

East Village Beat: Burnt Words

Remembering Micki Siegel

BY PAULETTE POWELL

Micki Siegel was born Micki Mary Magdalene Josette McGinley in St. Louis, on Dec. 29, 1945. Irish Catholic, she was a small woman with pink skin and fiery hair. She bore a delicate appearance

aware that my own path was the right path.

Micki was my spiritual midwife; she helped me deliver my poetry and overcome my fear of motherhood. I brought my daughter Cortney to live with me in New York City in 1992, and later I became mum to my former partner's children, Charlotte and Luke. Micki had a gift and that was the ability to cut through the shit to see things clearly. She knew what was truly important in life. I remember her saying, "So, Paulette, Cortney won't have the huge bedroom, or expensive toys, but she will have you!"

During the early '90s, Micki and I curated the reading series *Songs from the Web* at Sin-é, the Irish coffeehouse then on St. Mark's Place. Held monthly, it showcased an eclectic group of people, including poets, performance artists, journalists, and comic book writers. We borrowed the name from The Lyric award-winning Alabama poet, Carla Delane Wood, who kicked off the reading series. The title was appropriate because telling stories through creative expression was like a spider web connecting synergies. Our goal was to bring people together who walked different paths; spoken word was the common thread.

Micki elevated the reading by mixing the local poets with the established academics. The series lasted for two years, and it included Hal Sirowitz, Copernicus, Finnegan of Dark Star Crew, Carl Watson, Helen Davis, John Strausbaugh, Harold Goldberg, and Nobel Prize-winner Seamus Heaney. The series was always a pick in *New York Press* and mentioned numerous times in *The Village Voice*; and one of our readings, featuring wild women, was reviewed in *The New York Times*.

Hal Sirowitz, the former poet laureate of Queens and a National Endowment for the Arts fellow in poetry, was a mentor and friend in our mission. Micki and Hal became muses to one another and briefly dated. He based his unpublished play "I Know What I Want" on Micki, the spitfire poet, and had the work publicly read.

"When she came to a performance of the play, she brought an ex-boyfriend with her," Hal says. "He accused Micki of telling me intimate details of their relationship, he thought the play was based on them, but it was about us."

"Micki was an important person in the early '90s East Village poetry scene, an ambassador for poets that didn't get the recognition she deserved for the support she gave to all of us," says Sirowitz. "She should be remembered for that."

Micki connected to poets but she also had a natural affinity to kids. "Children are natural poets," she said. Instantly communicating with young people, Micki had a mystical relationship with them, not just charming them into inspiration, she genuinely loved their work and was excited about it. She felt their voices were the most important. Micki encouraged my daughter and other children to write and perform.

She had already raised an artist, and it reflected in her own son David's evolution as a poet in Dark Star Crew, and his klezmer band The Murreys. "Micki was a great mother to

David," says Sirowitz. "She let him live his life and didn't live it for him, allowing him to become who he was supposed to become."

"Micki said it was her honor to raise David," says writer Rosette Capoturo.

But Micki didn't only take to children artistically.

"I remember visiting Micki at her house," says Rosette's 16-year-old daughter Sophia. "She was baking bread and making pillows. I still have the pillows."

"Micki got me to drink milk," remembers my daughter Cortney. "I hated milk. She gave me a twirled straw, and in order to see what would happen I had to drink my milk. She could even make homework fun."

After our series ended, Micki's light burned even brighter, and she continued to bring people together. She curated her own series, the well received, *Burnt Words*, in 1993, first at Sin-é and then at its sister establishment, Anseo. This is where she met poet and Friday night Poetry Project curator Regie Cabico.

"That series was a great time in East Village poetry history," says Cabico. "Micki celebrated the hybridism of the American cultural experience, from Ebonics to Hawaiian pigeon. [She was] a great advocate for the voice that was real and unpretentious!"

Performance artist Irena Jarozewsky simply expressed, "Micki was a world Mother recognizing people of substance, tapping into their talent and helping them to realize their greatness."

Writer, Barry Graham, who now resides in Chattanooga, Tenn., remembers arriving in New York. "Back in 1993, newly married, my then-wife and I visited NYC from Scotland, and Micki really was my gateway to the city. She took me to readings, asked people to let me perform, had me read at her own series, and introduced me to so many people," says Graham. "She seemed to know everybody. She was funny and kind, and though we only spent a little time together, the way my life turned out would have been very different if I hadn't met her."

Later, along with many other East Villagers, Micki made the exodus to Williamsburg. There she met poet Joanne Pagano Weber, who curated *Heroes* at The L Café on Bedford Avenue.



Regie Cabico and Micki Siegel, early '90s.

Courtesy the Siegels

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complementing a beautiful fragile voice that immediately engaged you and pulled you into her circle, instantly making you her own. Micki was everyone's best friend; she never met a stranger (or you weren't a stranger for long). As soon as you bonded with her she was immediately whipping you up a wonderful dinner in her homey apartment on East 6th Street above one of the block's many Indian restaurants, or she was enthusiastically reading your poetry and offering advice, needed or not. Micki always said what she believed, and she never stopped believing in people.

Even when she struggled, as is the lot of



Jon, Micki, and David Siegel, early '70s. Courtesy the Siegels

many poets and artists in New York City, she maintained a richness of being.

I met Micki in 1990. The girl from the Midwest and this girl from Alabama felt an immediate connection. Micki was a wise woman, a feminist who didn't take shit from anyone but still was soft and sweet. Early in her life she made a choice to go her own way, becoming a Buddhist and an Earth Mother.

I was a 25-year-old who had a young daughter and still resided in Dixieland. The power of the hell and brimstone sermons still haunted me—"sinner repent!" I felt insecure about my poetry and, most of all, my motherhood. Micki sort of knocked me upside my head and validated that we both refused to turn into our own mothers, and she made me

Joanne was instantly drawn to Micki, who became a mentor to her. She recalled their first reading.

"I asked Micki to participate in *Heroes* along with Joe Maynard, Bob Hart, Tsarah Litzky, and me. She was so humble, and said it meant so much to her to be involved. I stopped her and said, 'No, it means more to me.' She didn't grasp who she was or her own capability and accomplishments; she was a hero to me and so many others," says Weber. "I later changed the name of the series from *Heroes* to the L word, in honor of Micki. The L word was a poem Micki had written (see p. 5). All the words in the poem began with L, and the last word was love."

Micki passed away this past Jan. 22, at 4:00 a.m. as the silent snow fell. For three years she bravely battled ovarian cancer and no one really believed she would lose. Her son David and her extended family of poets and writers are angry that our American medical industry gives women so little control and understanding in treating the female temple.

Please see POWELL page 5

Drew Gardner
 Morningside Heights, Manhattan
Alligators and Mermaids

listen up:
 respect golfers—
 the self is a golfer

a set of "flat to
 negative"
 personnel problems

those are
 windbreakers—
 folded windbreakers

your car starts
 because your car
 can be
 adorned

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PRINTED MATTER**Green Roots Pulsing in Concrete****Gorgeous Mourning**

Alice Jones

Apogee Press

With a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts and several books, including *The Knot* (which won the Beatrice Hawley award in 1992), behind her, Alice Jones, in her latest offering *Gorgeous Mourning*, takes her readers on a poetic retreat through a composite of 72 prose blocks. Each block is subtitled, producing a collection of snapshots that cycle around subjects such as mysticism, religion, nature, philosophy, language, psychology, mythology, and death. *Gorgeous Mourning* covers a topography that mainly centers around the Bay Area, but nothing escapes Jones' wandering mind, which leads us to other exotic locations such as Kashmir and the Galápagos Islands.

Jones, a poet with green roots pulsing in a concrete society, seems to be absorbed by her locale—it feeds and informs her work. With "wisps of fog coming in over the hazy headlands" the reader is placed on a pine branch right next to Jones, somewhere on a foothill in the East Bay. Like watchful owls eyeing their immediate environs, we, with Jones' guidance, wonder, embrace, question, despise, stomp, and resurrect this joyful, mournful, and intricate encasing called life.

Tilden Park, Big Sur, Mount Tamalpais, Berkeley High, the BART, and Royal Coffee are some of the signposts that appear in the snapshots on Jones' stage. Where we find her we also find all that surrounds her, physically and mentally. *Gorgeous Mourning's* environment is whipped, blended, seasoned, mixed, and logged by the "recording angel." Panic buttons, waltzes, newspaper headlines, Kali, dancing Vishnu, French horns, the Tao, red ants, camels, deserts, the Dalai Lama, tumor cells, Osiris, Zeus, and catacombs are just a few of the things the

reader might encounter in these pages.

Jones' love for the music of language and "what the lips do" is boldly evident in this collection. Her sound play enjoys rhymes, off (half) rhymes, assonance, homonyms, and homophones. In "Rifle" we find a vocabulary that contains ruffled, stifling, rift, rirraff, misfired, and rifled. "Journey" employs incense, tents, cents, sense, discontents, incensed, scent, sensing, and intense. Jones' risk of compromising meaning for sound is forgiven by her obvious passion for, and commitment to, her subjects. The mind

Like watchful owls eyeing their immediate environs, we, with Jones' guidance, wonder, embrace, question, despise, stomp, and resurrect this joyful, mournful, and intricate encasing called life.

and meaning are recurring subjects the poet explores, "how the tongue has a mind of its own: the psychic mechanism gets around itself so meaning has a sidekick." In "Wonder" Jones likens the mind to a horse, "the mind, off on a gallop, now stops by the pool to graze, chew its cud, to admire round-eyed, the wide ether blue. Happy fool." Jones continues her quest in "Disintegrate."

Compose yourself. With the mind in compartments? Or with

everything loose, on the hoof. Comportment they used to call

it, a girl's good behavior. No time off. When is a mind

complete? What about a mind ajar, incapable of

communication, maybe aphasic, maybe vegetative, awake but

responding to none of the world's come-ons, thought without a compass?

Meaning is also seldom exact, instead it is a "dumb shade and shades of meaning, fleeting, one touch, a buzz." Time, on the other hand, is a constant reminder, as we learn in "Leap":

How we're always lunging, trying to catch up with real time.

They've added leap years and now, leap seconds. Are we here yet?

Life cycles flourish in *Gorgeous Mourning*. In "Pass" the poet contemplates the passing of writers and compares it with the ripening of trees. "Outside, the piñon stands there with its nuts and needles. Many writers passed away this way, prickly and fruitful, falling down when their balance left them, lying floor-bound gazing upward, talking on."

Gorgeous Mourning concludes with "Home," an arrival song in which the reader is left with the sweeping image of geese flying North:

That night we parked beside the bay...and out of nowhere

interrupting, something by the window. Gone. Another.

More. One by one the geese — out of darkness, so fast, as

if falling down to skim the black water — going North.

Enchanted, Jones remarks, "so close they almost hit us, hurtling home." The exact moment during which we clash with nature appears to be Jones' foremost investigation in her *Gorgeous Mourning*. She delivers 72 moments spliced by nature and time, and renders them into lyrical experiences we'd like to sing along with. *Gorgeous Mourning* is a karmic dawn waiting to bid its lifelong mourner a "Good (Grand) Morning!"

—NICHOLAS LEASKOU

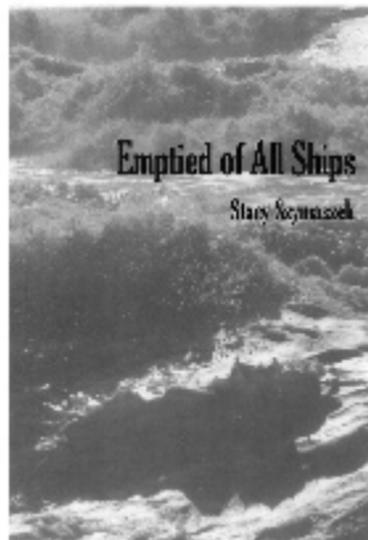
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Trade Language and Sonic Barriers Say Hello to The Mattoid

The Mattoid
Hello

Cleft Music

BY MORGAN RODDICK

A mattoid is defined as a borderline psychotic. I didn't know the word before hearing The Mattoid's *Hello*, but now it makes all the sense in the world.

This is one of those records that seems to wear its influences on its sleeve. It opens with a song called "Funeral Party," which is incidentally nothing like The Cure's song called "Funeral Party." Titles aside, the Cure's Robert Smith seems to have had a strong influence on The Mattoid's style throughout the record. A healthy dose of Nick Cave jumps right out at you through the vocals, but one can't assume to know how much of that sound he was born with and how much he acquired singing along in his bedroom during high school.

Born Ville Kiviniemi in Helsinki, The Mattoid was formed as a duo in England in the early nineties, and has been performing as a solo act in New York and a band in Nashville. The Mattoid gets around. No one in these English-speaking countries ever really knows what he's talking about (a thick accent and a strange vocal delivery make it all the more difficult), but audiences do get a charge out of philosophical lines like, "Drink your drinks and eat your eats; it's party time." The chorus of "Doik doik

doik... yeah" in "Party Time" usually gets a laugh or two.

There looks to be humor in his banal lyrics, but the vocal style seems mostly dire. The darkness doesn't exactly loom over the record, but it is there nonetheless. It could be attributed to The Mattoid's similarities to Cave or The Cure, or even some horribly misunderstood Tom Waits—only his dentist will know for sure. The instrumentation is certainly reminiscent of Cave's *Bad Seeds*. There is from time to time a repetitive inanity that feels like The Magnetic Fields, but it is less effective in this darker atmosphere.

The best songs on the record are vaguely reminiscent of Nick Drake or Billy Corgan, mellow but with a pulse that has some pep. The release never successfully finds

The Mattoid defines his sound as sango music, a style no one else has ever heard of. There is the African language Sango, which is a trade language that five million people speak. If that's what The Mattoid, far from a native English speaker, is referring to, maybe he means to create a new universal form of communication, an art that can link disparate styles and peoples together.

its own style despite this variety of influences. The relaxed but crisp "Juri Gagarin,"

perhaps about the cosmonaut who was the first man in space, is the best of these, and the best on the record.

The Mattoid defines his sound as sango music, a style no one else has ever heard of. There is the African language Sango, which is a trade language that five million people speak.



Courtesy Cleft Music

If that's what The Mattoid, far from a native English speaker, is referring to, maybe he means to create a new universal form of communication, an art that can link disparate styles and peoples together. Considering how many influences he wears and rehashes, this makes a certain amount of sense. The Mattoid does not succeed, but he does make an admirable attempt.

Hello might not be your cup of tea. It's pretty derivative and pretty strange. The Mattoid seems to best find his groove when the album is tighter and more musically upbeat.

For further information visit cleftmusic.net

Talk Engine is The Rap of Rock

When I received the new release by Talk Engine, it was loosely described as "spoken word," which is something I rarely enjoy. One reason is that dramatics tend to override sonorous textures, which leaves the front person dissociated with the band instead of blending with it. I tend to think that "spoken word" lacks musicality. "Spoken word" cannot rock.

My preconceptions came to nothing when listening to Talk Engine. They blend the vocals and music in a variety of wonderful ways. This band definitely *does* rock. Naturally it calls to mind King Missile, William S. Burroughs, and others of their spoken word clan, but only by comparison, not as a reference. This is something wholly new, yet fairly familiar.

Talk Engine's latest record is a good old-fashioned New York City rock album, the likes of which last flourished in the early '80s; personalized and unadulterated, dirty and straightforward, with no two songs sounding alike, and consequently conforming to no niches.

It has life in its sound. It pulses. Bob Holman, who often features the band at his Bowery Poetry Club, recently said, "If you ain't dancing by the end of a set, it's 'cause you're flying."

The words drive the release. Jackie Sheeler, award-winning poet, founder of the Pink Pony West poetry reading series, and curator of the Poetz.com website, is the head of Talk Engine, but her three-piece accompaniment—

gloriously performed by bassist Bryan Schmidt, drummer Glenn Minasian, and guitarist Landru von Dige—creates devastating funk-rock jams. Sheeler is getting a really good sound out of her band, and indeed, out of this record.

Sometimes Sheeler dominates more than she should. The closest thing to a chink in the armor of this original album is when the music is abandoned for a soundscape backed reading, which is more of a "piece" than a song. It isn't even really a chink; the band sounded so good that I wished the record focused more on them. Call me selfish, but I wanted more of the groove.

I don't want to talk too much about the specifics of the release; it's like telling you the ending of *Revenge of the Sith*. Every song was such a fresh delight that to rob others of that with foreshadowing would be wrong. Trust me, this is good stuff.

For more information visit talkengine.net or shoutedword.com —MR

Talk Engine's latest record is a good old-fashioned New York City rock album, the likes of which last flourished in the early '80s; personalized and unadulterated, dirty and straightforward, with no two songs sounding alike, and consequently conforming to no niches.

talk engine

Where You Should Be

Cross-Pollination

Tuesday nights
Pianos Upstairs Lounge
158 Ludlow St., NYC

Every Tuesday, Liberated Matter invites two acts to play Cross-Pollination. The artists each do their individual show and close the evening with a three-song shared set. That's Cross-Pol in a nutshell: quality and community. It's been going on for a little over a year, in multiple clubs and in several states.

Wes Verhoeve and Jay Goettelmann, the brain trust behind Liberated Matter, started Cross-Pollination at the extremely artsy Apocalypse Lounge, with its jigsaw tables and rotating art, creepy video and seven-person maximum capacity. Unsurprisingly, the event has outgrown the space. In the last month, Cross-Pol, recently associated with ASCAP, has moved to Pianos' upstairs room. It's a bigger space, more prestigious, and right in the heart of today's East Village.

The event has become an institution, with performers like Charles Zerner, Ivan Sandomire, Jaymay, Jeff Jacobson, and Amy Hills regularly performing, then pairing up to create new material. While the individual performances are good

on their own, it's the collaboration that's most exciting. Sometimes the artists work together on obscure covers and sometimes they generate performance art karaoke. In the best cases new material is written for the occasion, and the artists' (and the audience's) view of their art is transformed.

Almost immediately, Cross-Pollination attained its goal of "stimulating the community feel among musicians by pairing up artists to share a set and a meal."

Before the show the hosts feed the artists and then it's upstairs for the night's entertainment. There's no cover charge, though a tip jar is passed around for each of the acts.

Cross-Pollination also has monthly shows at the World Café in Philadelphia, featuring select acts from Cross-Pol's New York run. But before going out-of-state to get your taste, try the local variety. Their ad campaign calls Cross-Pollination "the best Tuesday night of the week," and it's hard to disagree. It's an exciting activity where you can see some of New York's most artistic souls getting even more creative through collaboration.

For info and future events visit www.liberatedmatter.com/crosspollination/.

—JON BERGER

Pali Kashi Williamsburg, Brooklyn



Finding Carr's Pond
16" x 24", acrylic on wood, 2005



Escape Wisconsin: Dead Show Parking Lot
41" x 36", acrylic on wood, 2005



Outlaw's Aftervision
60" x 30", acrylic on wood, 2005



Where Kevin Grew Up
25.5" x 25.5", acrylic on wood, 2005



Forest Family Room
25" x 18", acrylic on wood, 2005

About the Artist

Brooklyn-based **Pali Kashi** recently had her first New York solo exhibition at Williamsburg's Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery (438 Union Ave.). "Kashi's art combines painting and drawing to create multi-tiered environments that are simultaneously inviting and mysterious," writes the gallery. "These pieces evoke expeditions through a mythological landscape of secret clearings and secluded villages." For further information visit klausgallery.com

POWELL from page 1

"There is no comprehensive treatment for this disease," says David. "My mom really had to fight for answers and, in the process, learned how little doctors know and how they purposely distance themselves from their patients. Most doctors claim ovarian cancer can't be detected early. We learned that is untrue; it can be diagnosed through an inexpensive sonogram. Mom wanted to write a book about her experience with the medical establishment and her struggle to advocate her own medical treatment."

"Micki was a fighter, a survivor," says Rosette Capotero. "She went into remission many times, and that is unheard of with her type of cancer. She really beat the shit out of that cancer. But even when she was fighting her fight she was still using her knowledge to reach out to others with cancer, and share with them what she had learned."

A poetry reading was held last month at the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church. Old and new friends gathered to celebrate and read Micki's words. Her light flooded the old church. Even death can't stop the master curator; Micki Siegel is still bringing people together.

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Micki Siegel The L Poem

linguini
lasagna
lo mein

lotus
luna
lagoon

Lena
Lou Reed
Leonard Cohen

loco
limbo
lost

longing
languid
liquid center

loose
losaida
low down

long legs
lips
lick

love

Bruce Weber

poem for micki siegel dieing at age 59 on a snowy day

-
the snow is falling
across the sky
of my window
drifting across the prairie of the street
like a ghost of micki's life
she ain't here to see the snow
she died this morning at 4 a.m.
and i'm wishing she could be here to see the snow
worship the snow in one of her poems
take the snow home on her back like a little child
play in the snow
her red hair all tangled up in white's confusion
white's bulky wetness
white's ever ready punch of a snowball
zooming across the sky like a javelin
no micki ain't here no more
unless she's that streak of snow
passing by my window
leaving a hint she's here
in the shadows
in the dust
in the reflections
in the moonbeams
micki
just
a
step
away
in our minds
in our poems
in our imagination
the snow
there's micki
the moon
there's micki
the bright and luminous sky
that's micki

in honor of friendship

Stephanie Young

Oakland, Calif.

This is Mine

I'm like a west coast
—Cynthia Sillers

Everybody has their own way of itching it
and this is mine
begun after midnight, books
of the frantic middle
Kerouac choosing Jekyll & Hyde
"ending the last elegant sentences at dawn"
terrified by trees
and roots
and fog
and water, *incessant*
they are open 24 hours
they are trying to close our tab.
You don't have to ride a bike for very long
before you ride it trashed, the Altamont
could fit twice inside the Grapevine
it's all so
unraveled Colorado
I'm always on it, stand
as a swimmer
above the bed of California stars
there's swimming
pools everywhere
but nobody swims, they are being
the instrument
of other people's desire
how it only takes one driver
to move the three of us along
in the absence of being moved
the rogues keep coming. It's in their nature
to knock things down. The oversized load
threatened to spill onto our sister
she has three spells to impart
they are my hand on your wrist
"honey I've got to get to know you"
it's the *lounger* I can't have,
not the lounging

Steven Vincent

San Francisco

103.A

No, don't tell the groom

I will be angry in my own quiet
There is no statuary - no matter
The fluted dresses, the combed marble -
The music is full of scratches
Nothing trembles
What might be gold, blackened silver.

Joshua Corey

Ithaca, N.Y.

7.6

Roaring the night we lie on lambs a gale:
strange sudden unstopping of a sound we slept to
untoward. That is, water whites the night
in our ears, starting up from sandy beds to hear
our peace of ignorance. The creek, sheared sky—
we've forgotten there's no down, just attraction
through interstellar cold. Wool tumbles
from trembling backs to build a cloud to dream on,
a shop to sweat from. Air between anything
whistles a tune among ears to answer
the snow that coats without preciousness: air
and fire at the right distance, bridging opposed lobes.
Sin is thetic and makes a sign read by the tongue
to catch a requital that wasn't made for meaning.

from *Severance Songs*

About the Poets

Joshua Corey's book *Selah* is out from Barrow St. Press. Krupskya published Drew Gardner's (cover) *Sugar Pill*. Read Steven Vincent's *Sleeping With Sappho* from Faux Press/e at www.fauxpress.com/e/vincent/. Tougher Disguises will be releasing Stephanie Young's book *Telling The Future Off* shortly.

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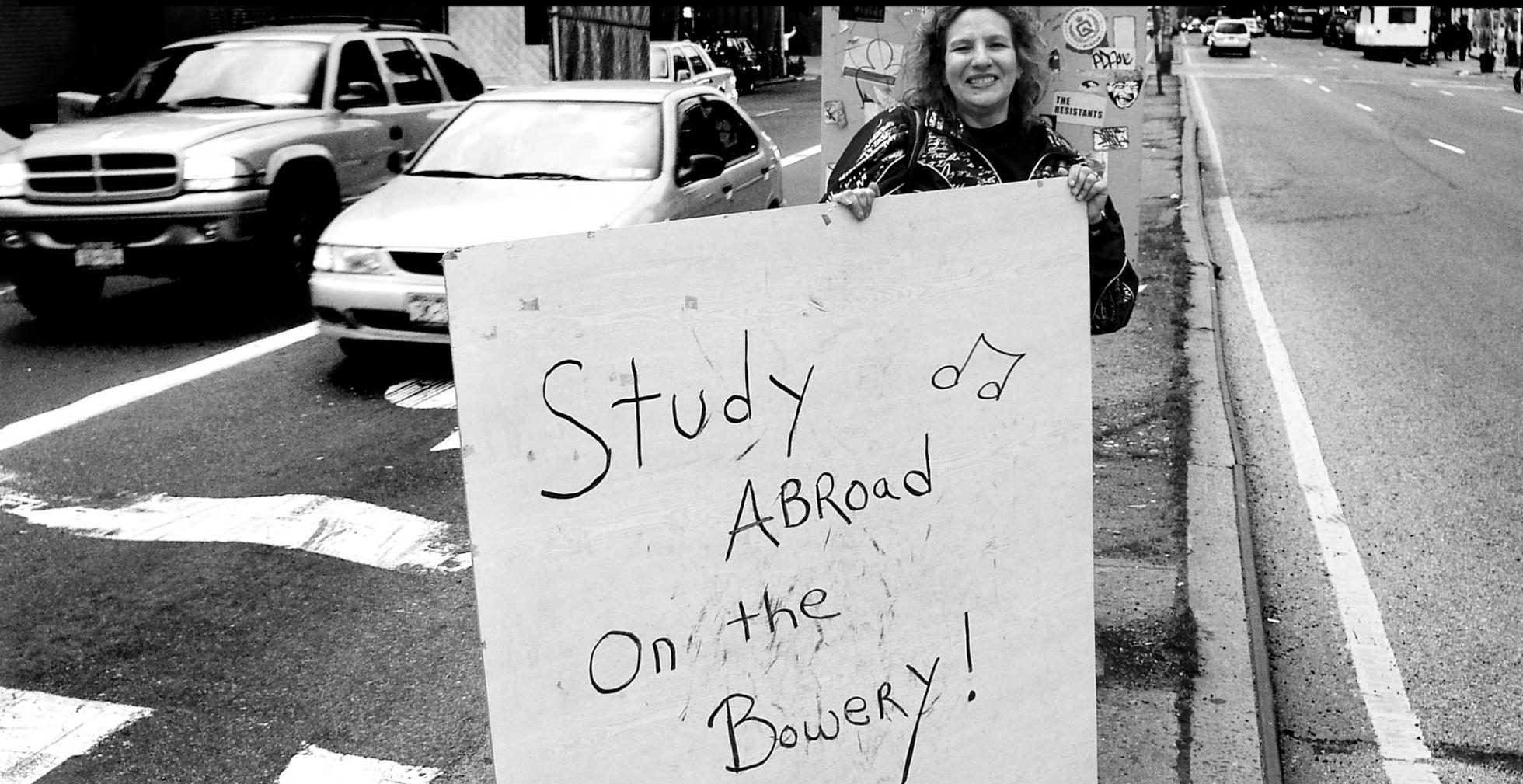
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Summer 2005 Session
August 15 - September 3, 2005

Study Abroad on the Bowery announces an exciting 3-week intensive Applied Poetics program, designed to correspond with New York City's renowned HOWL! Festival—the annual culturecircus built on the extraordinary art and activist traditions of New York's Lower East Side, from Emma Goldman to Charlie Parker to Allen Ginsberg ...
to you!

Program includes:

- 1) The HOWL! Festival Aug 21-28.
- 2) Daily Writers Series with Hettie Jones, Celena Glenn, David Henderson, Steve Cannon, Anne Waldman, Ed Sanders, and Tuli Kupferberg.
- 3) Performance Lab, Tuesdays, 1-4pm with Karen Finley.
- 4) Writing Lab, Wednesdays, 1-3pm with Bob Holman.
- 5) Poetics Lab, Fridays, 1-3pm with David Henderson.
- 6) Internship Program/ Poetry Is News.
- 7) Project Outreach with Rev. Tom Martinez.

OPEN HOUSE SCHEDULE

Bowery Poetry Club 308 Bowery
(Between Bleecker & Houston)

Tuesday, June 14th. 4 - 6pm

Sunday, June 19th. 6 -7pm

For more information:

212 334 6414

www.boweryartsandscience.org