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Intermedia Poetics In and Out of Detroit's Alternative Press

Abstract: This article addresses the experimental Detroit-based publisher known as the Alternative Press, who published eccentric works of art and poetry—in the form of bumper stickers and postcards, among other useful objects—between 1969 and 1999. While the Alternative Press is largely unknown to scholars, this article traces its influences on poets including Victor Hernández Cruz, Robert Creeley, Diane di Prima, Ted Berrigan, and Alice Notley. It suggests that though these poets (and additional Press contributors) are generally grouped according to other geographic or formal tendencies, involvement with the Alternative Press produced an aesthetics of intermedia experimentation that traversed poetic schools, eras, and allegiances in the late twentieth-century US. It situates the Alternative Press in the context of better known art-world movements such as Mail Art and Fluxus and links the Press's founders—Ann and Ken Mikolowski—with other influential publishers and artists of the time, notably Dick Higgins. This article introduces substantial new archival research conducted at the University of Michigan Special Collections, and prompts scholars to consider how a Detroit-based publisher can remap the geographic and generic contours of late twentieth-century US poetry.

Keywords: Small Press Publishing, Intermedia Aesthetics, Twentieth-Century Poetry, Mail Art

Between 1969 and 1999, Ann and Ken Mikolowski ran the Alternative Press from their home in Michigan (initially Detroit) publishing an eccentric range of materials by artist and poet contributors from across and beyond the United States. The Alternative Press's eccentricity, which includes what and how they published, means that the Press's output, on first and subsequent glances, resists a unified type, style, or summarizable set of tendencies. Although they returned over the years to a handful of favored printable formats—bumper

stickers, bookmarks, postcards, and broadsides—what went into and onto these supports varied. The Press printed poets and artists from numerous locales and orientations, without tying itself to a single school or network of practitioners. And it both received and sent out an ever-changing set of printed objects that included type (but not always), words (but not always), drawings (sometimes), paintings (on occasion), woodblock and other prints (as both paratext and text), and even once, an egg. This is only a partial list.

The Alternative Press published works by poets and artists based in or around Detroit, but they also published Language poets, Black Mountain poets, Beat poets, Nuyorican poets, New York School (first and second generation) poets, mainstream poets, avant-garde poets, academic poets, and an array of others—affiliated and not. These included contributions from figures such as Amiri Baraka, Bill Berkson, Ted Berrigan, Donna Brook, Andrei Cordrescu, Robert Creeley, Diane di Prima, Ed Dorn, Allen Ginsburg, Jim Gustafson, Victor Hernández Cruz, Hettie Jones, Faye Kicknosway, Joanne Kyger, Bernadette Mayer, Alice Notley, Ed Sanders, Gary Snyder, and Anne Waldman, among many others.[1] The Alternative Press published its nontraditional packets of “Art, Poetry, and Melodrama” until Ann Mikolowski’s death in 1999.

The late 1960s were a particularly lively time for alternative publishing culture in Detroit. The Detroit Printing Co-op[2] formed the same year as the Alternative Press. A few years prior, Dudley Randall’s Broadside Press was founded in 1965[3] and the Detroit Artists Workshop was established around 1964.[4] In fact, the Artists Workshop’s “1904 Chandler & Price hand-set letterpress” was what enabled the Alternative Press to start printing, when it was sold to the Mikolowskis in 1969.[5] In Detroit, this publishing scene was tightly interwoven with art of all kinds and Leftist politics. For instance, prominent members of the Detroit Artists Workshop included photographer Leni Sinclair and then-husband John Sinclair. Together, the two later co-founded, with activist Pun Plamondon, the White

Panthers—a radical antiracist group that sought to support the Black Panthers and made demands that included abolishing money, the release of all the world's prisoners, and the end of mandatory army conscription worldwide. Importantly, John Sinclair's politically motivated arrest on minor drug charges in 1969 is another aspect of the Alternative Press's founding and early growth. Allen Ginsburg came to Michigan to raise money for the John Sinclair Defense fund and stayed with the Mikolowskis. He raised $4000, took no expenses, but left a poem, "Rain Wet Asphalt Heat Garbage Curb Cans Overflowing," that became one of the Alternative Press's first publications.[6] Later, through the Alternative Press's postal distribution channels, they also published poetry from John Sinclair written while incarcerated in Marquette Prison, and received extensive correspondence from enthusiastic readers in return.

The Alternative Press's origin story is thus one of multiple creative and political convergences, and this extended to the poetics the Press ultimately promoted. Their publication formats had to do with the material constraints of hand-printing and the time and labor involved. But these constraints also invited—at times demanded—a particular aesthetic of their wide-ranging contributors: an intermedia aesthetic. This was a constant of the works the Alternative Press published, which always involved the collaborative confluence of more than one medium, aesthetic strategy, or expressive regime. Encounters with the Alternative Press influenced the participating poets, inviting new forms of poetic politics and opportunities for aesthetic collaboration, along with chances to create poetry that was shorter, funnier, more colloquial, and had broader public audiences in mind. These poetics arose out of the intermedia nature of the Alternative Press's publications, which paired strong formal constraints in terms of publication format with maximum flexibility in terms of how—and with what media—poetry could be composed. The Press's influence cut across schools, styles, and decades marked or demarcated by other common stylistic or (in)formal tendencies

seeding new currents of intermedia experimentation across a wide swath of late twentieth century US poetry.

Intermedia, some definitions

As a term to describe twentieth-century artforms, "intermedia" can be credited to Dick Higgins. Higgins was a prominent member of the multifaceted and collective artistic movement Fluxus, founded in 1960. He used the term "intermedia" to describe their and other contemporary aesthetic practices rooted in the intersection and combination of various media and art genres. Like the Michigan couple, Higgins was also a publisher. His Something Else Press published the *Something Else Newsletter* (home to the essay coining "intermedia" with a nod to Samuel Taylor Coleridge),[7] a famous anthology of concrete poetry (a form that can be considered intermedia), and various important Fluxus documents including the *Great Bear Pamphlets*.[8] The *Great Bear Pamphlets*, more than the Alternative Press's envelopes of printed matter, prioritized a largely Fluxus-affiliated group. But Something Else Press, as a whole, had a reach that extended beyond and included folks from outside of this conceptual in-group. They published works by Gertrude Stein, Ian Hamilton Finlay, and Eugen Gomringer, for instance, though their publications tended to come in more traditional formats, i.e. books, pamphlets, and newsletters.

Fluxus artist Ken Friedman reflects that, through his publishing, Higgins fostered "a meeting-point and breeding ground for some of the best and most innovative experimental art" of the late twentieth century.[9] I want to make a similar claim about the effect that the Alternative Press had on US poetry of the same time. While largely unknown to scholarship, the Alternative Press fostered a huge network of poetic contributors and in their work as publishers, the Mikolowskis coaxed from these poets extensive intermedia experimentation. Though neither Ken nor Ann Mikolowski produced the kind of theoretical oeuvre that

Higgins did (and Ken's writing style is notoriously economical in the amount of words it uses), the Michigan publishers can be thought of as another catalyst for the kinds of intermedia innovations Higgins, too, was spurring.

Outside their parallel roles as publishers, the Mikolowskis and Higgins were mutually aware of one another. In a letter to Ken from 1970, Higgins praises the Alternative Press for their "important work" and says "it's very different from the kind of work we publish here at [Something Else] Press, but that's a matter of identity, not quality" [10]. It's true that the two presses had different "identities" as Higgins notes—Something Else largely published books that facilitated the sharing of aesthetic ideas and the Alternative Press largely published not-books that put intermedia works into material circulation—but it can also be said that they shared many of the same aesthetic orientations and helped foster more of the same from poets and artists practicing in the latter decades of the twentieth century.

In his 1966 Intermedia essay, Higgins writes that "much of the best work being produced today seems to fall between media."[11] He ties this change to the supposed "dawn of a classless society" then taking place and charts the "separation between media" to the Renaissance.[12] From there, he offers a brief history of art that culminates in the performance-events known as "happenings" that were characteristic of Fluxus. The notion of a dawning "classless society" seems preposterous in hindsight (and certainly would have been from the perspective of 1960s Detroit), but Higgins' characterization of the increasing intermediality of the arts during the era is useful for thinking about comparable changes poetry was undergoing at the time, and not just in New York City.

The Intermedia essay notes it lacks space to explore there how other formations of intermediality register in adjacent arts. But further such explorations follow. His chart, "Some Poetry Intermedia" from 1976 offers a diagrammatic overview of some of the possibilities for poetry to intersect with other media. Underneath a smaller triangle linking theater, the visual

arts, and music—"the happenings intermedium"—is a more complex figure that spiral-outlines various forms of poetic intermedia. Poetry and sculpture are intermedially related through object poetry, poetry and video through video poetry. Poetry and visual art connect by way of "visual poetry (including concrete poetry)," and poetry and happenings (themselves an intermedium) are linked with "action poetry." Between poetry and music is sound poetry, and between poetry and philosophy is concept poetry. Poetry and mail art (relevant for the concerns of this essay) connect by way of postal poetry. Though arrows indicate these specific vectors of possible poetic intermedia, the spiral that runs through them suggests further continuity between each of these possibilities, as does the arrow proposing poetry and literally "anything" can find confluence in some other, yet unnamed, intermedial link. As Higgins' chart indicates, "with familiarity each intermedium becomes a new medium, and that new intermedia can therefore be said to exist between old ones." [13]

Mixing and Translating/Transfusing Media

Higgins notes that "intermedia differ from mixed media in that they represent a fusion conceptually of the elements."[14] Such a "fusion" would be an alternative to a work in which distinct regimes may be combined but carrying out divergent functions. The mixed vs. intermedia distinction is useful for thinking about the kind of output generated by the Alternative Press, which may be characterized as beginning from mixed media impetuses and moving toward more intermedia strategies.

The Alternative Press's publications almost always combine text and images, in various forms. At its origins, this came about because of economic imperatives. In the Press's early years, standing outside the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Mikolowskis would give away free poems, a gesture from which Ken says people would "recoil in horror."[15] Later though, as a growing family, the Mikolowskis needed money and began to include visual materials

with their printed poems. As Ken Mikolowski reflects, "we did artwork, and we tried to make [the poems] look attractive. And we learned to print eventually. Then we started selling things."[16] The combination of visual and textual elements was also due to the backgrounds of the printers themselves. Ken Mikolowski was a poet and Ann Mikolowski was a painter. Her work outside of the Alternative Press includes massive lakescapes and tiny portraits of the couple's poet friends. The combination of their talents lent itself to the Alternative Press's publications, which in turn intermingled the two aesthetic regimes.

Victor Hernández Cruz's Alternative Press postcard (figure 1) is an example of this mingling and helps illustrate how to think about the relationships among media in the Press's publications.

[insert figures 1a and 1b about here -- ideally they would be printed side by side, forming a single image]

The indication from the Alternative Press archive at the University of Michigan is that "Versions of Basho in Spanish" were submitted to the Mikolowskis in text only.[17] The principle language of publication for the Alternative Press was English, and this is one of relatively few examples of Alternative Press postcards I've come across that is, first of all, a kind of loose translation of haiku by the Japanese poet Bashō, and second, is entirely in Spanish. From the image in figure 1, you can see a trial print of the toad that would eventually join these verses. A card like this might be thought of as an example of mixed, rather than inter-, media in that its words and image do seem to play fairly separate roles, and function in distinct ways. Unlike strategies used in some kinds of visual poetry—where the visual elements of text itself contribute to the poem's image—on this card, text and image accompany one another.

Yet it is also possible to conceptualize this card as an intermedia work, in part because of the ways the print of the toad does more than decorate this card for its eventual readers. Because most of the Alternative Press's publications were in English, we can assume its readership was primarily, though not exclusively, readers of English. As this card does not contain further English versions, (although a handwritten translation done on a leaf of legal pad paper appears in the archive),[18] the toad print functions as a kind of intersemiotic, or intermedial, translation of the (already translated) poems printed in text on the card's face. Intersemiotic translation was introduced by Roman Jakobson, who defined it as "interpretation of verbal signs by means of nonverbal sign systems."[19] The toad illustration on Hernández Cruz's card does perform this function, at least in part. Its underbelly angle and the toad's stretched hind legs visually depict the splash of the toad into the lake that is also depicted in the text. But Jakobson's definition of intersemiotic translation differs from Higgins' notion of intermedia in that, rather than the fusion postulated by Higgins, Jakobson's intersemiosis implies the separation of its categories. To interpret one in the sign of the other necessitates a kind of differentiation that would permit such a passage of information to take place across an implied divide.

Claus Clüver points to some of the perceived inadequacies of intersemiotic translation, writing that "a translation is customarily expected to serve as a self-contained replacement of the original."[20] A painting, he writes, "if divorced from the verbal text, would allow for a variety of interpretations, some conceivably quite far removed from whatever the lyric line was held to convey."[21] This kind of distance would likely be tolerable to the loose mode of translation active in Hernández Cruz's poem, as the "versions" in "Versions of Basho in Spanish" attests. But furthermore, as Clüver goes on to argue, concerns about the nonequivalence of translation from verbal to visual media, aren't always pressing, for instance, in "the ancient Chinese genre of poem pictures, which unite in intricate interplay the

sign systems of visual representation, verbal text, and calligraphic rendition of that text, executed with the same brush that created the painting."[22] Hernández Cruz's postcard differs from the poem pictures Clüver discusses in a number of ways, but it does incorporate "the verbal text in the visual field" as Clüver describes. The text is printed around the image of the toad, fitting into the blank space around the creature's limbs. And here the whole support of the postcard, including the text and the image, helps constitute the visual-material field that is the poem.

The intermedia activity on display in the poem, then, is less akin to Jakobson's intersemiotic translation and nearer to what Clive Scott describes as synesthetic translation. He writes that the intermedial "is not primarily to be conceived of as a process of transfer of one medium to another; it is the translation of one medium out of itself into multisensory, or cross-sensory, consciousness."[23] This takes place in Hernández Cruz's card which moves from a purely text-based submission to the Alternative Press into a tangible material object that incorporates within it additional visual elements, all contributing to the poem. Though I've mostly been focusing on visual and verbal elements, the poem also prioritizes its sonic capabilities, especially in the third haiku (or stanza) where the toad's jump into the lake shows up in the onomatopoetic "fuá," in a usage akin to English expressions such as whoosh or splash. The translation activity in Hérnandez Cruz's postcard poem can thus be read (or perceived) as closer to Higgins' fusion-focused understanding of intermedia than to the process of interpretation across unique sign systems described by Jakobson. The poem is not merely a collection of mixed, but distinct, media; it arises from their confluence.

Intermedia on the Move

The Mikolowskis' notion that poetry would become more desirable with the addition of attractive visual elements points to a mixed media impetus for their approach—making

poems in which text is accompanied by an illustration that perhaps is there to serve a distinct purpose. But while this pragmatic incentive for mixing media may have informed the Press in the early days, as their publications grew, visual, textual, and material elements increasingly worked together in the mode of "fusion" described by Higgins. As an example, many of the bumper stickers published by the Alternative Press represent a fusing of poetry and what we might call the art of bumper stickering.

Bumper stickers might not be the first thing that comes to mind when imagining forms of art, and their historical deployment belongs perhaps more readily to advertising, mass-market (although, ironically, *personal*) expression, or kitsch. But kitsch, as Daniel Tiffany has argued, has a prominence in late twentieth-century US poetry to which works published by the Alternative Press correspond. Tiffany writes of certain New York School poets like John Ashbury, Kenneth Koch, and Frank O'Hara who applied "Dada techniques" like collage and appropriation in their work, and who were "interested in using vernacular materials and documenting everyday experience."[24] We can think of the Alternative Press in this vein—as building on the strategies employed by historical and contemporary vanguards—but the Alternative Press concentrates and literalizes these strategies, further accelerating the collapse of art of life and apparently distinct mediatic categories. Here, poetry *is* vernacular materials such as postcards, bookmarks, or bumper stickers. These objects sometimes further incorporate collage techniques, especially the "Multiple Originals" series that allowed contributors to hand-design their own original postcards (discussion of these will follow), but as intermedia works, the life-art interface of Alternative Press publications is not one of documenting quotidian experience, but of making poetry from, and sending poetry out into, these very experiential spaces.

[insert figure 2 about here]

The bumper sticker poem, “Grindstone City: The little town with a great future behind it,” is one of Ken Mikolowski’s own and refers to the small city in Michigan which was, following Detroit, home to the Alternative Press. Located at the tip of Michigan’s “thumb” near Lake Huron, Grindstone City’s claim to fame (and name) came from the area’s once-important industry. Formerly prosperous, the town and the industry withered around the time of the First World War, when synthetic grindstone alternatives became available. With its quarries filled in, Grindstone City was effectively a ghost town by the 1970s, when the two remaining buildings from its industrial past joined the National Register of Historic Places. Although decades earlier than the wider withering of Michigan’s auto-industry, the narrative is familiar to many Rust Belt cities, pushed into decline by the economic forces of twentieth century capitalism.

Sianne Ngai indicates that the bumper sticker belongs to “the genre of the capitalist ‘sticker’” (which also includes “promo” and “price”).[25] Ken Mikolowski’s bumper sticker fits in here, belonging, as Ngai suggests, to an established type of late capitalist stuff, but it also comments on the failures of capitalist production, environmental exploitation, and the broken promise that capitalism can sustain the livelihoods of communities and their futures. Ngai goes on to argue that “what we stick on is usually intended to stick out—if mostly in ordinary, not necessarily disruptive ways,”[26] and Mikolowski’s poem takes advantage of this feature of stickers in general, which allows it to slip noticeably/unnoticeably into the field of vision of countless unsuspecting readers. This enables the poem to invoke its ironies of futures-past, addressing Grindstone City’s specific decline, and synecdochically implicating the region as a whole. Ken Mikolowski’s poem plays with the language of municipal marketing—the kind that might show up on street signs, promotional pamphlets, or (as in this

case) bumper stickers. But the poem inverts the usual direction of such language, turning the future toward the past and acknowledging the area's loss.

The found image included on the bumper sticker is a small print of a person with their nose to the grindstone. A visual pun on the clichéd expression, the image's presence amid the ironic city slogan also works to press the poem's indictment of industrial loss toward broader conclusions. One can only have one's nose to the grindstone, after all, where is there is grindstone to nose in the first place. By the time this bumper sticker was circulating through and beyond Michigan, there was no grindstone left in Grindstone City. This suggestion points to the difficult entanglement between labor and the structural forces that permit or exclude it from the marketplace, indicting the meritocratic myths of American capitalism. While local to the industrial loss taking place in the Rust Belt at the time, the bumper sticker mourns (preemptively, even) a broader history of economic change characteristic of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century United States.

The intermedia features of this poem, then, have to do with the ways the poem's material form (a bumper sticker), its material features (bright red font, varied text size, the image of the nose to the grindstone), and its poetic function fuse in the service of conceptual ends. The poem on its own could carry out some of what the bumper sticker accomplishes. Certainly, its twist ending and marketing-speak come across without the support of the sticker itself, or the poem's visual elements. But, fused together, and stuck to the back of a vehicle driving somewhere around the United States (perhaps Michigan itself), the poem has a way of traveling outside the usual confines of a poetic text or performance and into the very public spaces its ironies address.

In a letter to Ken Mikolowski from 1994, Diane di Prima writes about the Alternative Press publications as objects that "enter immediately into the world again, as defined by their use."[27] Generally speaking, this is a feature of the intermediality of the Alternative Press's

output. It doesn't just combine textual and visual regimes but achieves a kind of fusion of art and popular forms made uniquely possible by the Press's approach to publishing, which enabled the poems to travel into all kinds of extrapoetic spaces, and to fuse with various sorts of extrapoetic texts.

In our interview, Ken Mikolowski comments that the Press's approach to poetic creation opposed a kind of white room model where "you locked the door and were quiet and introspective."[28] For the Alternative Press, no such quiet refuge was necessary: "You get up in the morning, you brush your teeth, you write a poem. It's all just part of what you do. It's part of your life."[29] This attitude resonates with broader trends ongoing in late twentieth-century US poetry, that like the Alternative Press's catalogue, also cut across schools and geographies. But while groups like the Beats or the two New York Schools may have at times avoided lofty language in order to approach, via poetry, ways of communicating that reflected (or wholesale appropriated) everyday speech, the Alternative Press's publications push these same poets' work further—leaving the norms of poetry publication, and embracing forms of popular communication to such a degree that they fundamentally confuse the borders of both.

Tiffany writes that kitsch forces a destabilizing set of questions: "Is it fake or not? Is it art or kitsch?"[30] The Alternative Press's publications—especially those like the bumper stickers that are both intermedia poetry and commercial objects (however small the actual commercial enterprise may have been)—do not bother with these questions. In fact, they capitalize on the very indistinctions that Tiffany outlines in order to generate alternative publics for the poetry produced. This poetry both responds to and *is* the textual ephemera of everyday life.

Di Prima proposes two bumper stickers to the Alternative Press in 1994: "BLAME GOD" (which the Alternative Press eventually published) and "PROUD TO BE A SCARLET

WOMAN."[31] (which I could not find in printed form in the archive, though it may have been published).

[insert figure 3 about here]

On the one hand, both of these submissions are ironic provocations that fuse poetry with what we might call the generic tendencies of the bumper sticker. While there are not a great number of bumper sticker studies, those that have been done have shown that the bumper sticker often "declares support for or identification with a political or social grouping" that includes religious affiliation, electoral or issue-driven politics, and other such alliances.[32] Both of di Prima's proposed bumper sticker poems share these markers of the style, albeit ironically.

They also build on, and concentrate, existing tendencies within di Prima's poetic practice. As Estíbaliz Encarnación-Pinedo writes about di Prima's long poem *Loba*, these tendencies include prominent intertextual references and, specifically, those that forward a "revision of female power in religious texts."[33] Di Prima notes in the letter alongside her submissions that "PROUD TO BE A SCARLET WOMAN" was "inspired by a bumpersticker that actually said 'Proud to be a Methodist Minister.'"[34] As such, the intertextuality at work in "PROUD TO BE A SCARLET WOMAN" shares much in common with other tendencies in di Prima's work, that, like Encarnación-Pinedo suggests, propose an "opposition to more rigid patriarchal religious narratives."[35] But where *Loba* makes references to biblical mythology, di Prima's bumper sticker poem offers a revision of a very different kind of source text, though retaining an opposition to patriarchal expressions of religiosity. With a nod to Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, Di Prima's poetic response sticker calls attention to women's—and women's sexuality's—biblical associations with sin and evil. It

also sheds light on the likely unintended irony of the bumper sticker to which it refers, where the deadly sin of pride is unproblematically applied to Methodist ministry. But unlike other poetic reformulations of religious mythologies, the stickers di Prima proposes to the Alternative Press are meant to, and do, move beyond mere textual reference.

As such, what might be a one-way poetic appropriation of extrapoetic texts here comes full circle, fusing itself onto unknown number of car bumpers that reenter the space from which intertextual inspiration came. Here, then, poetry is not simply porting in the language or registers of popular culture; it ports it back out again too, and in an intermedium where a confusion of what is art and what is kitsch makes it possible for the bumper sticker to be received as either. Intertextuality thus registers differently in the case of di Prima's bumper sticker poetry than it does in longer works like *Loba*. It is also not merely inter*text*ual in that the lines of continuity between inspiration or reference material and the work ultimately conceived by di Prima are made of more stuff than text. This underscores the fundamentally intermedia character of the works produced by the Alternative Press, in that they are literally comprised of a fusion of mediatic modes and matters, not simply text (borrowed or not).

Another significant difference to *Loba*, as well as the years-long *Revolutionary Letters* for which di Prima is well known, is length. Like most Alternative Press poems, di Prima's are short, short enough to fit on a bumper sticker. Her aesthetic practice includes work with the visual arts and an interest in word and image, so it is not necessarily the case that the Alternative Press is responsible for introducing further media experimentation to di Prima's practice. But I do want to consider how poets' involvement with the Alternative Press produced effects for the poetry that resulted. Part of this is the brevity the Press's publications demanded, which allowed poetry to capitalize on what Marjorie Perloff describes as "the billboard culture of the late twentieth century" wherein the "'successful' text is one that combines high-speed communication with maximum information."[36] This combination is on

display in di Prima's text and its effect is the creation of a distinct articulative zone in which poetry can succinctly forward its message. Like Ken Mikolowski's own "Grindstone City" sticker, di Prima's "Blame God," once stuck on a bumper, simultaneously creates and relates to a different kind of readership than is typical of poetry.

[insert figure 4 about here]

Similarly, Robert Creeley's "I Saw Delight" (figure 4), is able to travel beyond the usual confines of poetry by adhering to other, more vehicular, supports. Like "PROUD TO BE A SCARLET WOMAN," Creeley's poem builds from intertextual reference. "I Saw Delight," is, as the lightbulb-constructing text indicates, an "homage to Hank Williams." The bumper sticker is a misquote of Williams' song "I Saw the Light," first recorded in 1947. The song later became a standard for country music gospel acts. Like di Prima's examples, Creeley's inverts the trope of religiously affiliated bumper stickers, here via homophonic punning. Rather than the "light" of Christian re-birth the song apparently refers to, the Creeley poem textually foregrounds "delight," pleasure. And with the neon yellow color as well as the sticker's image, Creeley's light substitutes an insistent literalism for heavenly metaphor.

This poem's revamped interlyrical refence to Williams' song, like di Prima's bumper stickers, draws from and contributes to a kind of roadside bibliography of poetic inspiration and rearticulation that is characteristic of the Alternative Press's publications (and other intermedia artefacts like Mail Art, as this essay will soon discuss). In such works, intertextuality and collective, accumulating authorship develop across a network of aesthetic exchanges in the material world. In this case, as William's biographers' describe, the lyric "I

saw the light" itself corresponds to such a scenario, where the singer's mother woke him from an intoxicated back-seat slumber saying "I just saw the light" in reference to a lit-up airfield landmark they passed on their drive home from a show.[37] This bit of borrowed speech winds up as the refrain of William's song, rearticulated as a born-again anthem. Creeley's poem continues this trend of borrowed and recontextualized speech as lyrical font. And his poem introduces a further ironic turn: reembedding the phosphorescent delights that inspired "I Saw the Light"'s metaphor and dragging Williams' song back down to earth.

Aspects of what happens in Creeley's "I Saw Delight" are in line with his poetics writ large, or small. His work was already inclined toward brevity, which included, as Will Montgomery writes, "short lines, short stanzas and short poems."[38] The Alternative Press's formally constrained character limits were a perfect match for this approach to verse, meeting Creeley's brevity with a material expectation of the same. But they also invite the poet to experiment with other features of the Alternative Press's intermedia style. On the one hand, this includes experimentation with techniques more common to visual or concrete-adjacent poetry. On the other hand, the Alternative Press offers to Creeley a differently constructed relationship with public readers and space.

To the former point, this bumper sticker mimics the strategies of certain types of visual poetry. Some of the textual material of Creeley's poem—"HOMAGE TO HANK WILLIAMS"—also contributes visually to the work, forming the image of the light bulb in the center of the sticker. This is a kind of calligramatic approach to poetic visuality marked by, as Johanna Drucker describes, "a strong use of recognizable iconic form in the arrangement of the words on the page (e.g. falling drops of rain in Apollinaire's 'Il pleut')."[39] This strategy is sometimes referred to as "concrete poetry" in the broad understanding of that term. However, concrete poetry as established in mid-twentieth-century Brazil, while certainly experimental in the visual realm, largely eschews the kind of mimeticism on display

in Creeley's bumper sticker. That said, twentieth-century readers of Creeley have, in fact, drawn a relationship between his writing and the precepts of Brazilian concretism as well. This relationship centers, for the most part, not on a shared approach to visual experimentation but on an insistence that, as the Brazilian concrete poets write in their "Pilot Plan," poetry "communicates its own structure: structure-content."[40] Both this and calligrammatic visual strategies are visible in Creeley's bumper sticker.

Creeley is cited in Charles Olson's essay "Projective Verse," where he is there credited with the notion that "form is never more than an extension of content."[41] And Mary Ellen Solt whose 1968 anthology, *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, was among the first such anthologies of the form to circulate in the United States, picks up this point. In her account of the US (where there is often assumed to have been no real concrete poetry movement), Solt spends some time unpacking the relationship between Creeley's poetics and Brazilian concrete poetry, particularly the idea that structure (or what Olson/Creeley call form) and content are coincident with one another. Solt writes that in "Creeley's "Le Fou" (for Charles Olson) we find a fascinating counterpointing (conflict) of the too-slow movement of the old grammar and syntax against the propulsive energy of the new, which moves through the poem in a succession of key words repeated somewhat in the manner of the concrete poem."[42] What Solt highlights here is not just visual arrangement of words on the page, but an extreme proximity of form and content, whereby the grammar of Creeley's poem is "part of the meaning."[43]

In "I Saw Delight," the arrangement of words form part of the meaning. He thus arrives, in this case, at the structure-content synthesis characteristic of concrete poetry by way of calligrammatic mimesis. But there is more too, in that the bumper sticker itself—its color, its stickiness—also lend meaningful "content" to the poem. As a result, this little homage takes up a complex array of opportunities afforded by the Alternative Press's intermedia

format. And these provide further ways of fusing the form/content poles in the poet's practice. While Creeley might already have had something to share with related intermedia forms like concrete poetry, and also collaborated with visual artists throughout his career (including Georg Baselitz and Robert Indiana), the intermedia aspects of his work are furthered thanks to engagement with the Alternative Press—both its publishing formats and its publishers.

"I Saw Delight" came about via a collaboration with the Mikolowskis that took place over the span of at least three years. Creeley's Alternative Press poems are not dated, but from the archive, the genesis of this idea took shape in a letter Creeley wrote to the Mikolowskis in December of 1981. He writes:

> for some years I've had this in my head – one time NYC friends were to put it on tee shirts – etc. If you had any use for it – great – with or without 'visuals' in any form, you name it. Or just say to hell with it, equally terrific. To wit:
>
> I see
> delight!
>
> or caps:
>
> I SEE
> DELIGHT!
>
> or title surrounding in letters forming lightbulb: "HOMAGE TO HANK WILLIAMS · HOMAGE TO HANK WILLIAMS · HOMAGE TO HANK WILLIAMS……………" [44]

Later, on a postcard in 1984, the past tense and eventual layout of the bumper sticker come in. Creeley writes "re the light: What about R. Crumb style lite bulb?" above a drawing that roughs the idea out.[45] In this version, there is no "homage to Hank Williams." The eventual bumper sticker combines these elements, though, in the shape of the lightbulb calligram that anchors the poem. Although the archive does contain a further text-only version (no image of the bulb, calligram or otherwise), the version with the lightbulb provides the opportunity to

fuse Creeley's two proposals into an intermedia final form that, even more than t-shirts might, provides a chance for the poem to continue circulating in the material environments that inspired it—first by post to other Alternative Press subscribers, and then by automobile, past all kinds of roadside lights.

These opportunities offer a further chance to turn Olson's notion of poetic propulsiveness literal, pasting the poem to a combustion engine vehicle and sending it on its way. And this points to another turn that Creeley's poetry takes when it makes its way to the Alternative Press. While he maintained his characteristically short verse in contrast with the long, epic poetry of contemporaries like Olson, Creeley's short poems for the Alternative Press restructure the oft-assumed contextual implications of this divide. Montgomery describes a "pervasive assumption in academic poetry criticism: that short form and long form tend to correspond respectively to lyric interiority and epic collectivity."[46] Montgomery questions the applicability of this divide with regard to Creeley's work, and the even-shorter forms of the Alternative Press publications provide further counter evidence to the suggestion that short forms prioritize interiority. Here, Creeley's short poem, like so much of the Alternative Press's catalogue, is collectively authored and principally oriented outward.

In "I Saw Delight," there's a clear mutuality afforded between the poem and the sticker that takes advantage of the Alternative Press's use of intermedial strategies and the ways in which these strategies facilitate further poetic-public engagement. Creeley draws from both Williams' song lyrics and the vernacular of the bumper sticker, which in addition to religious identification, is marked by irony, humor, and visual communication. Here, none of these features is particularly subordinate to the other, and the meeting of media Creeley's sticker enables is not a matter of images illustrating a (largely autonomous) poem. Rather, song, sticker, text, image, and adhesive all "fuse" as Higgins describes, to create a poem from the combination of its elements. Eventually, the poem sends itself back out into the world.

Ken Mikolowski comments that “I don't think you could put [di Prima’s “Blame God”] on the back of your pickup truck and ride through Alabama,”[47] but the point of the sticker is of course: that you can. And this provocation is part of the Alternative Press’s public politics. Isabel Castelao-Gómez refers to di Prima’s early Beat poetry as “motional” arguing that it “reflect[s] bohemian female experience as intimately located and situated.”[48] At the same time, she argues that rather than a singular perspective, di Prima’s poems present “decentered ‘Is’ that build themselves through experiential events of interrelation.”[49] As an Alternative Press bumper sticker, “Blame God” gives up nearly all of its locatedness. There is no reference to a specific place, and the sticker’s background (white in figure 3; in other printings, silver) and serif-but-strange blue font don’t conjure a particularly situated earthly origin. The silver version even reads as interstellar. But Castelao-Gómez’s point about “decentered ‘Is’” is supremely evident here. There is no speaker, but the poem’s capacity to move about and generate ever-new relational events with an unanticipated set of readers is lucidly on display.

There is a politics in this gesture, one makes use of the affordances of intermedia to set (often political) messaging in motion. And this stretches across the Alternative Press’s publications, across the range of poets and poetic schools they published. Many politically-infused artifacts were published by the press over the years. Some, like “Blame God” or “Grindstone City” are political by way of their circulation through potentially unsympathetic spaces. Others, like “I Saw Delight” are ironic provocations potentially received as political depending on the viewer. Still others are manifestly straightforward such as the bumper sticker, “Defund the Right” (figure 5), by Fugs member and founder of *Fuck You/A Magazine of the Arts*, Ed Sanders.

[insert figure 5 about here]

Its red, white, and blue color-scheme suggests an alternative vision of patriotism. Like the bumper stickers by di Prima and Mikolowski, Sanders' contribution circulated first through the Alternative Press's network of subscribers, and via this audience, it later emerged into a broader world of readers. And as with other examples, these roadside readers included those not already inclined toward poetry or Leftist politics, something the particularly intermedia quality of bumper sticker poetry makes possible.

Postal Poetry

Postcards published by The Alternative Press showed an in-built interest in the possibilities that could arise by way of fusing poetry with the postcard form. The Mikolowskis collected and redistributed poetry throughout the US and the importance of this mode of distribution is baked into the very (printed) matter of poetry as it emanates from, and into, Detroit. Traveling by mail meant that the postcards could be distributed quickly and by informal means. Like the bumper stickers, being postcards also allowed the poems to circulate outside of dedicated poetic channels and to both exploit and disrupt their means of dissemination.

Postal poetry is one of the intermedia categories explicitly charted by Higgins on his swirling "Some Poetry Intermedia" diagram. For him, it represents a fusion of the categories of poetry and Mail Art. The Alternative Press's publications vacillated along this axis. Though the focus of this essay is on the Press's innovative poetry publications, they also distributed quite a lot of visual art (and other materials) by mail. And Ken, particularly, was in contact with the more codified Mail Art network that involved an international group of artists and was also, itself, and intermedia art form. Ken Mikolowski notes that he "sent things out internationally, to Japan, Sweden, all different places" and, in addition to Higgins,

he maintained correspondence with Brian Buczak and Geoffrey Hendricks, among others. Ken was in touch with the founder of Mail Art, Ray Johnson, who visited the Mikolowskis in their Grindstone City home and contributed a collage recognizing the Press's decennial: "Peter Beard's Silhouette surrounded by ten Michigans for the Alternative Press tenth anniversary" (figure 6).

[insert figure 6 about here]

Like postcards in general, the Alternative Press's included both visual and textual material, and left the reverse mostly blank, aside from the various versions of branded paratext and images (though the distinction between text and paratext is rather fuzzy in their work). On the reverse sides, appearing horizontally along the top left would be the author attribution, vertically through the center would be a reference to the Alternative Press, and in the top right would appear a stamp or press mark such as the nose to the grindstone, a bison, or other images.

[insert figure 7 about here]

As Timothy D. Murray points out in one of the few scholarly mentions of the Alternative Press, "poetry postcards were often distributed to individuals who actually used them as postcards," something that hinders their collection in libraries, but also speaks to the successful fusing of poetry and the postcard form.[50] For the Alternative Press, these weren't poetic appropriations of postcard-ness, but actual postcards, "functional" works of art, as Mikolowski describes.[51]

The poetry postcards are intermedial, then, by way of their being postcards. But, like the bumper stickers, they also incorporated a variety of media on their faces, including prints, drawings, and paintings, as well as letterpressed and handwritten text. At times, the artwork, as well as the textwork, displayed on the postcard's face was done by the Mikolowskis, in collaboration with individual poets, as in the case of the Hernández Cruz haiku card addressed earlier in this essay. Other times, the Alternative Press provided the cards and (para)text on the reverse, but left the faces blank, for contributors to fill in entirely of their own accord. Poets, and artists, would then mail these "Multiple Originals" in sets of 500 back to the Mikolowskis, who distributed the cards to readers in subsequent Press mailings. The range of media included in the Alternative Press postcards, then, is especially noteworthy among the "Multiple Originals" series, though intermedia strategies are identifiable in the more "traditional" postcards as well.

Murray indicates that the Mikolowskis' Press was one of three US small presses to publish what he deems "poemcards," beginning in the 1960s.[52] The others were the Santa Barbara-based Unicorn Press and Keith and Rosmarie Waldrops' Burning Deck Press, which started as a magazine in Ann Arbor. According to Murray, the Unicorn Press's poetry postcards started around the same time as the Alternative Press's (1968); the Waldrops' postcard series launched in earnest in 1974.[53] In the early 1970s, Chilean poet Nicanor Parra also published a book in postcard form, which was a similarly intermedia affair, involving both text and drawings/collages that the poet and collaborating artist Guillermo Tejeda put together.[54] In the late 1970s Jeffrey Cyphers Wright likewise published postcard poems from New York, via his Hard Press, though not at the immense scale of the Alternative Press. This decade marked the heyday of Mail Art, a practice that shared much in common with the Mikolowskis' Press. During the 1970s, as Seeta Peña Gangadharan describes, "the number of

[Mail Art] exhibitions increased from two to 425," attracting hundreds, even thousands of participating artists from all over the world.[55]

The Alternative Press was thus part of a current in global art and poetry of the era that took advantage of, and played with, the affordances of the postal channel. Though Ken Mikolowski remarks that his involvement with Mail Art was largely "independent of the Press,"[56] there were numerous overlaps between the two efforts. For instance, Craig Saper writes of "perhaps one of the most important Fluxus kits" known as "the Flux Post Kit," which consisted of "a post office mail box, canceling stamps, [and] a number of postcard artworks," including those that call attention to the mail carrier (and sorter)'s involvement in the distribution of these works.[57] A Fluxus example Saper cites—Ben Vautier's "postman's choice"—involves "a postcard stamped and addressed on both sides with two different addresses,"[58] a gesture that forces the agential involvement of postal workers in the delivery of the object.

A similar gesture is identifiable in those Alternative Press postcards that made themselves difficult to deliver by mail. And embedded within the Alternative Press's approach to publishing was what Ken Mikolowski describes as a kind of playful "challenge to the post office":

> We had the artist Carol Steen who did 500 brass postcards. We challenged people to put stamps on those things. We put stamps on them and addressed them and sent them to see if they got through. And mostly they did go through. Some people would do things like put a stamp on an egg and address the egg to see if they could get it through. Those didn't.[59]

If a collapse of form and content aligns Creeley's poetry (Alternative Press and otherwise) with intermedia forms like concrete and visual poetry, here the Alternative Press's publication strategy points to a collapse of aesthetic media and the medium through which it travels, or

doesn't. As postal poetry is an intermedium consisting of poetry and mail art, the mail itself contributes to the poem, and facilitates or stymies its arrival in a reader's hands.

This is something the Alternative Press's particular approach to publishing makes possible, and invites from its contributing poets, who might not have already been involved with the broader Mail Art movement. When poets were sent 500 blank postcards, this impetus rattled poets' lyrical tendencies and invited them to make more intermedia use of the blank space on the postcards' faces than they might when facing a blank page. Though it's hard to make a general claim about what these postcards did—due in part to the fact that they were actually used as postcards and only a sample remains in the University of Michigan archive—from what I have seen, most of the postcards that formed part of the Press's "Multiple Originals" series, in particular, were not simply text. Some of the cards are painted, collaged, stamped, or drawn, among other possibilities. Donna Brook did a series that involved a set of bunny rabbit stickers; Sally Young contributed a postcard with a ziplock bag of dirt stapled to the face; Jim Gustafson submitted postcards typed or written, but also stuck with straight pins or wrapped in ribbon. It resulted that the intermedia invitation of the poetry postcards, extended even beyond media typical of postcards themselves.

Contributor Ted Berrigan reflects, "I could do anything I wanted on [the 'Multiple Originals'] besides just write."[60] His cards were often handwritten, and sometimes incorporated multiple colors of ink or marker, and drawings.

[insert figure 8 about here]

His postcard from 1982, "People of the Future" (figure 8), for example, incorporated a drawing by Ted's young son, Anselm Berrigan, now a poet himself. Like much of the

Alternative Press's catalogue, this card draws from a variety of media that do more than simply mix with one another.

Before it formed part of the Multiple Originals project, "People of the Future" first appeared as a stand-alone, text-only poem in Ted Berrigan's 1977 collection *Nothing for You*. In the Alternative Press version, the text is attributed to the dinosaur. In addition to making for a good joke (another feature of the Alternative Press's poetics), the dinosaur and speech bubble allow the poem to keep scolding its readers across and through various futures. With the dinosaur here credited with speaking these words, there's a way in which the postcard poem suggests, via the drawing, that it could have preceded the version that appeared in *Nothing for You* many centuries after the Mesozoic era. The postcard thus resists being assigned a secondary status, despite the text having been borrowed from a previously penned poem.

Ted Berrigan has remarked that at times, when working on the "Multiple Originals"—a daunting project for any poet—"in order to keep going, [he] copied older poems onto the postcard."[61] However, once part of the postcards, the poems were not simply copies, but part of a new material apparatus and intermedia environment that influenced their function and reception. Anselm's drawing, and the Mikolowskis' postcard, help to shift this poem from a single-authored creation in text to a collectively authored intermedial poem. As with other Alternative Press poets, this builds on tendencies already alive in Berrigan's work, but it also pushes the poet in new directions, and his collaboration with the Alternative Press would lead to other such intermedia experiments down the line.

Daniel Kane writes that for the second-generation New York School (which Ted Berrigan is considered part of), "poetry was in many ways produced of sociability."[62] Ben Olin echoes this point, noting that these writers' "work is suffused with references to a broader intersocial web of friends, acquaintances, and fellow poets,"[63] which arose out of

collaborative writing, publishing, interactions in and around the Poetry Project, and other casual and codified group gatherings. Kane argues that this feature of the group's work "invites us to consider how a conception of the poem as communal gesture affected literary reception,[and] challenged established notions of what constitutes authorship."[64] But such challenges can, at times, wind up being penned in by geographic limitations, which invite communal authorship, but only where those authors are already together, and in this case, together in a cultural center like New York City. The Alternative Press, based in Michigan but mailing its publications to all kinds of places further afield, helps erode the geographic boundaries of intermedia collaboration, contributing to an emergent trend that Ross Hair describes in which small press publications "facilitate community, dialogue, exchange, and collaboration amongst a geographically and stylistically disparate network"[65]

Local and not-so local communing are registered on a postcard attributed to Alice Notley and Bernadette Mayer. This postcard is archived under Notley's name at the University of Michigan Library and the verso indicates the card comprised part of Notley's first "Multiple Originals" series (she did two series of 500 each) (figure 9). However, the poem was in fact largely written by Ted Berrigan, and it's his handwriting that shows on the majority of the card.[66] It was painted by Alice Notley, the opening lines up to "gums" were a prompt of Mayer's, and the remaining lines are Berrigan's.[67] Attributed to Notley and Mayer together and handwritten by Berrigan, this card already suggests, like Berrigan's dinosaur example, the ways existing social relationships contributed to the New York School ethos of communal authorship, and to authorship as it registers in the Alternative Press's postal poems. But the poem is also filled with references to writers outside this immediate context, including Creeley, Dickens, and Tennyson. What's more, the poem's title is a reworking of an e.e. cumming's poem that begins "all in green my love went riding."

This poem wasn't included in Berrigan's *A Certain Slant of Sunlight*, where many of his "Multiple Originals" later appeared, but it partakes of the same tendency Notley identifies about the collection (and the "Multiple Originals"), namely, a sort of extreme case of collaborative authorship. [68]

[insert figure 9 about here]

Notably, while these Alternative Press postcards do display intimate, local collaborations between poets and their family and friends, the Alternative Press publications extend such collaborations beyond a geographically-bound community of poets, and encourage these same poets' existing communal tendencies beyond those that register in text or speech. For instance, Mayer's poetry prompts are somewhat famous, but this intermedia postcard, which shows the imprint of her distinct handwriting, provides an opportunity to make visible the usually-hidden or later erased influence of the poetry prompt (and the poet doing the prompting) on the final poem produced. Notley brings to this card a set of practices that weave throughout the visual art (principally collages) she was making during this era. As Nick Strum describes, "nearly all [of Notley's] collages are added to with watercolors, gold and silver paint, and pastels."[69] We see these features here as well, and the card's intermedia environment, multiple authors, and intertextual references layer themselves like a collage, but without the origins-erasing effect of collage as a juxtapositional strategy. This is a result of the intermedia affordances of postal poetry, which permits the poetry to reveal its construction by multiple contributors (humans and media). Ultimately, the postcard moves away from the locale of its conception and out into extracodexical channels of distribution, carrying with it the marks of its many makers (including, even, stamps and marks made by postal workers).

Here again, the meeting of multiple media in late twentieth-century poetry is not entirely unique to the Alternative Press. As with the first generation of New York School poets or the Black Mountain school, the Second Generation New York poets had close ties with visual artists. On the cards and off, for example, Ted Berrigan, collaborated multiple times with artist George Schneeman (who also contributed separately to the Alternative Press), and Berrigan's "*C*" magazine published writers and artists of various persuasions. The novelty of the Alternative Press is not that it also partook of such collaborations, but that intermedia publishing—which included poetry and art, but also the printing process, the various material supports on which the Press published, the post office, and more—comprised the core of what the Press produced. This had an effect on the poetry that followed poets' engagement with the Alternative Press.

In an undated letter, for example, Notley writes that "it seems possible (somehow) we won't get [the "Multiple Originals"] done quite as quickly as we bragged. Meanwhile writing great short poems on them."[70] This note recognizes, perhaps subtly, the influence of the Press on the poets in practice, and the ways the constraints of the postcard form both slow and generate a particular (short) style of poetic iteration. Notley picks this point up again when writing about Berrigan's *A Certain Slant of Sunlight*. As she shares about the book's relationship to the "Multiple Originals,"

> the cards as a constant size and shape became for Berrigan a form, and the poems written in this form became a sequence. The form provided for a poem that could be only as long as the card's size permitted: if the handwriting was kept very small you could wind up with a poem as long as "What a Dump, or, Easter" (thirty-one lines, including stanza breaks); however, most of the poems are shorter than that, in the eight- to twenty- line range, say. A few are very much shorter, are only a line or two

lines in length, and sometimes suggestive of a postcard "message" (e.g., "salutation / 'Listen, you cheap little liar'").[71]

For Berrigan, and I can speculate, many of the poets submitting to the Alternative Press, this kind of material constraint as generative impetus, made a mark on the poems produced. Though Notley doesn't directly address the intermedia affordances that accompanied the constraints of the Alternative Press's approach to publishing, these come through, for example when she comments on the tendency toward epistolary poetry, or the ways in which the cards impress on the poets' handwriting.

Berrigan took inspiration from this interaction, and not just in that many of his postcard poems were later printed in text form in *A Certain Slant of Sunlight*. In the early 1980s, for example, he printed up cheap versions of his own "Alternative Press" postcards, stamping them with the Alternative Press's pressmark and attributing their origins to Grindstone City. While Olin writes that Berrigan was "renowned for his poetic plunderings,"[72] here we see such plunderings extending beyond lines of borrowed verse to include the entire material apparatus used by the Alternative Press. This speaks to the Press's lasting influence, and also to the ways in which the postcards are indivisible intermedia objects whose apparent paratext is just as important as what it frames.

For the Alternative Press, intermediality is central to their vast catalogue of poetry publications, not an appendix to the books of poetry (or even magazines, even DIY magazines) being published concurrently. Here, we've seen the ways the Alternative Press coaxes this intermedia aesthetic out of a range of late twentieth century US poets. These poets include more, even, than those discussed in these pages, something that hints at the influence that the Alternative Press had over poetry, even where poets' usual aesthetic or geographic affiliations diverged quite drastically from one another, and from the Alternative Press's intermedia poetics. It is true that many or most of these poets likely returned to their preferred

poetic tendencies when publishing in other venues. But if we look at these poets not as individuals—or as groups schooled by style or locale—we can see that that intermedia poetry wasn't written only in marginal instances of experimentation by otherwise lyrically-oriented poets. The Alternative Press offers a view in which a little-known Detroit hub for poetry and art was responsible for generating a robust catalogue of intermedia experimentation that spanned at least 30 years and intersected with poets, artists, and readers all across the United States.

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Notes

1. A full list of participating poets and artists is available from University of Michigan Special Collections at https://quod.lib.umich.edu/s/sclead/umich-scl-altpress?byte=1685143;focusrgn=C01;subview=standard;view=reslist

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2. See Danielle Aubert, *The Detroit Printing Co-op: The Politics of the Joy of Printing* (Los Angeles: Inventory Press, 2020).

3. Randall's press became one of the most important publishers of contemporary Black US poetry at the time, publishing (among other significant works) Gwendolyn Brook's "Riot" in 1969 "after she decided to leave Harper & Row and seek publication with a black publisher." Jasper Bernes, Joshua Clover, And Juliana Spahr, "Gwendolyn Brooks's 'Riot' and the Opt out," *Jacket2*, https://jacket2.org/commentary/gwendolyn-brookss-riot-and-opt-out (March 15, 2014, accessed March 2, 2021). For more information on Broadside Press see Melba Joyce Boyd, *Wrestling with the Muse: Dudley Randall and the Broadside Press* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) and Julius E. Thompson, *Dudley Randall, Broadside Press, and the Black Arts Movement in Detroit, 1960-1995*. (Jefferson: McFarland, 1999).

4. It was not just Detroit; in fact, in much of the Midwest (and beyond) similar counter cultural publishing initiatives were thriving at the time. For example, in nearby Ohio, there was Doones Press, established by Ray DiPalma (also an Alternative Press contributor). D.A. Levy hand printed under the imprints of Renegade Press and Seven Flowers Press. Luna Bisonte Prods printed "small books, chapbooks, cards, labels, and other products, using rubber stamps, collage, photocopiers, and found materials" in Columbus and likewise experimented with a diverse range of media. John M. Bennett, "Luna Bisonte Prods," *From a Secret Location: Poetry, little mags, small presses, and transient documents from the mimeo era and beyond*, https://fromasecretlocation.com/luna-bisonte-prods/ (2017, accessed March 3, 2021). Of course, beyond the Great Lakes region, there are numerous other examples, and the Mikolowskis were connected with the wider small press publishing scene in the US at the time, including as members of COSMEP, the Committee of Small Magazine Editors and Publishers. Ken Mikolowski, "Personal Interview," July 30, 2018. For more information on

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small press publishing during the era, see Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips, *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing 1960–1980*. (New York: New York Public Library and Granary Books, 1998) or the companion website https://fromasecretlocation.com.

4. Ken Mikolowski, "The Alternative Press," *From a Secret Location: Poetry, little mags, small presses, and transient documents from the mimeo era and beyond*, https://fromasecretlocation.com/the-alternative-press/ (2017, accessed July 16, 2020).

6. Ken Mikolowski, "Personal Interview."

7. As Higgins' poster "Some Poetry Intermedia" explains, the term "intermedia" "was first used by Samuel Taylor Coleridge about 1812 and re-applied in 1965 by Dick Higgins to describe artworks being produced which lie conceptually between two or more established media or traditional art disciplines." Dick Higgins, "Some Poetry Intermedia," New York: Unpublished Editions, 1976.

8. As Chad Kloepfer explains:

> The *Great Bear Pamphlet* series was published by Dick Higgins, Something Else Press, from 1965–67. Numbering 20 in total the thin-little pamphlets represent some of the seminal themes of the avant-garde and cultural scene of the times. Each pamphlet, except the Manifestos issue[…], features a single author, with some notables being John Cage, Allan Kaprow, Dieter Roth, Claes Oldenburg, George Brecht, Jerome Rothenberg, and Jackson Mac Low. The pamphlets represent a sampling of artforms from concrete poems, and plays to happenings/events, and collages.

Chad Kloepfer, "The Great Bear Pamphlets," Walker Reader, https://walkerart.org/magazine/the-great-bear-pamphlets (2008, accessed April 21, 2020).

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9. Ken Friedman, “Thinking About Dick Higgins,” in *Intermedia, Fluxus and the Something Else Press: Selected Writings by Dick Higgins* (Catskill, NY: Siglio, 2018), 12-21, at 15.

10. Dick Higgins, “Letter to Ken Mikolowski.” (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Library Special Collections, June 10, 1970).

11. Dick Higgins, “Intermedia,” *Something Else Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (1996), unpaginated.

12. Higgins, “Intermedia.”

13. Higgins, “Some Poetry Intermedia.”

14. Higgins, “Some Poetry Intermedia.”

15. Ken Mikolowski, “Personal Interview.”

16. Mikolowski, “Personal Interview.”

17. Ken Mikolowski describes the Alternative Press as “a bibliographer’s nightmare.” Their publications were infrequently dated, limited edition prints (many times single originals for which no copy or record exists). I have tried to include in my essay as much bibliographic information as possible, given the availability of such details in the University of Michigan’s archive and from my discussions with Ken Mikolowski. Ken Mikolowski, “The Alternative Press.”

18. Ken Mikolowski’s draft translation reads:

> The lake of always
> Looks at a toad
> Water about (around) wherever (water is everywhere)
>
> The old lake
> Toad of the moment
> The thing gets wet

Lake

Toad

Fuá (I think it is an onomatopoeia like "splat")

Water

"Unpublished Translation of 'Versions of Basho in Spanish' by Victor Hernández Cruz" (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Library Special Collections, n.d).

19. Roman Jakobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," in *Selected Writings II: Word and Language* (Paris: Mouton, 1971), 260-266, at 261.

20. Claus Clüver, "On Intersemiotic Transposition," *Poetics Today* 10, no. 1 (1989): 55-90, at 56.

21. Clüver, "On Intersemiotic Transposition," 56.

22. Clüver, "On Intersemiotic Transposition," 56.

23. Clive Scott, "Intermediality and Synesthesia: Literary Translation as Centrifugal Practice," *Art in Translation* 2, no. 2 (2010): 153-169, at 154.

24. Daniel Tiffany, *My Silver Planet: A Secret History of Poetry and Kitsch* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 182.

25. Sianne Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form* (Cambridge, MA, 2020), 196.

26. Ngai, 196.

27. Diane di Prima, "Letter to Ken Mikolowski," University of Michigan Library Special Collections, March 2, 1994.

28. Mikolowski, "Personal Interview."

29. Mikolowski, "Personal Interview."

30. Tiffany, *My Silver Planet: A Secret History of Poetry and Kitsch*, 186.

31. Diane di Prima, "Letter to Ken Mikolowski," University of Michigan Library Special Collections, March 24, 1994.

32. James W. Endersby and Michael J. Towle, "Tailgate Partisanship: Political and Social Expression through Bumper Stickers," *The Social Science Journal* 33, no. 3 (January 1996): 307-319, at 317. For readers looking for a more contemporary example of bumper sticker poetry, Cuneiform Press has published a collection that includes contributions from many once-Alternative Press contributors.

33. Estíbaliz Encarnación-Pinedo, "Intertextuality in Diane Di Prima's Loba: Religious Discourse and Feminism," *Humanities* 7, no. 123 (2018): 1-17, at 4.

34. di Prima, "Letter to Ken Mikolowski," March 2, 1994.

35. Encarnación-Pinedo, "Intertextuality in Diane Di Prima's Loba: Religious Discourse and Feminism," 4.

36. Marjorie Perloff, *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

37. Colin Escott, George Merritt, and William MacEwen, *Hank Williams: The Biography*, (New York: Hachette, 2004), 307.

38. Will Montgomery, "Robert Creeley's Refusals," *Caliban: French Journal of English Studies* 35 (2014), https://journals.openedition.org/caliban/303.

39. Johanna Drucker, "Experimental, Visual, and Concrete Poetry: A Note on Historical Context and Basic Concepts," in *Experimental — Visual — Concrete: Avant-Garde Poetry Since the 1960s*, edited by Eric Vos, K. David Jackson, and Johanna Drucker (Atlanta and Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 39-61, at 40.

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40. Campos, Haroldo de, Augusto de Campos, and Décio Pignatari, "Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry," in *Novas: Selected Writings*, edited by Antonio Sergio Bessa and Odile Cisneros, translated by Jon Tolman (Evanston Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 217-219, at 218.

41. Charles Olson, *Collected Prose* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 240.

42. Mary Ellen Solt, *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1968), 49.

43. Solt, 49.

44. Robert Creeley, "Letter to Ken and Ann Mikolowski," University of Michigan Library Special Collections, December 30, 1981.

45. Robert Creeley, "Postcard to Mikolowskis," University of Michigan Library Special Collections, December 24, 1984.

46. Montgomery, "Robert Creeley's Refusals."

47. Mikolowski, "Personal Interview."

48. Castelao-Gómez, "The Art of Life, the Dance of Poetry: Gender, Experiment and Experience in Mina Loy and Diane Di Prima," *Miscelanea* 56, no. 2017 (2017): 33-56, at 45.

49. Castelao-Gómez, 45.

50. Timothy D. Murray, "Metered Mail: A Survey of Contemporary Poetry Postcard Publishing," *Popular Culture in Libraries* 1, no. 1 (1993): 159-172, at 162.

51. Mikolowski, "Personal Interview."

52. Murray, "Metered Mail: A Survey of Contemporary Poetry Postcard Publishing," 159.

53. Murray notes, though, that there were "several out-of-series poemcards produced earlier between 1970 and 1972." Murray, "Metered Mail: A Survey of Contemporary Poetry

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Postcard Publishing," 163. According to Ken, the Burning Deck postcards came about "because they liked what [The Alternative Press was] doing" Mikolowski, "Personal Interview."

54. Rebecca Kosick, "The Postcard Poetics of Nicanor Parra's Artefactos," in *Latin American Textualities*, edited by Heather J. Allen and Andrew R. Reynolds (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018), 128-150.

55. Seeta Peña Gangadharan, "Mail Art: Networking without Technology," *New Media & Society* 11, no. 1–2 (February 1, 2009): 279-298, at 280.

56. Mikolowski, "Personal Interview."

57. Craig Saper, *Networked Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 127.

58. Saper, 127.

59. Mikolowski, "Personal Interview."

60. Ted Berrigan, *On the Level Everyday: Selected Talks on Poetry and the Art of Living*, (Northfield, MA: Talisman House, 1997), 114.

61. Berrigan, *On the Level Everyday: Selected Talks on Poetry and the Art of Living*, 114.

62. Daniel Kane, "'Angel Hair' Magazine, the Second-Generation New York School, and the Poetics of Sociability," *Contemporary Literature* 45, no. 2 (2004): 331-367, at 333.

63. Ben Olin, "Reframing the New York School: Public Access Poetry and the Screening of Poetic Coterie," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 59, no. 1 (2018): 47-85, at 48.

64. Kane, "'Angel Hair' Magazine, the Second-Generation New York School, and the Poetics of Sociability," 333.

65. Ross Hair, *Avant-Folk: Small Press Poetry Networks from 1950 to the Present* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 4.

66. The poem later appears in *The Collected Poems of Ted Berrigan*.

67. Alice Notley, “Email to Rebecca Kosick,” November 23, 2020.

68. Notley indicates that “Poets who contributed phrases or lines to these poems included Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky, Steve Carey, Greg Masters, Joanne Kyger, Steve Levine, Tom Pickard, Jeff Wright, Elineen Myles, Anne Waldman, Harris Schiff, Bernadette Mayer, James Schuyler, Tom Carey, Ada Katz, and [Notley herself.] Artists who provided images for the original five hundred postcards included George Schneeman, Dick Jerome, Rosemary Mayer, Shelley Kraut, Steve Levine, and [Notley]. There were undoubtedly others.” Many of these poets and artists also contributed ‘separately’ to the Alternative Press over the years. Alice Notley, “Notes,” in *The Collected Poems of Ted Berrigan*, ed. Alice Notley, Anselm Berrigan, and Edmund Berrigan (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 665-720, at 706-707.

69. Nick Strum, “’I Make these Collages and Write’: Alice Notley’s visual art,” *Jacket 2*, http://jacket2.org/article/i-make-these-collages-and-write (December 22, 2020, accessed February 18, 2021).

70. Alice Notley, “Letter to Ken Mikolowski,” University of Michigan Library Special Collections, n.d.

71. Alice Notley, *Coming After: Essays on Poetry* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 67.

72. Olin, “Reframing the New York School: Public Access Poetry and the Screening of Poetic Coterie,” 47.