry magazine was the short-lived (1947-48) *Contour*, edited by Christopher McClaine, which published work by James Scheville, Denise Levertov, Porter, Spicer, Duncan, Rexroth and Lamantia. There were subsequent publications ranging from *The Berkeley Miscellany* edited by Duncan which had two issues in 1948-49 and included work by Duncan, Spicer, Mary Fabilli and Gerald Ackerman to *The Berkeley Bussei* published by the Berkeley Young Buddhists Association which included poetry by Gary Snyder and Jack Kerouac in their 1958 issue. The Free Speech Movement of 1964 led to the non-student outside-agitator magazine *SPIDER* [Sex Politics International-communism, Drugs, Extremism, and Rock & roll] whose six issue run was complicated by numerous arrests for selling the magazine on campus.

In sincere flattery of my then-favorite publication, *Liberation*, edited by Dave Dellinger (to whom I would become related by marriage some 35 years later), in May of 1965, I put out the first (and only) issue of a mimeographed magazine, *The Community Libertarian*, which was dedicated to politics and poetry. In it I published poems by the only three poets I knew at the time: Jim Shipounoff, Ron Silliman and myself. Ron was from the adjacent town of Albany and Jim had grown up on the same street I did in Berkeley.

At the much celebrated Berkeley Poetry Conference held at the University of California in July of 1965, I met more poets. On the first day of the Conference I met Richard Denner (then spelled Rychard) also from Berkeley and a day or so later met John Sinclair, guiding light of the Detroit Artists' Workshop Press. I took a 25-cent brown spiral-bound notebook with me to the readings and lectures by such luminaries as Robert Creeley, Ed Dorn, Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov, Charles Olson, John Weiners, Duncan, Snyder, and Spicer. In my note book I made notes to the effect that: "Poetry is like it is today because of LSD, the Beatles, racial integration and Red China is a world power - Gary Snyder"; and Charles Olson's projected verse is "belly verse." Quoting him as saying "The poem is in the style of the poet's body" and "the muse is very jealous" - Charles Olson. I also drew a picture of Robert Creeley and wrote poems starting in the back of the notebook. In addition to the daily lectures and nightly readings there were other unofficial gatherings and infamous parties. One of which has been immortalized in Richard Denner's *Xito*.

In the winter of 1965 I went to New York briefly where I met Will Inman, read at the Bowery Poet's Co-op, and was impressed with the copies of *Yugen* magazine, published by Amiri Baraka, then known as Leroi Jones, which I found in bookstores in the Village.

I decided to move back to Berkeley and start a poetry magazine. I formed the *Undermine Press* which published *the Avalanche* magazine from 1966 to 1969, as well as seven chapbooks. We also held unstructured sign-up-sheet based free open Sunday afternoon poetry readings at Shakespeare & Company Bookstore from 1966 into 1969.

Other contemporaneous poetry magazines were published including *Aldebaran Review* started by John Oliver Simon in 1967 and *Litmus*, edited by Charles Potts, who moved from Seattle and started publishing in Berkeley in 1968. John and I became partners in a small commercial printing shop, *Noh Directions Press*, where we did outside work to support ourselves as well as our poetry. Ultimately all *Undermine Press* publications were printed at *Noh Directions Press* on an old A.B.Dick 360 offset press.

In May of 1968 the Conference Of Small Magazines, Editors and Pressmen [COSMEP] was held at U.C. There were open poetry readings associated with the conference and John and I solicited poems from each participant in the readings and we produced an “open” anthology of the COSMEP readings.

We produced anonymous poetry free sheets, the most notorious being the *Grass Profit Review* which lasted ten issues. Ron Silliman’s article, *The State of the Union and the Education of Poets*, first published in G.P.R. #5 without attribution, is reproduced below.

Many of the poets I published were residents of Berkeley. Although Luis Garcia was born in Berkeley, most came from somewhere else: Martin P. Abramson came from Venice, California, and squatted in a house on Regent Street with his small family for several years in Beat non-pecuniary splendor; Norm Moser, originally from the South, was the publisher of *Illuminations*, a beautiful large-format publication he put out with his wife Hadassah in Marin County before moving to Berkeley where he lived until the 90’s when he died in his eighth decade; John Thomson grew up in Brooklyn and gained some notoriety by getting arrested for sitting on the steps of the Student Union Building on U.C. Campus with a sign saying “fuck” and in smaller letters the word “verb.” He now lives in San Francisco and is known as johnthepoet and writes music reviews in the alternative press; Michael Upton, an artist (oils and pen & ink) as well as a poet, came to Berkeley from Oregon with his brother David, and lived here for many years before moving to a cabin in White Thorn in Humboldt County, in the far woods of Northern California. The pages of *the Avalanche* also contained material by non-local writers including Charles Bukowski (five poems and a small drawing); Malay Roy Choudhury, a Bengali and English Language poet prosecuted for “obscenity” and a leading proponent of the “Hungry Generation” in India; d.a. levy, also prosecuted for “obscenity” and one of the leading proponents of the “mimeo revolution” from Cleveland; John Sinclair; Tuli Kupferberg of *The Fugs* contributed a song and an article to the special “Rock and Roll” issue; an interview with Andy Warhol and Gerard Malanga conducted while they were in bed with “Bruce” in the Chelsea Hotel in San Francisco touring with the Velvet Underground; and others. [Work by non-Berkeley-related writers is not included in the material accompanying this article.]

Of course, many other poetry enterprises were underway during the mid-late sixties in Berkeley including the poets associated with the *R.C. Lion*, which was University based, *the Hepatitis Indians* (a decidedly non-University group of individuals) and many others.

The following words and images are a small selection from the work I published at the time as well as a few timely and relevant poems initially published by others. These Berkeley poets were not found at the University; they read in bookstores or private homes, their publications were mimeo or short run photo-offset. Their electronification and wider circulation is long overdue.

POEMS

You Could

I could walk in a mud puddle for a
dream
I could sit on a doorstep for a while
I could take a young girl for a virgin.
I could grab a tear for a smile
O I could laugh or run or die
Or set in a shadowy room and sigh

I could hold a pomegranate for a streetlight
I could smash a raindrop with my first
I could hold an autumn in a bottle
I could find a tin whistle in the mist
Or I could steal the farmer's pigs
Or I could rape the farmer's wife
Or fall down the dark stairwell of life

I could look at a fat lady through a
window
I could kiss a pretty girl for grieving
I could run in the night for
courage
I could cry at the crows for
leaving.

-Michael Upton

Animal Man

Amazing, coruscating
chaos animal man
Kept aflame by blood
brought together most

Beautiful by spirit
honed down
To a fine edge
of near hysteria
By so-called society
and its disinterest

-Michael Upton

con(serv/vers)ation in the '60's

Child, child, look (a bird).
There, no, there. Among the power lines?
The trees! What Trees?
I don't see anything. There! Where?
South Again. Oh, it must've gone
to Cuba.

-Ron Silliman

These Trees Have Simple Names

These trees have simple names:
oak, elm, japanese plum.

My great-uncle, who helped to start
the unions, had another

for that deep purple fruit
that follows its pink-white buds.

"Nigger-apples," he'd laugh
& bite hard into one, juice exploding

over his unshaved chin.
The black boys who pose with me

in the pool hall, backs arched,
Pall Malls hanging, eyes half-shut,

have a name for him, my mother's mother's brother,
which they mutter after a scratch,

& even a name for me, with my blond hair,
that is whispered only at night, alone.

-Ron Silliman

The Giant

Never turn
inward, yr eyes to find
the giant who
hides laughing at
our mincing

- steps

daring -
us to confront
our holy grave
yard of broken
- wings

and -

Never forget that
we will desecrate
the dreams
of the living with
- such

terror -

only the laughter, of
a sleeping giant, will
remain to haunt
the insane who hold

flowers with
wilted hands

-Martin P. Abramson

Touch

You stayed in
my hand on
your thigh

- today
I said it
all, With touch

no waiting

what you cd
not do, I did

- now
it is
much easier for us

to walk along
and talk about
different things, then
we used to

-Martin P. Abramson

A Walk

Down this street
the wrong way
bounce
off evening rush/
faces

Past trees fucking
in the wind

Past people
in the wind

Up this street
to the school

Hey is that
a boy or a girl
It looks like a boy
but..

they haven't been told

no boys
no girls

only energy

flashing back
& forth

a joke of
some body
more roles
to confuse
simple-minded
folk
& watch out
even more
for adolescence
myths &
adult
 hood
 or
head
 trips

it is all a trap

beware of mother's cookies, children

Across this street

now
my toes are tired

27.5 organisms
per city block

It is almost
too much -

walking

-Patricia Parker

The Inconstancy of Beauty

All these days were strong days,
strong like hemp, like silk
and as clear as lakes.
You came to me in the nights
but it is the days I remember.
The nights have become days,

There was a mountain air,
there the gaiety of festivals,
the stillness of moonlight and solitude.
We watched as the goats encircled
the house, one step, then another. In those days
we almost seemed to share their unconcern.
They had all I could ever have wanted in them.

When I try to conjure you, what comes up?
That solitary browning cornstalk, bent but
refusing to budge -- swayback, but tassels streaming.
There were moments when I feared you would fly.
I held on, pushing no more than I could help,
happy for once just to be there.

I suddenly cannot find my stomach,
strain to see, through the mist that has come
(which has none the less some day in it).
I wish now, to be true to that which was.
Can only turn to whatever comes, & hope beyond hope
for some measure of that simplicity again.

Such days, such days, such days,
I have never seen their like, before or since.

It was, perhaps, just that sheer clarity,
that utter simplicity, that pool-like purity
that was the then unmarked sign
they would not stay that way forever
(though a small spell makes a long forever).

Surely the rains

If not the deluge

Must always come...

-Norm Moser

To and For Sharon

Ah if the day is as long
as the night / then equally
the night will grow short
and the day grow wide
the river will glow by
night and sound by day/
Or the moon establish
lovers / in the night
the trees ashake/the
grasses low/and
lovers even in among
the grasses /deep deep
at night in day of
themselves /deep deep
and after the flowing
to hold and sleep
sleep with the sun coming
up among and in
in /up to the new flow
the deep deep the deep

-Doug Palmer

i looked up
saw those horror eyes again
flashing red doom warnings
& they said
in my head
“just a reminder

I listened
to the roaring screaming din
pass by
my sky
shouting warnings
“just a reminder

I sat up stood walked ran hid
but the voices
the eyes
and the messages

followed after and preceded me
on the walls
from the windows

branded even on my head
in blood
the warning
“just a reminder (only 168 more shopping days till CHRISTmas

-john thomson

Capricorn Moon

for Marion Brown's Music

when words are said they become
at that instant realities
intwined with that which we thought real.

(it is not the cold that causes the

shudder

but fear)

the real lives only words die.

Say softly G A R V E Y and it grows

right there in the snow.

Say A R K E S T R A and the SUN is

BLACK.

REVOLUTION.

(still you will not come)

-De Leon Harrison

we are
running.

we are
mad.

the stars
point out
the way.

we are
naked.

we are
free.

there are

flowers on
the path.

-Rycharð Denner

The Riot Act

for Khoi Phuc

about the next timr
I almost get runover
by a cadillac in the
cross walk
5,000 dollars worth of tim
wld print a lot of poems
henry fords the name on
the only american revolution
still going around
the mummy behind
the wheel
 body by fisher

come see
come saw
we will all say when
americans finally realize
they deserve each other
let there be no more
attempted intercourse with the dead
berkeley babble on
rubin raps for a yipee circus
we will survive bobby
 who
its all politics
they lie
the greatest sho on earth
the plague is back in town
to render them
hi octane
 natural gas

becker showed up in the city
with me and all the other
farmers
the american migration
stopped in both directions
the frontier thesis
is a closed book
maybe u'll be back
in china
before
 urban renewal

at 10:00 oclock some morning cop
will bum somebody else's trip
and get shot down
one nation
under seige
there's gold in them thar hills
for those of u who
make it
 1969ers

I shda been a gentle man
I shda known etc
the registered and elligible
and even those prevented
vote
for something else
I've stopped pretending
to the throne
the people are the people
their function is to lay
off us
and give us all the bread we need

tell them how and turn
into the rainbow
hail and
 farewell

-Charles Potts

for wild pigs

“Will he be able to find his
body, now that they moved it?”

hunters camp on skinnners ridge
got no water
just got rye whiskey when hunters there

half mile
north at apple tree gap they left
12 guage shells cork-
screwed in sunlight on
manzanita.

they say some doctor
panicked in first snow, abandoned
30.06 rifle & good scope too up
on that ridge.

“gonna find it when it gets to be open
season on niggers and
animals,” monterey county sheriffs
deputy bob larsen

and then this animal who was high on
pot or lsd or
something, threw away his gear and
wandered off in the snow
over pine ridge. had to shovel him
into a sack to bring him home
6 weeks later

-John Oliver Simon

The Cities are Washed into Time

the cities are washed into time
the riders begin
to reclaim the territory
block by block,

in a shadow of myself
I pass thru matching
pigs boudoirs with barbed wire & crocodiles
eating each other under the pale skin
of a violet lagoon

I was there
wandered into the next room
and you didn't know I'd even been born
hands still
tied behind my back

found a dead moth in the
pages of lamentations

being american we were
born without this knowledge.

-John Oliver Simon

MARRIAGE

for Hilary

I trace your lip

alone

in the quiet

crystal glasses unused
smiling engraved faces

not there

just the quiet

and a ring that fits

exactly

-Gene Fowler

from **The Kingdom of Apgar**

I was born in the year 1599. Paperhorns
boomed longer than flagshadows
flipped the courtyard stones.
Stand and cheer
Welcome the heir with the hairswish of a summer day
 child
 man

A mounted soldier rides past the wild dogs
crouched in the fog-wetted dunegrass. Follow
the dunes south
sail every sea, and where is my kingdom now
now that I am dying?
Spain 1620
I dream of who I was and who I am.

I discovered your delight secrets for the first time
on a junebuggy romp across the black moors
and barely walls of stone from the plowed fields.
To savor your uncarefully windkept hair
 I let you outrun me
 you let me catch you
 sail your pink sea without destination
In those later winter evenings unnoticed by you
I intently listened to the tuneless hum
you fantasyed in remote attention
facing the glowing heaped coals of the old fire
waiting for the new wood
to burst new heat nearer your skirts lifted
to warm our feast
snowflakes disappearing into your hair.
 later

I uncorked the wine to pour at your feet
in a humble gesture to your fertile generosity red
to enhance your whiteness
to rest and cool our passion. a cordial ruby stream
to sooth the dryness and wash down
our tencourse spent contentment
a magic potion to lubricate our balance of power.

 What time is the world?

the january war
year of forty-three messiahs dying
backyards empty

diningroom tables vital phases of the war effort
a no father picture of daddy nationwide favorite
a camel a soldier Grant
Wood is dead
smiling baby will see sixty-three a better world
postwar plastic in the american way

the marriage of the poor people was consumated
on a haystack, she was
entered from every side by a rough-driving locomotive
that taught her to bear the lumber-country trade,
till, finally, a weary wisp in a new blue
pinafore fell screaming from the concrete pinnacle
erected two hundred feet
higher than the surrounding treehills.

a dedication to commotion
a construction of despair

a gray pencil of mysterious origin serving those
who subscribe by a nightly
rate. The night wait is long
and full of falling people.

-Jefferson D. Hils

from **EXTREME UNCTION, Part One**

My United States of America died of a broken heart
on the lonesome railroad tracks
just outside San Miguel Allende, Old Mexico
My United States took ship to Europe
and sends coded love messages from Istanbul
My United States is a pacifist archangel
in exile hiding from two-faced demons
of the ten-sided asshole Mammon
My United States has been put on trial
for uncontrollable dreams and
living justice outside the law, just a man
My United States is as innocent as
you, my friend, are innocent as the winos are innocent
And in your defense the birth wet infant howls
as he enters the world with a resounding slap

Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury your honor
I call you not judges for fear I judge
I call you the soapy hands of Pontius Pilate
I call you an eagle with a broken wing
I call you thumbs down coliseum of Rome
I call you Salome the head-shrinking policeman's wife
We need no more religions, we need more visions
We need not more politics but rather more crayons
It's all about God or fucking and it's a thin line
But if it sounds like something you
heard before it's because it is
and it's still all true, O my brothers.

-Andy Clausen

You Must Think of it as a Dance

the Way the Players move
from table to table.

the Way they take each other home.

learning survival.
the cool world outside our fingertips
just a shot away...

The tape recorder, hypodermic needle
just end-points of a culture
blasted by technology,

find the Real path out of the jungle,
miss neither forest nor trees.
Leave no fingerprints
at the scene of the crime,

fly safely
and take care of your brother.

Your sister is waiting on the bed
or the bar stool

for your rough hands and soft mouth.

The pull of gravity effecting tides.
Civilizations loose their grip
as years pass.

The 8 ball heading towards the pocket.

-Richard Krech

Sgt. Pepper. Where

Sgt. Pepper. Where
are your soldiers now? - they've been seen
wandering
down crystal shattered lanes
the fragments converging
on one point. the end

of a needle
puncturing a paraffin vein,
the days going in...

hours,
spent getting
the exact sensation.

“It’s pretty much the same” he said,
 “More money passes thru your hands,
 but you’re in the same position.”
 his words fading
 as he spins into another nightmare/

Old sailors
stumble into the afternoon dust
of a cob-web,
the corners of the room
going faint.

Rip Van Winkle sleeping. The corner
of his laugh
turned-in. His volume boosted
by amplifiers.
In turn
boosted from record stores. The whole world
a big burn.

Acid salesmen
carrying guns
to keep from being robbed. The whole scene

going down Your drain,
Heroin;
getting fat
off the skinny bodies

the way you make them
crawl/

-Richard Krech

Mythology for the People's Liberation

The poem begins in the last garden
of the courtyard.

A vast labyrinth of sound
winding down to this moment,
this muffling of voices.
Private comments lost in the wind.

A fat sun disappearing
behind the crater like mountains
the seated rise from their wooden benches,
sunset making their outlines
hardedge red.

They move thru the white adobe walls
of the palace,
fine glasses tinkling.
Stare passionately out at the valley
growing from their feet
on up to the stars
coming out one by one
they slip off into the cover of darkness
to perform their tasks.

ARABESQUE THEATER FANTASY!

These people are real!
going about their tasks daily

in your neighborhood when you are not at home.

The poem is not changed
to incriminate the guilty,

for they are guilty
beyond any shadow of a doubt.

The poem's main purpose
is to see justice carried out.

Lighting the fuse of the imagination,
drawing events together, amid sparking
flashing gun powder cool air ticking
pointing the way.

THE LOGICAL EXPLOSION OF HYPOTHESIS

Oh Lady, on the fourth day of his mission
when he found the keys
of the enemy
in your purse he had to
disregard your sensibilities.

Murder after sex
isn't the natural order of the universe
but neither are the crimes
daily pushing the people towards revolution.

*WE WILL CELEBRATE
WITH SUCH FIERCE DANCING THE DEATH
OF YOUR INSTITUTIONS*

Oh, the smoke will rise
for many miles around
purifying the air
and no longer will our nights
be plagued by industrial fog,
purple skies.

NIGHTCLUB. BILLY COP. BE BOP
"GOT ANY IDENTIFICATION, BOY"
BLUES

It's all going to be
a brand new history

written by our children.
Our job is to wipe the slate
clean.

“Maybe by the time I’m thirty” he said
“there won’t be such a thing
as over thirty.”

They nodded silently
and parted in different directions.

The empty palace sat still for a few minutes
before dissolving
to assume its new role
in the revolution.

The eyes watching this scene
turn inward,
while the paper you are holding
and your hands
begin to tremble.

-Richard Krech

THE STATE OF THE UNION THE EDUCATION OF POETS

by Ron Silliman [written 1968]

The libraries are filled with the wrong books. No ! Is needed, it is enough to find Guest where there should be Ginsberg, Ciardi where there should be Creely, Poe for Pound, Ann Stanford for Jack Spicer. One must go to the hip bookstores, but how do you find one in Blue Springs, Missouri? Good poets will never infect the young if you are not exposed. Suggestion: buy, or even lift, a few good books of your favorite people and send them to the library of your choice.

The college classes are even worse. Patching up bad poems is not path to awareness. Nor is Greek prosody unless you're many many years into the whole thing. Books of any 6 good & current Poets are of more value than any text I have ever seen. Let's learn what happens when the good are good.

Critics, scholars & even novelists are not proper teachers of poetry because they do not know, they cannot know, just what happens when a poet writes his poem. They have no sense of that kind of insanity. All of Rimbaud's poems are about poetry, directly.

The minds of poets are on the battlefronts of reality. What Pound did in 1917 to poetics the Beatles are now doing to rock, without Dante there would be no John Wesley Harding. It is time poets took over the politics of their art away from the critics, it is time to govern ourselves. Poetry is still the most advanced of the arts. 70,000 students on college campuses are taking courses in writing poetry. How many will be destroyed by their menopausal profs? 69,995?

Poet Yannis Ritsos is in prison in Greece, Nikos Gatsos has totally disappeared from the streets, many others are in exile in Paris! what are you doing? Wars will not end until the minds of all men are beyond petty jealousy and sniveling greed. It is the job of the artist, privileged to speak to the gods & to be one with them, to bring the mind of man out of the Wall Street horror.

Get on a bus to the city, any bus. How many riders are reading poetry? How many reading the Wall Street Journal? What are you doing?

Poets must rise above negation, it is the poets who will bring in the new world. Will you ever get to Grail Castle, baby? Will I?

You need not write about the war, only about the world! In a world of wars, of racists, of thieves leading nations, all poems relate directly. Be with yourself, you are what is needed, the word is you.

fin.