



Collage, d.a.levy, *The Buddhist Third Class Junkmail Oracle*, Vol 1, #9, Jan. 1968

At the Corner of Euclid Ave. and Blvd. St. Germain:

d.a.levy's Parables of Local Necessity and Universal Decentralism

by Karl Young

Mail from d.a.levy was never simply mail. Frugal, busy, impoverished, generous, and concise as he was, the letters were usually brief and typed on a sheet of letterhead size paper which he'd torn in half so the remainder could be used for something else. Even had he not been a stamp collector at one time, he probably would have recycled stamps, gluing used stamps that had escaped cancellation onto the envelope with what seemed to be rubber cement. The envelope, large or small, usually included some sort of publication—often his own, but at times a magazine or book published by someone else. His immediate mission seemed to be proselytizing: he thought he knew what you needed and part of his job was to share his enthusiasms and convictions about poetry and other arts. You could see the extras in the envelopes as postal variants on the publications he hawked on the street, often giving them free to people he thought needed them. He also donated some of what he read to local libraries. Immediately before his death, he sent out packages to his friends and correspondents. Many contained books. Some contained sheaves of images he had clipped out of glossy mainstream magazines to use in collages, perhaps hoping, as he did with the books and magazines, that the recipients would make active use of them in their own work.

In the autumn of 1967 (if my memory reconstruction is accurate), I received a letter from him with copies of *Le lettrisme*, the official magazine of the French Lettrist group, folded up and inserted along with the torn sheet on which he'd typed his message. I don't recall him mentioning why he included the magazines. He might simply have done so because I was studying French literature at school. His reading in French poetry, philosophy, and theater was extensive, though apparently done in English translation. He may have received the magazines in exchange for publications he'd sent to French poets. The Lettrist magazines were, at that time, rather crudely produced, and were more concerned with film, sound poetry, and socio-political commentary than the visual poetry the group would later be more strongly identified with, though levy may have thought that the graphic nature of some pages related to my visual poetry. In retrospect, the most unusual, and the most meaningful, aspect of this mail was that Lettrism was scarcely known in the U.S. at the time. The majority of the Americans who ran under the banner of "concrete" poetry, even before the Emmett Williams anthology had reduced the genre to the brittle minimalism that the overwhelming majority of readers would overwhelmingly reject as underwhelmingly trivial, were not looking toward Lettrism for inspiration. It is possible that levy was seriously interested in Lettrism; yet it seems more likely that hints at Lettrist tropes in some of his own poems came not directly from the French group, but from the European and Latin American poets who picked up ideas from the Lettrists. The Lettrist magazines levy sent not only introduced me to Lettrism—they gave me a glimpse into the huge net of levy's correspondences and his attempts at finding out everything that might be relevant and useful to him.

In the spring of the next year, a Lettrist splinter group, the Situationists, would be a driving force for **what came** to be called "the student revolt" in France. The events of the Paris Spring included **the largest** wildcat strike in history—over 11 million workers in a coun-

try of 55 million walked off their jobs, many to set up barricades in streets and roads throughout France. Since this was also the largest decentralized revolt in history, the press and the powers that were found it incomprehensible, and had to identify it with something they could grasp. The media successfully made the exceedingly loose coalition of everything from teamsters' unions to eccentric philosophers fit the stereotypes of student demonstrations happening throughout the world at the time. The Situationists provided a vocabulary and some root ideas to a disorganized conjunction of socio-political optimism and revulsion against the De Gaul administration, but nobody was really in control of anything. That the Communist Party played the decisive role in making deals with the government that returned the country to conservative normalcy shows just how uneasy a decentralized revolution could make those on both ends of the political spectrum, including those who previously seemed most radical. As a student myself, I was more than happy to believe the media deception of students taking over the country. Of the many oddities of the May revolt of 1968, one of the strangest was that a seemingly tight-knit cadre of esthetes had come closer to bringing about political change (albeit in conjunction with an odd spectrum of non-artistic groups) than any of the more somber and dedicated revolutionary art movements of the century. For serious students of left-wing politics, the rapid dissolution of the revolt may seem a lesson in the inability of decentralism to succeed in maintaining a victory, even one that briefly went beyond anybody's wildest dreams. Another political aspect of the uprising didn't fully reveal itself for several decades. Revolutionaries from France, including Situationist silkscreen artists, went to Mexico City to try to assist in related demonstrations at the Olympics in October of 1968. The massacre of demonstrators at this event was the bloodiest of the era. The official body count was 300 dead, though most sources claim that's a huge underestimate. Many who took part in the protests would reemerge as more violent activists throughout Latin America, particularly in the attempts at revolution in Central America in the 1980s.

For me personally, a curious and fruitful chain of events started with the copies of *Lettrisme* I received from levy. In 1997, 30 years later, with the cooperation of David Seaman and Alain Satié, I set up the Lettrist movement's first official, consecrated web site. As a participant in the mimeo revolution of the 1960s, the opening of the web in the 1990s seemed like a return to the days of cranking publications out on mimeo machines. My site remained Lettrism's official electronic manifestation until November, 2004. In addition to the world's response to the U.S. election results, it was long past time for the official site to come from France, which was, after all, the movement's home. The Lettrists have not asked me to take down my Lettrist site (and as I write, it is undergoing an overhaul and expansion with their cooperation and encouragement), but the days of it being *the* main Lettrist site are over. Still, one of the proudest feathers in my web-master's cap was that this quintessentially Parisian movement should have its web site emanate from a small apartment and student grade equipment in the great French metropolis of Kenosha, Wisconsin.

levy's life, work, and home town are tied together in a way more reminiscent of the middle ages or antiquity than Anglo-America. Even Charles Olson's Gloucester seems less important in comparison, while Dante's relation to Florence comes across as more relevant. Likewise, more than his contemporaries, levy is tightly tied into a brief time period, to the point where some commentators see him as the centerpiece of an as yet unmade documentary of the 1960s counterculture. Both Cleveland and the 60s are essential to an understand-

ing of levy as a poet, but it is easy to be side-tracked by superficialities of both. The purpose of this paper is to suggest larger motives and contexts for the poet in time and place, which in turn may bring levy's relation to the city and the era into clearer focus—or higher resolution, as we might put it in the digital age. levy does more to define the era than virtually any of his more celebrated contemporaries.

levy claimed over and over again that he wanted to bring civilization and enlightenment to Cleveland. To some extent, this reflects the arrogance of the era and of youthful presumptions, and to some extent it served as a defense during the years he was under increasing assault by the powers that existed in Cleveland. As easy as it is to dismiss his remarks as rhetorical, it seems more instructive to take a careful look at his claims.

Square one for levy in the search for civilization and enlightenment came from reading. He said on several occasions that starting to read had prevented him from killing himself, had given him something to live for, and had proved pivotal in his thinking. He wrote that once he started, he tried to read everything he could. This is not as much of an exaggeration as it sounds. Early encounters with serious reading took place in several stages, first in the public school system then small public libraries. Perhaps the limitations of their collections helped him develop skills in finding what would be most important to him. It seems likely that they provided enough of a tease to make him desire a further range of resources and to pursue books more avidly. Whatever the case, pursue them he did, and with increasing dedication and thoroughness. The plethora in our own time of books on subjects that interested him may make it a bit difficult to realize how hard to get were many of the books most important to him. Of lists of bookstores in Cleveland at the time, there does not seem to be one of the traditional "Occult" variety, in which you'd find a proprietor looking something like Aleister Crowley or Madame Blavatsky charting ephemerides in the back of the shop, and a jumble of often delectably odd but not particularly relevant books on the shelves. His friends don't mention anything like a Theosophical Society Reading Room. These would have been the most likely sources of books on Buddhism in other cities, but even in these venues, the selection of work that would have interested levy would have been sparse. There may have been Buddhist temples in the city, but no levy friends mention them, and they would probably have been for Asian immigrants and their descendants who wisely tried to maintain their distance from Occidentals. New Age bookstores and Zen Centers were simply not part of the urban landscape of the day. Although this was a period when paperback book publication expanded rapidly, books of the poetry of the immediate present would have appeared infrequently on store shelves. Readers could find a reasonable selection of New Directions and Grove Press books easily enough, and probably a few books by such presses as City Lights. Like young poets elsewhere in the U.S., they probably read these over and over, often enough until the pages fell out of the bindings; but the plethora of alternative publishers we find now was in the process of being created—in Cleveland perhaps more than any other city.

It's important to see how much depth and detail levy could glean from the limited range of the libraries he frequented early on. His best editors, Ingrid Swanberg and Alan Horvath, do not cease to be amazed at the scope of sources in the work, and have at times discovered that words or phrases which initially seemed typos or neologisms turn out to be

precise references to concepts, practices, and persons who remain esoteric even with the greatly enhanced reference tools available today. I can find myself equally surprised by correctly used words and phrases from languages and topics unusual to American readers, and references to artists and movements not particularly familiar 40 years later. This only increases with my familiarity with the subject. levy showed, for instance, a more detailed knowledge of pre-Columbian central Mexican mythology and culture than any other Anglo-American poet of his day whom I can think of.

Although levy's early reading may have been solitary, and to some extent a remedy for loneliness, frustration, and boredom, by 1963 it had taken on distinct social characteristics. levy found himself with a growing number of friends who not only shared each others' books, but actively discussed them, and, more importantly, tried to bring the ideas in them into their active lives. These were not voyeurs or hobbyists, but young people looking for a new way of living in and experiencing the world. Their level of expertise and erudition varied, and may not seem profound by the standards of people who are now older and have more resources to draw on. But they showed the same eagerness and effort that seem consistently to take place among young people on the eve of major changes in the arts. And as with other young people at modern transition points, it is important to note that the majority came from working or middle class backgrounds, had at best modest formal education, and were strongly self-motivated. A measure of their commitment was the pattern through levy's adult life of people supplying him with books and a place to stay, *provided* he continue writing and publishing.

Finding no guidance from or energy in the mainstream elders of Cleveland, levy grew more serious about the need to bring civilization and enlightenment to the city. Outside the mainstream, he found encouragement and direction from discussion groups held by Adelaide Simon and Russell Atkins, from the ad hoc library they assembled, and, with Jau Billera, the Free Lance imprint publications that they oversaw. Exposed to a larger range of work, and able to discuss it with peers, levy also seems to have realized that if he was going to bring about some kind of change, he had a lot to learn. He would have to figure out the details of his intuitive gospel while preaching it. His reading seems to have acquired an additional intensity and concentration as he saw a greater need to expand the perceptions and capacities of the people around him.

Not content to be a passive reader, and having a strong belief that the poetry he and his friends wrote had major significance, levy decided to print his own books and magazines. He started doing this on a small greeting card size letterpress in 1963. Descriptions of his handling of type suggest that printing may not have been part of mandatory industrial arts classes in his high school, and he apparently had to teach himself how to use the press. The results tended to be unimpressive from a technical point of view. This type of printing, particularly on a miniature press, took a lot of time, and manic energy seems to have gotten him through sometimes painfully long hours of concentration.

As soon as he could manage, he went over to producing his publications by mimeo. Perhaps mimeo publications levy received influenced his move to this production method. In the early stages, he would not have thought of himself as part of a "mimeo revolution." Mimeo was simply there for the taking. Mimeograph machines were common features of offices of all sorts—the first I used was in the junior high school of which my father was principal. Opportunities to use those available, with or without permission, presented them-

selves often enough. Manufacturers of the machines suggested the use of their own heavy, absorbent paper, but you could use other stocks or “liberate” some of the standard stuff from the office you moved into after hours. Mimeo machines were inexpensive enough so that you could buy one without unconquerable strain on a limited budget. T.L. Kryss reports buying his first machine at Sears Roebuck for \$75 in 1966. A year later, he and rjs picked up a reconditioned A.B. Dick for about \$125. For comparison’s sake, in 1967, my tuition at the University of Wisconsin was \$105 a semester; a first class postage stamp sold for five cents; you could send several pounds of books via library rate for something like eleven cents; Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl and Other Poems* from City Lights sold for seventy five cents; and the New Directions edition of Kenneth Patchen’s *Hallelujah Anyway* retailed for \$1.25.

Other methods were available and used by levy. Hectograph (ditto), for instance, gave you more flexibility with graphics, though its purple inks were not as legible, often faded quickly, and the smell was strange. Legend had it that you could get high from sniffing the print, but I had no such luck. I doubt that anyone else did more than make up stories about it. Silkscreen was the great graphic technology of the period, largely forgotten now because it was not saved by libraries. Still, it was part of the basic tool kit, and T.L. Kryss continued using it long after other poets had moved to other methods.

Despite claims to the contrary by people who commented on mimeo publication after it had ceased to be used, mimeo was not conducive to graphics. levy published what people at the time called “typewriter poems,” in which designs could be created by retyping the same words or letters. In addition to his own poems in this genre, levy did a book by Dom Sylvester Houedard, a monk living in England, and perhaps the supreme master of and authority on the genre. Good-quality production of visual poetry, illustrations, and even letters other than what we’d now consider the standard ASCII set, however, were extremely difficult to produce. You could have stencils electrostatically engraved, but this was expensive, and the quality was not particularly good. Although mimeo manufacturers sold all sorts of styli and other devices for inscribing stencils, the rubbery surface was not cooperative to an artist or even a skilled lithographer. Some of us tried techniques as odd as holding stencils near light bulbs to make them blister and crack or rubbing them on the sidewalk or bricks in hopes of producing relief from the type and inscribed images which usually looked clumsy and childish. Ingrid Swanberg identifies the small, inset drawing on the cover of the 1968 Zero Edition of *Suburban Monastery Death Poem* as drawn on a mimeo stencil with a can opener by Barb O’Connelly, wife of literary collaborator, D.r. Wagner. Jokes about the difficulties, such as that drawing on a mimeo stencil being comparable to writing with the claw of a hammer on a used condom, made up a sub-genre of its own. But for text, you could type a basic mimeo stencil as quickly as you could use a typewriter with paper, making corrections with a green or blue equivalent of the liquid white-out used in ordinary typing. If you had a decent and well-maintained machine, you could produce a flyer or a broadside in as little time as an hour, and a chapbook in a day. Mechanical difficulties could slow the process down considerably on some machines, and perhaps there’s a bit of irony in the superior results you could obtain by using a machine that someone else took better care of than did most literary mimeographers. Still, mimeo publication lent itself to the sometimes fast-moving political events of the era, and often enough there was little distinction between literary and activist publications. Although levy would later find ways around the graphic limitations of the medium, speed and

lack of expense made it the ideal medium for the times and particularly for levy's poverty, sense of mission, and urgency.

In an environment of growing readership and active publication, Jim Lowell opened his first Asphodel Book Shop in 1963. The first store was located among offices on the fourth floor of a building whose first two floors housed a shopping arcade. Part of Lowell's stock consisted of relatively conventional titles, as well as a significant stock of what we would now call alternative publications. The rare and unusual publications were most important to Lowell, and his wide-ranging and encyclopedic knowledge of the field made him almost unique among book store proprietors in the country at the time. It's difficult to overestimate the influence of the store or of Lowell's knowledge and interests upon the poetry scene in Cleveland and upon levy's development as a poet. The store's clientele consisted primarily of young people who alienated the arcade operators. Lowell would eventually find himself arrested along with levy, would have part of his stock confiscated, would move to several other locations, and, for many years, would finally become the most important poetry distributor in Anglo-America between lower Manhattan and San Francisco. As he moved from one shop to another, Lowell began to rely more on mail order sales until that became almost his entire business.

However much levy and Lowell encouraged and made contacts for each other, levy came to realize early on that, as important as a local bookstore might be and as much as he could personally pass out publications on the street, he would need a means of getting them sold outside Cleveland. Producing books wasn't enough: once produced, a means of distribution was needed. For levy, Ezra Pound's definition of poetry as "news that stays news," had a particular relevance and urgency. The news might stay news, but it had to circulate quickly in the ever-growing and accelerating literary dispensation of the era. His publications gave him a form of currency which he could use in exchanges for more of the news that stays news from other places. The correspondences that grew up around his publishing efforts increased his need to make forays outside Cleveland—not just for kicks, but to meet other writers and to extend the face-to-face conversations that had grown up among his friends at home. Despite his travels in the west, he seemed to feel a greater affinity to poets living on the east coast. His contacts with East Coast writers preceded his trips to New York, and this may have been one of the reasons he had contacts lined up when he arrived in the city.

Mobility includes several layers of oddness. At a time when driving cars was essential to the core of being for most young American males, levy was a dedicated pedestrian and hitch-hiker. He had a driver's license, and it's possible that he didn't drive because he couldn't afford a car. He loved the life of the streets and may have wanted to stay close to it in cities. Part of the framework of *Cleveland undercovers* is a walk through the city. Given his acute sense of economy, he may not have wanted to be encumbered with a car when he could get around by other means. That he had started hitch-hiking in his teens meant that he was a veteran of the art by his twenties. Whatever his motives and skills, he was not confined to Cleveland, riding his thumb or otherwise grabbing rides as far as the coasts and Mexico. That he showed up in Milwaukee several times, once either on the way to or from Madison, suggests that he may have taken other mid-range excursions in the upper Midwest—not simply to the area immediately around Cleveland, but also to other cities in the Great Lakes region.

I haven't been able to determine whether levy's first visit to lower Manhattan was in 1963 or 1964, but he did make at least three sojourns in the city before his death. His correspondence had put him in touch with some of the most active poets on the scene at the time. As luck or fate would have it, this may have been the densest and most pluralistic reading scene in history. The full spectrum of what would later become more rigidly defined coterie groups such as the Beats, Black Mountain, Fluxus, Umbra, Deep Image, and New York Schools read together on a regular basis without significant friction at bars and coffee houses such as Les Deux Megots in the East Village and the Cino in the West Village. Readers included poets who had not completely identified themselves with any existing tendency or group yet were on the scene, such as Armand Schwerner, Paul Blackburn, Jerome Rothenberg. The pluralism of the time could draw on the cornucopia of literary and artistic resources overflowing in a small area. Despite the strong misogyny of the early and middle 60s, lower Manhattan provided a milieu for women writers not found elsewhere. These women ranged from one of the most inventive poets of the time, Rochelle Owens, to Diane Wakoski, perhaps the first woman of the era who could become widely popular without compromising her non-conformist base. Carol Bergé, who developed a particularly supportive friendship with levy, not only wrote beautiful lyrics, but got around the sexism of the time by making herself indispensable as an organizer of readings and other events. In addition to the avant garde poets on the scene, formalist conservatives also read alongside their more unorthodox colleagues. The audiences could include creative people of all sorts and statures: the area was particularly dense with painters and musicians of all types as well as representatives of virtually all forms of theater. Equidistant from Max's Kansas City and the Filmore East, Les Deux Megots could bring in as diverse a crew as any venue in the world. In a time when mixed media was self-consciously growing, individuals were mixing media on an intuitive level as well. You could, for instance, see Ed Sanders read as a poet, sing with the Fugs, and tend his bookstore in the time frame of perhaps two days. Whether or not John Cage, Andy Warhol, John Coltrane, Richard Schechner, Bob Dylan, even the aging Marcel Duchamp appeared in the bars and coffee houses, you might see several of them on a single walk in the vicinity, and you could go from the Cino to at least one of the major galleries, theaters, and musical or inter-media performance spaces within a few minutes, or spend a number of hours at several in the course of a single day. Some of the reading spaces encouraged active discussion along with readings, and the tendency was to move away from a strict division between active performer and passive audience. I haven't found anyone who remembers levy reading in any of these venues: Carol Bergé told me he did not; and the one account I've seen about him reading contains an anachronism and has other internal problems—but he certainly made his share of contacts there.

So far we have a more or less standard story of a young poet going to the artistic capitol and finding wonders. But the story makes a major paradigm shift in levy's case. As much as he loved New York, he never seems to have entertained the idea of staying there. Despite his sometimes bitter relationship with Cleveland, it remained his city and base of operations. In fact, he seems to have been trying to create a scene in his home town that would serve as a partner with the metropolis, rather than the traditional role of a farm from which the bigger city could skim those with the most ability.

Several people have said that his first visit to New York inspired levy to set up readings in the basement of a church, at a venue called “The Gate” (the persecution that eventually cost him his life began with reading poems there), but it seems likely that he would have tried to set up readings whether he’d attended them in New York or not. It was a time when poetry was breaking out of the restraints of silence and invisibility. Decorous and refined readings by visiting poets were not unusual on college campuses and a fair number were even hosted by civic and cultural organizations. Although hip readings might have been in part modeled on those of the San Francisco area and Lower Manhattan, other sources as quaint as choral reading societies also provided models. Young writers from all over North America insisted on being heard and set up readings in venues ranging from coffee houses to public parks. levy’s early publications, predictably, had been of his own work and that of his fellow Clevelanders. By 1964, his publication list included a large number of the poets who read at the bars and coffee houses in lower Manhattan. If he was simply picking up scraps and tokens from Gotham, he would have been repeating a traditional model of centralism. This is precisely what he was not doing. Instead of picking up their scraps, he was publishing their important work of the period *before* it appeared in New York. It is interesting to note that, despite her placing herself in an essential position in organizing readings at the succession of lower east side coffee shops—10th Street, Les Deux Megots, and Le Metro, and despite her position in LeRoi Jones’s landmark anthology, *Four Young Lady Poets*, and other collections and magazines, Carol Bergé’s first solo book was published, not in New York, but by levy in Cleveland. I’m not sure how many other first books he published by the writers he met in New York, but he did publish some of the earliest solo works of Ted Berrigan, Paul Blackburn, Margaret Randall, Ed Sanders, and Charles Bukowski. He also began publishing poets living elsewhere, from Doug Blazek in Chicago to bpNichol in Canada to Dom Sylvester Houedard in England. Although I generally avoid commentary on levy’s poetry in this paper to keep it from overshadowing other essential points, it’s clear that by 1965, levy was writing better poetry than many of the poets who read in lower Manhattan, and that he was publishing not as a supplicant, but as a peer. Clearly, he was not simply publishing major work by the New Yorkers, he was grabbing the news that stays news when it first became news wherever it came from, trying to equate poets at home with those living elsewhere, and trying to put Cleveland on the international literary map in the process. An essential part of bringing civilization and enlightenment to Cleveland was not simply teaching lessons to his fellow rubes, but putting them in a position where they could join in the process of forming what he would consider an enlightened civilization. Enlightenment and civilization are not conditions that can be deposited on empty receptacles, but require active participation on the part of all involved.

levy had become one of the main figures in what we now call the mimeo revolution. Although the main strength of the movement was its tendency to decentralize and to reduce hierarchies, we can see several high points in the mimeo dispensation. Ed Sanders’s *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts* tends to get top billing among magazines of the era. It may have contained the largest volume of the best poetry. Whether it did or not, it did not use mimeo as anything but an expedient, not exploring any special properties of the medium itself. If Sanders’s magazine gets most credit for quality of content, it should be noted that it was closely followed by *Trobar*, *Floating Bear*, *Yugen*, *El Corno Emplumado* and a host of others.

Some magazines which only lasted an issue or two had more impact than other, more staid vehicles that lasted for decades.

Poems Collected at Les Deux Megots, later renamed *Poems from le Metro* when one coffee house closed and another replaced it, took advantage of the ease of production and do-it-yourself features of mimeo. At each reading, most if not all of the poets who read brought typed mimeo stencils of one of the poems they would read, or typed them on the spot, or went through the awkward task of writing them out with a stylus. Theoretically, there was no editing of the poems and the collection appeared as an issue of the magazine at the reading a week later. This may have been the most democratic lit magazine of the time, a precursor of *Assembling* and its heirs. It greatly benefited from the sense of immediacy and personal exchange of the coffee house readings. Although this magazine took advantage of the mechanics of mimeo, it did nothing with mimeo tech. levy was one of the few publishers of the time to replicate this process for the open reading series, *Poets at The Gate*, assisted and continued by his friend rjs after he ceased work on it.

levy was almost completely alone in making mimeo an art form in its own right, and he certainly was better at it than anyone else. Almost from the beginning, he seems to have been uneasy with the limited range of graphic possibilities in standard mimeo. The first and easiest solutions to this were working with covers. Silk screen and linoleum cuts could become collaborations with the artist who did them. levy was an avid painter and collagist. With some of his books, he made paintings on large sheets of heavy paper. He then cut them down into book-cover size pieces and bound the books inside them. This made every cover unique, and it gives current levy admirers shudders every time they hear about a library re-binding one of levy's books.

Even with the best maintenance of a machine, mimeo tended to be sloppy. I didn't like this and used a process called slip sheeting. As each sheet came out of the cylinders, I dropped in a piece of cardboard so that the ink would not set off on the next page to follow it, and to minimize smearing or blurring on the side just printed. Clearly, although I appreciated and made use of the roughness around mimeo-printed letters, I was too young and too dumb to realize how much else I lost with this fastidiousness. levy thought it was funny. He initially started setting up pages in such a way that any smearing or set-off that occurred contributed to the feel of immediacy and personal contact of the publication. This seems to have been largely an intuitive process. I don't know how he did it, since many mimeo productions done more or less the same way simply looked tacky. Taking a cue from blurs and set-off, levy began overprinting texts, sometimes for visual effects alone, sometimes as a technique to obscure some words while leaving others visible, creating a new text out of an old. A number of other mimeographers had reversed stencils, printing texts backward. This was almost invariably done to produce results that were merely cute. levy worked reversed stencils in conjunction with other print runs to produce meaningful interactions of directions. His most resourceful use of mimeography came from over-inking stencils. Slight overinks were one of the perennial annoyances for veteran mimeographers. In a number of late works levy achieved a surprising range of text alteration and abstract graphics through various degrees of over-inking and cylinder impression. The initial results of these prints were often single sheets which he then had reprinted offset so as not to disturb the imbalance he had set up. In this process, he had completely jumped over the standard limitations of mimeo, turning it

from one of the most tediously restricted forms of letter reproduction into the tool for one of the most dynamic forms of visual poetry of the era. If readers see the mimeo revolution as a time of literary resurgence in such centers as New York and San Francisco, it's important to realize that the medium as an art form achieved its highest level in Cleveland, an accomplishment by a poet who wanted to civilize that city by making it compare creatively and artistically other places.

During his visits to New York, as his visits elsewhere, levy was collecting addresses. I don't know if he met Ray Johnson in the city, but it's pleasant to think that the patron saint of mail art might have helped him expand his network of correspondence. Unwilling to rest on any laurels he may have won by publishing new people, he used his growing readership as a means of expanding his range of correspondence, his knowledge of literary and artistic movements, and his understanding of Buddhism. In grim irony, some of the powers that were in Cleveland didn't like the idea of being civilized or enlightened, particularly by someone as unconventional as levy—and through their barbaric and disgraceful treatment of him demonstrated just what shallow hicks they were. At the same time, the attacks on levy, which elsewhere might have seemed more like minor rites of passage, made him both more resentful of the city and simultaneously more committed to it. The persecution that followed his first arrest extended the irony of the situation on another level: it generated sympathy for levy not only throughout the U.S. but in other countries in the world. This extended the number of people who wanted to be in contact with him. Even those put off by his advocacy of consciousness-altering drugs or his notions of telepathy or his lengthy meditations on suicide not only rallied to his defense, they also gave him a more serious reading as a poet and became part of his network of publication exchange.

The arrest of Jim Lowell and the way it firmly tied him to levy may have augmented Asphodel's development from a small bookshop to a major organ of distribution for books and information. Perhaps seeded by donations for the defense of levy and the Asphodel which arrived in the mail and by way of levy's own mailing list, the store's orientation moved farther away from in-person sales to mail order transactions. This trend kept growing for at least a decade after levy's death. Not only was the Asphodel one of the first places to look for books of poetry not available elsewhere and its catalogue a welcome item to find in the mailboxes of poetry enthusiasts around the world, it became a clearing house for information as well. It became a source of addresses for poets wishing to get in touch with each other. Some simply sent mail with a poet or editor's address on it, with a request that Lowell forward it to the addressee. The Asphodel's venue resolved itself into a space divided between the store and Jim Lowell's wife's Tessa's beauty parlor. This may seem a small and drab conclusion for a bookstore under fire, but it kept the Cleveland area on the literary map into the 1980s, and it was a truly essential and indispensable national resource—a status it retained even as Lowell aged, slowed down, and succumbed to the weariness and ill health of alcohol use.

The "free levy" campaigns not only trigonometrically expanded his correspondences, they also brought visitors to Cleveland. The most important were Allen Ginsberg and The Fugs, who came to do a benefit for his defense. Despite the best intentions on the part of all involved, the circus this visit created seems to have made levy's position more untenable than it had been. Had he been willing to leave Cleveland after the fuss and pageantry, this

event could have served as a credential in career-building for levy. But he didn't have any serious intention of relocating in another city. From this point on, his life took on the character of a Greek tragedy, with the protagonist moving inexorably by a fatal virtue toward death. Certainly the "outside agitators" were the last form of civilization and enlightenment any but a few of levy's friends in Cleveland were going to tolerate. The city's newspapers had vacillated between defending and condemning him. After the save levy event, the papers were as vehemently against him as was the rest of local public opinion.

By the time I received the copies of *Le lettrisme*, levy's web of contacts may have exceeded that of any other American poet under the age of 40. How levy's contact with other poets affected them is hard to say. When Geoffrey Cook, a poet and rogue scholar who had been a friend of levy's, began a global letter writing campaign to free Uruguayan dissident poets Clemente Padin and Jorge Caraballo, he had levy's death in mind, and didn't want to see anything like it repeated anywhere in the world. Dick Higgins, who may have met levy at Les Deux Megots, posted a monetary security with the Uruguayan government which secured the release of Padin and Caraballo under promise that they would leave the country. Whether Higgins remembered levy from Les Deux Megots is questionable, but he certainly would not have acted without Cook's campaign. levy apparently met the Argentine poet and translator Miguel Grinberg in New York, and Grinberg may have been instrumental in putting him in touch with other Latin American poets. In the years since levy's death, I don't think one has gone by in which I haven't bumped into a contact he'd made who was so unpredictably outside the range attributed to him that I haven't experienced a brief "hunh?" response—followed by an "of course" or the clicking into place of configurations and connections I hadn't previously understood. Among U.S. poets, his influence and the number of his supporters have continued to grow. Although the process of this expansion seems to progress in waves, with sometimes long troughs between them, it seems clear that, although the advance toward consecration will probably continue to be fitful and problematic, levy's influence will not cease expanding, and new individuals will continue to find new dimensions and applications in his poetry.

Several years after levy's death, using the date "40071, reckoning roughly from the earliest cave paintings," Gary Snyder wrote the only essay on levy of the decade that both contained lasting insight and achieved wide circulation. In it, Snyder wrote: "His hometown, Cleveland, that he wouldn't move from. Like the Sioux warriors who tied themselves to a spear and stuck it in the ground, never to retreat. Why? An almost irrational act of love—to give a measure of self-awareness to the people of Cleveland through poesy." In this, he precisely defined levy's role in Cleveland and Cleveland's role in levy's life and death in an immediate contextual frame. If we add to it that levy's love of Cleveland included the desire to give it the opportunity to breathe, to have a living relationship with the world outside, we expand the frame.

Snyder, perhaps more intuitively than consciously, was also registering the major paradigm shift from the milieu of his own coming-of-age to levy's. This is where levy's repeated insistence on staying in Cleveland defined an era.

More than such period color as the hallucinogens, which levy used parsimoniously in practice and expansively in metaphor, or the fashions in clothing, or the manner of speech, or

topical allusions, or the specific rock lyrics of the day, the counterculture of the late 60s made a demographic shift away from the Beats of the previous decade. The Beats were essentially elitist, often traveling in small hunting packs, but returning to the safety and tribal acceptance of arty dream worlds in Greenwich Village and North Beach. They might make forays out into the world of the squares, but their disdain for them, and desire to rob, exploit, humiliate, or show them the maximum of contempt was dominant. The counterculture of the 60s was just the opposite: it sought to include everyone. If it wanted to assault the "straights," it sought to do so by absorbing them rather than robbing them, to find a commonality of spirit that would put a final end to idiotic wars, of which the one raging in Vietnam was the ultimate example, and replace it with a society in which everyone practiced art and spiritual growth, explored the many regions of consciousness, and bound itself together with an uninhibited sexuality that began in individual erotic liberation but also sublimated itself into universal well-being. Buddhism had spread through many underground channels and flowered in the hometowns of North America in ways that no one could have predicted a decade earlier.

levy's refusal to leave Cleveland, and his martyrdom as a result of it, do more to define the era than film clips of Woodstock or the 1968 Democratic Party Convention or the kids dancing around with painted faces in the Haight-Ashbury district.

If the era, much scorned as it has been since, had an epicenter, it was a hyper-active, fanatically hard-working, scrawny, fidgety, malnourished kid with rotten teeth, obsessed with giving away everything he could find or make and ready to die to bring personal liberation to everyone, starting with the people of a mid-sized, heavily polluted, factory city in the heart of America. The sentimental and vapid media Beullahland concepts of "love" and "flower power" as an easy means of escape wandered in and out of the counterculture, particularly as it moved into the end of the 1960s and 1970s. The era would deserve the contempt and derision it has received if it were indeed as phony as the media reduction of it, just as the Paris Spring becomes nonsensical when commentators try to reduce it to students taking over a country inspired by arcane comic books. Love is difficult, depends on struggle and change. The self-centered eroticism of the Beats tended to miss it, and certainly didn't seek to expand it to those outside their flock. levy's attempt to make it grow, base it in interconnections, and make it available to everyone, also makes it meaningful and worth the effort and sacrifice, whether it succeeded or not. If the word "love," so much associated with the era, carries levy's profound intensity and insatiable desire for a new world, his complete willingness to give everything he had, including his life, to distribute poetry and if possible use that as a tool to bring humanity out of samsara, its meaning becomes substantial, cogent, and something we can use today. In levy's case, however much the outlaw hype follows him, such perennial virtues as commitment, dedication, generosity, and untiring effort separate him from his persecutors, whose capacity for such traditional values paled in comparison to his.

The entrance to the Cleveland Museum of Art features a large cast based on Rodin's iconic sculpture, *The Thinker*. In 1970, insurrectionists tried to destroy it with a hefty dynamite charge. The blast did severe damage, but did not completely destroy the cast. The museum decided not to restore it or remove it, but to leave it in place with the damage left as it was. Although no group claimed responsibility for the bombing, the insurrectionists almost

certainly had some idea who levy was, and their rage may even have been encouraged to some extent by his martyrdom, even though its primary target was probably the Vietnam War or social injustice of some other sort. And the people of the city knew who levy was, even if few had any idea how long the world's memory of him would last, or that in the next millennium, books like this one would be published. Is it too fanciful to wonder if the museum realized that the city had lost something important two years earlier and did not want to be associated with the human vandalism that led to his death? Probably. Yet preserving *The Thinker* in semi-destroyed form suggests something levy himself might do if he were running a mainstream museum. One of his themes was the interdependence of creation and destruction. The books of "destructive writing" such as *The Tibetan Stroboscope* deployed something similar as an intentional working method. levy invented more literary forms than any other young poet working in the U.S. in the 1960s. European classicism and romanticism have always made use of remnants of Mediterranean art partially destroyed by time, but Cleveland has the only major museum I know of with a piece of sculpture intentionally mutilated in our own time at its main entrance.

Notes:

My Lettrist site can be found at <<http://www.thing.net/~grist/l&d/lettrist/lettrist.htm>>

The new site originating in Paris has this address: <<http://www.lelettrisme.com>>

The latter is solely in French; mine is bi-lingual French/English.

My Light and Dust Anthology of Poetry can be found at:

<<http://www.thing.net/~grist/l&d/lighthom.htm>>

The Home Page for d.a.levy, curated by Ingrid Swanberg and me, can be found at:

<<http://www.thing.net/~grist/l&d/dalevy/dalevy.htm>>

The site contains a large selection of poems by levy, along with commentary and a draft of the immaculate bibliography by Alan Horvath and Kent Taylor. It includes the Snyder essay mentioned above, and work slated for appearance in this book by several other people. Going by my statistics generator, which indicates that during some months more than 3,000 people access the site, it's safe to say that more people have read levy's poetry there than in all print editions put together. In some respects, the web is what levy would have seen as an ideal medium. This should reinforce print rather than compete with it. Swanberg's print edition will remain the definitive readers' edition for some time to come, and will probably form the base of other selections decades hence. Horvath's short-run, intensive editions should form the ground for a collected works and for the critical, annotated, and variorum editions that will probably appear as levy takes his place among the major poets of his era. The web site's main function has been primarily to keep readership growing and moving out of the ghetto where it has tended to languish. The work Swanberg, Horvath, and I have done on paper and in electronic form suggests how much levy's news has stayed news, and the "mimeo revolution" and Cleveland poetry scene of the 1960s have refused to stay in their place.

Thanks to Ingrid Swanberg, Tom Kryss, Alan Horvath, Larry Smith, and Márton Koppány for critical reading and suggested amendments to this essay.