

# JOHN GIORNO



(A)  
WORDS, SOUND, WISDOM  
BY ALISON COPLAN

(B)  
FIVE HUNDRED MIRRORS  
K ALLADO-MCDOWELL AND MARCUS  
BOON IN CONVERSATION





## Words, Sound, Wisdom By Alison Coplan

When you call any of the still-active versions of *Dial-A-Poem* today, you hear a pregnant pause. Three seconds of nothing on the other end—enough to make you wonder if this project from 1968 is still working. Then there is John Giorno, the maestro and ringleader, with an announcement. His distinctive accent and charisma, enunciating clearly and as present as ever, drips through the title as he states it each time along with the name of the poet whose work follows. “DIAL-A-POEM: \_\_\_\_”

The work is currently active through four phone numbers (in France, Mexico, and the United States), which can be dialed from anywhere, and as interactive sculptures on view at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, containing 293 recordings by 135 poets, artists, musicians, and activists. It started with an idea Giorno had while talking on the phone:

“I heard the person I was talking to with great clarity, and it came to me that the voice was the poet, the words were the poem, and the telephone was the venue. Previously, the telephone was a personal connection, one to one, ‘you call me and I call you.’ But now, I imagined, the telephone could be the medium for mass communication: a phone number for everyone to call, with a recorded poem for them to hear. . . . But that wasn’t all. I imagined not just one recorded poem, but many, which the callers would hear at random.”<sup>1</sup>

From there, Giorno orchestrated a collaboration between poets, engineers, and the New York Telephone Company to engage new technology that could link, for the first time, ten industrial answering machines and ten phone lines through a single telephone number, maxing out the system’s capabilities in order to feature the most poems possible. Including only poets and poems that he really liked,<sup>2</sup> Giorno began by compiling tape recordings from William S. Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and Brion Gysin, along with his own. He then invited the rest of the poets to his loft and recorded them reading with his new Sony tape recorder, which he later transferred to reel-to-reel tape. They were John Cage, Jim Carroll, Aram Saroyan, Bernadette Mayer, Anne Waldman, Ted Berrigan, Ron Padgett, David Henderson, and John Ashbery. To succeed, Giorno said, the poems had to be great, and offer *Dial-A-Poem* callers wisdom.<sup>3</sup>

Giorno changed the selection on offer each day: “The relationships between the poets, how each poem juxtaposed and counterpointed the others, were very important. Ten voices sang at the same time. I had a large grid chart and could see at a glance what poets were on what days with what poems. It was an audio collage of voice and content.”<sup>4</sup> He found joy in making the selections and crafting the overall narrative framework, and also in the public response. From the beginning, the phones rang continually, with all lines busy from 7 am to midnight. Fourteen thousand calls a day were received—the maximum possible with the technology at that time—and millions in the first weeks.<sup>5</sup> He had achieved a desire that Marcel Duchamp had once stated: “What I really want to do, is send art over the telephone,”<sup>6</sup> a quotation he found and included on the press release for *Dial-A-Poem*. Accessible to a global audience, here poetry could be “heard rather than just read.”<sup>7</sup> Moreover, as a distribution system for poetry, it afforded Giorno the potential to achieve what would become the central tenets of his life’s work: to share wisdom and compassion, to expand the consciousness of the audience, and to connect minds. “With *Dial-A-Poem*, we transcended Marshall McLuhan’s ‘The medium is the message.’ We were the medium *and* the message. And the real message was wisdom sound.”<sup>8</sup>

Prior to this, Giorno had been experimenting with bringing amplification and recording technologies into poetry performances. It began with an epiphany in 1963, during a reading by Frank O’Hara and John Ashbery that he and Andy Warhol found dull:

“[They] sat at a table and read from a book with no amplification. . . . ‘Why is it so boring?’ Andy asked. ‘I don’t know. I can’t hear one word and I can’t see them. There is nothing there.’ . . . It was one of those seemingly meaningless moments that change your life. ‘Why is it so boring? What’s wrong?’ echoed in my mind. I went to many great performances all the time: rock concerts, new music, the Judson Dance Theater, Happenings, performances by artists. But poetry was dead.”<sup>9</sup>

Giorno realized that for poetry to connect with audiences and push into the new terrains that painting, sculpture, music, and dance were expanding all around him, poets would have to use new technologies and techniques for the making and communication of their work. He set out to achieve this with his own poetry and performance, and through collaboration with other poets—to disseminate their work via the organization he founded in 1965, Giorno Poetry Systems.<sup>10</sup>

Giorno’s memoir, *Great Demon Kings*, which he wrote over more than twenty-five years and completed one week before his death in 2019, abounds with formative experiences of encountering and making art that were shaped by recording, amplification, and distribution technologies. In high school, following a recommendation from his English teacher, Giorno went to an enthralling reading by Dylan Thomas at the 92nd Street Y, after which he “bought two albums of Thomas’s poetry . . . trying to understand and absorb something.”<sup>11</sup> Already from Giorno’s youth, then, poetry was more than just words on a page; it could be a recording that was heard, listened to anywhere. A performance by the Ronettes, where he encountered Phil Spector’s wall of sound paired with the singers’ sexually charged performance, followed a few days later by Karlheinz Stockhausen’s first concert in New York, which was “the most cutting-edge in avant-garde experimental music,” opened him to new directions for engaging technology in sound production and performance.<sup>12</sup> Several times a week he attended screenings of the newly coined underground cinema organized by Jonas Mekas,<sup>13</sup> and he was featured in his then-lover Andy Warhol’s initial film experiments, including most famously Warhol’s first feature film, *Sleep* (1964). Wanting to be a poet but working at the time as a stockbroker on Wall Street, Giorno had his image and presence transmitted, for the first time, to an audience, making him the original Warhol superstar. Around this time he became involved with Gysin, and later Burroughs, who introduced him to using a tape recorder for poetry and sound pieces, marking a significant new direction for his work and beginning his trajectory of expanding found language into the realm of sound and performance. Through his relationship with Robert Rauschenberg, Giorno worked as a cameraman for the 1966 Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.) performance series at the 69th Regiment Armory entitled *9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering* and was introduced to Robert Moog, inventor of the eponymous synthesizer. “The real great work of art was the concept [of] . . . artists working with technology,” Giorno said of E.A.T.<sup>14</sup> From that point, collaborations with engineers and emerging technologies were central to his work.

Throughout these encounters across the 1960s, Giorno was refining his own techniques for making poetry. Inspired by the artists with whom he was intimately involved (Warhol, Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns) who used

found imagery, he decided to work with found language. To make these works, “I picked something from the paper, a neutral-seeming article, and latched on to a sentence or phrase that I connected to emotionally, the pieces of the whole that radiated, and those pieces became the poem.”<sup>15</sup> With Gysin, he first experimented in using electronics and technology to make sound pieces, including for his poem “Subway” (1965), which was made with language taken from ads posted in the trains. For “Subway Sound” (1965), Gysin and Giorno went underground together to record Gysin reading the work along with the atmosphere of the surrounding subway environment. In 1965, Giorno wrote and published “Pornographic Poem,” which treats excerpts from an erotic story as a found poem. With this, he began to realize his “heroic aspiration to take homoeroticism to another level,”<sup>16</sup> a goal of featuring homosexual images in the pursuit of gay liberation that would continue throughout his life’s work. He then recorded poets and artist friends reading the poem:

“I made sound compositions from each reading, laying down two tracks, one on each track of the stereo tape recorder, slightly off sync. The repetition created a rhythm and a beat, and brought out the musical qualities inherent in the words and the person’s voice. The emotional vulnerability of each reader, the hidden sexual nuances, each person’s sexual hang-ups and their openness were magnified into musical phrases. The piece was twelve voices in succession.”<sup>17</sup>

The recording was released by Giorno Poetry Systems as part of a tape edition in 1967 and was featured in Giorno’s first live performances.

Also in 1967, Giorno began collaborating on sound compositions of his poems with Moog and his newly invented synthesizer. Experimenting together with oscillations, vibrations, and filters, they created multitracks on a sixteen-track tape recorder that enhanced the musical quality of the words: “The tracks came together in miraculous symphonies of song.”<sup>18</sup> After further experimentation in live performance, next with multi-speaker systems to disorient the viewers with “overwhelming sound” and ultraviolet neon tube fixtures to create a “giant black-light purple soup,” Giorno reached a breakthrough in his “pursuit of synergy between sound and light”<sup>19</sup> with the advent of an organ developed by Bell Labs engineer Fred Waldhauer that analyzed the light content of sound, adapted to his sound poems, to register pitch via four colors and volume with brightness. From 1967 to 1970, Giorno used this light organ as part of a series of installations and performances he called Electronic Sensory Poetry Environments (ESPEs). Sound compositions were fed through the light organ to banks of colored lights and then “augmented by different combinations of striplights, light panels, and electroluminescent tape, while the various scents—from strawberry and peeled oranges to Frankincense and Chanel No.5—were delivered to the audience through aerosol, fog machines, bubble machines, and incense.”<sup>20</sup> At some of these performances he would give out marijuana, LSD, and wine to further enliven all the senses and open the audience to the performance experience. The goal was to entertain and liberate minds: “When I talk of performance, I really mean *entertainment!* You know, you realize that it’s the entertainment business! And I find that fascinating! Because one discovered, actually, that when

you make people feel good, they *surrender* themselves to you! And then you’re in this shameless position, which is wonderful!”<sup>21</sup>

Giorno’s innovations with recording and performance technologies were reflected in his text-based poetry, which evolved throughout the 1960s from appropriation of found text to cutup and collage of different materials and then double-column poems. The two columns mirrored his polyphonic performances with their boundless possibilities for combinations of words and multiplicities of meaning. Like echoes and layered voices in performances and recordings, repetition too became a focus, as words and phrases repeated in multiple directions across the columns. For an audience or reader encountering this repetition, Burroughs observed, “The changing emphasis on different syllables as the phrases are repeated helps to break apart the too-familiar ‘meaning’ of the words, to crack them open and show their emptiness. This explicit realization conveys a feeling of liberation.”<sup>22</sup>

When Giorno decided in 1965 to devote himself to working on poetry, he knew from the outset that this would entail more than writing poems: “There were boundless ways for poets to make art.”<sup>23</sup> Giorno Poetry Systems was established as “a small business as a work of art” a press release stated, with which he could receive and raise funds for poetry projects, events, albums, and more. As its author, curator, producer, editor, fundraiser, and archivist, he orchestrated the work and controlled its transmission through channels that he created and shaped. The press release continued: “The purpose of GPS is to communicate poetry to people using television, radio, telephone, newspapers and other forms of media. We will produce environmental poetry readings, events, poster poems, window-curtain poems, matchbook poems and books.”<sup>24</sup>

Beginning in 1965 and continuing through today, Giorno Poetry Systems has made good on its promises. In addition to countless live events, continued iterations of *Dial-A-Poem*, and radio programs, it has released on cassette, vinyl, CD, and video more than fifty unique recordings with each package featuring original artwork. Of the albums that the GPS record label offshoot has released, Jean-Jacques Lebel writes: “The recording, editing and production of all these records, which are exceptional in terms of quality and reach, allowed John to build up a sound archive of the international underground which is unparalleled.”<sup>25</sup> In putting artists’ works in mutual relation and creating a framework for the work to spread to new audiences, Giorno gave life to a corpus of his peers, collaborators, and those he admired: “My work . . . is at times a collage of other poets which becomes a work of art itself that changes daily.”<sup>26</sup> Just as in his own performance practice, here too Giorno appropriated the tools and strategies of entertainment “to generate moments of magic, when the hearts of the collective audience get connected to yours.”<sup>27</sup> The evolving and ever-growing work released by Giorno Poetry Systems through mass-media channels was thus able to reach a global audience and spread wisdom through poetry to liberate minds. Under the direction of Anthony Huberman since 2023, Giorno Poetry Systems thrives today as a nonprofit operating out of Giorno’s former home and studio at 222 Bowery. It continues his work and legacy of supporting artists, poets, and musicians through artist-led events, album releases, grants, and continued work with *Dial-A-Poem*.

The experimentation that Giorno did in the 1960s with new technologies developed over the following decades. Beginning in the 1970s, his projects became more politically engaged, and in the 1980s he began enlisting the modes, venues, and performance strategies of rock and punk music. While Giorno Poetry Systems would continue to release albums, and Giorno would go on to be featured in and collaborate on multimedia works by new generations of artists on whom he had a great impact, by the late 1990s, his own poetry and performance shed most of its technological accompaniments and distilled into the dynamic force of a unique voice and style that he had pioneered. Featuring original language that “arises in the mind,”<sup>28</sup> he would stand with a microphone and recite from memory, as Laura Hoptman describes it:

“Enunciating each word with clarity and force, eyes, eyebrows, elegant and flexible mouth are in constant, expressive movement as is his body. Giorno gestures not only with his hands, but with both arms, sometimes flapping them like a graceful bird in his excitement. Bending and swaying to the rhythm of his own voice, which can vary in tone from conversational to outraged, Giorno is a raconteur rather than a reader. In full performance mode, he resembles nothing so much as a singer—a rock ’n’ roll balladeer to be more precise.”<sup>29</sup>

What remained the same across these decades was his steadfast dedication to “change [poetry], expand consciousness, and liberate the mind” through connecting to audiences, through compassion.<sup>30</sup>

Giorno’s foundational impulse for compassion and spreading love was shaped by both his devoted practice and study, beginning in 1971, of Tibetan Buddhism of the Nyingma lineage, and his commitment to gay liberation through sexual freedom. Through Buddhist study, he sought to recognize the empty nature of the mind, “leading to a deeper insight into the true nature of existence and the alleviation of suffering.” So too with breaking all concepts around gay sex: “transcendence and emptiness, sex and great bliss were spiritual accomplishments.”<sup>31</sup> These ideals came together explicitly in the AIDS Treatment Project, Giorno Poetry Systems’ response to the AIDS crisis, in which direct action was administered in the form of cash grants given to those suffering from the disease. “I wanted to offer love from that same place, [the affectionate, personal moment of connection after anonymous sex,] in the form of boundless compassion,” Giorno wrote.<sup>32</sup> From 1984 to 1994, thanks to Giorno Poetry Systems album artists donating their royalty checks to the cause and other individual donations, GPS gave \$460,732.

When I called *Dial-A-Poem* today, after the moments of silence and Giorno’s announcement of the title, “DIAL-A-POEM: \_\_,” I heard him introduce himself, “John Giorno,” along with his poem “God Is Man Made” (2015).<sup>33</sup> With incisive lucidity and masterful vivacity, Giorno affirms the answers to universal questions of human consciousness and religious reckoning: “Yes, there is a god / and it is man-made.” “Yes, everything is delusion.” Connected to me now, just as he synced together with audiences in over fifty years of performances, he sings a line repeatedly: “I will always be with you.” And I believe him, because he is here with me now. Consistent with the message of his life’s work, the poem crescendos with his sharing what comes “after the realization that everything is

delusion”: finding “emptiness / awareness / and bliss . . . through yourself . . . self-luminous / awareness / ceaselessly coming.” Flowing with wisdom and spiritual clarity, the phone line disconnects when the poem is over.

- 1 John Giorno, *Great Demon Kings: A Memoir of Poetry, Sex, Art, Death, and Enlightenment* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), 226.
- 2 Giorno, *Great Demon Kings*, 226.
- 3 Giorno, *Great Demon Kings*, 226.
- 4 Giorno, *Great Demon Kings*, 229.
- 5 Giorno, *Great Demon Kings*, 232.
- 6 The Architectural League of New York Press Release for *Dial-A-Poem*, January 8, 1969.
- 7 The Architectural League of New York Press Release for *Dial-A-Poem*.
- 8 Giorno, *Great Demon Kings*, 235.
- 9 Giorno, *Great Demon Kings*, 116.
- 10 Giorno Poetry Systems officially became a nonprofit in 1974.
- 11 Giorno, *Great Demon Kings*, 5.
- 12 Giorno, *Great Demon Kings*, 34.
- 13 Giorno, *Great Demon Kings*, 50.
- 14 Giorno, *Great Demon Kings*, 153.
- 15 Giorno, *Great Demon Kings*, 112.
- 16 Giorno, *Great Demon Kings*, 172.
- 17 Giorno, *Great Demon Kings*, 176.
- 18 Giorno, *Great Demon Kings*, 156.
- 19 Giorno, *Great Demon Kings*, 192, 193.
- 20 Michael Hennessey, “Poetry by Phone and Phonograph: Tracing the Influence of Giorno Poetry Systems,” in *Audio-books, Literature, and Sound Studies*, ed. Matthew Rubery (London: Routledge, 2011), 78.
- 21 Nicholas Zurbrugg and John Giorno, “Poetry, Entertainment, and the Mass Media: An Interview with John Giorno,” *Chicago Review* 40, nos. 2/3 (1994): 87.
- 22 William S. Burroughs, “The Déjà Vu Experience,” *Palais Magazine*, no. 22 (2015): 197. This text was republished in a magazine made as a catalogue for *UGO RONDINONE: I ♥ JOHN GIORNO*, an exhibition organized by Giorno’s partner, Rondinone, to celebrate his life and work at Palais de Tokyo, Paris, in 2015–16. The exhibition was restaged and expanded across thirteen venues in New York in 2017.
- 23 Giorno, *Great Demon Kings*, 116–17.
- 24 Giorno Poetry Systems Press Release, 1970. See: [https://www.instagram.com/p/Cx53FxnKBLf/?img\\_index=1/](https://www.instagram.com/p/Cx53FxnKBLf/?img_index=1/).
- 25 Jean-Jacques Lebel, “John Giorno, Here and Now,” *Palais Magazine*, no. 22 (2015): 84.
- 26 Museum of Modern Art, New York, press release for *Information*, 1970.
- 27 Zurbrugg and Giorno, “Poetry, Entertainment, and the Mass Media,” 83.
- 28 Marcus Boon, “John Giorno and Buddhist Poetics,” *Palais Magazine*, no. 22 (2015): 138.
- 29 Laura Hoptman, “Words Come from Sound: John Giorno’s Killer Life in Art,” *Palais Magazine*, no. 22 (2015): 117.
- 30 Giorno, *Great Demon Kings*, 176.
- 31 Giorno, *Great Demon Kings*, 293, 275.
- 32 Giorno, *Great Demon Kings*, 311.
- 33 John Giorno, “God Is Man Made,” *Palais Magazine*, no. 22 (2015): 156–57.





John Giorno and Robert Rauschenberg kissing, New York, 1973. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York

#### JOHN GIORNO

(1936–2019) was a versatile artist based in New York and celebrated for his poetry performance and activism, including his politically charged *Dial-A-Poem* project (1968–ongoing). In 1965 he founded Giorno Poetry Systems, a nonprofit organization to support other artists, poets, and musicians, which produced events and festivals, operated a record label, and provided grants to help with AIDS-related costs. Giorno's work extended into various media in collaboration with artists and filmmakers such as Andy Warhol, William S. Burroughs, and his partner, Ugo Rondinone. He practiced Buddhism, within the Nyingma lineage, for most of his life, and in 2017 he retired from performing to concentrate on meditation, art, and writing his memoirs. His lasting legacy encompasses his artistic contributions as well as Giorno Poetry Systems, which continues to operate today and invites artists, poets, and musicians to reflect on the work of other artists, poets, and musicians.

#### ALISON COPLAN

is Chief Curator at Swiss Institute, New York. In 2017 she served as the cross-institutional festival organizer for the thirteen-venue New York iteration of *Ugo Rondinone: I ♥ John Giorno*. In Spring-Summer 2024, she will be based at Villa Waldbera, Munich, for the Kunstverein München Writers Residency.



John Giorno with soundboard operator at Z.B.S. Studio, Fort Edward, 1980. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York





The INTRAVENUS MIND presents  
poems by  
**JOHN GIORNO** STEREO

side 1 RASPBERRY

starring:

She Tasted Death- Robert Rauschenberg, Leather-  
Paratrooper-Head- Yvonne Rainer, Outlaw-  
Janitor- Peter Schjeldahl, Women-  
Problems-

side 2 PORNOGRAPHIC POEM

starring:

Henry Geldzahler	Patti Oldenberg
Trisha Brown	Nina Thurman
Ann Ware	Bryce Marden
Tod Berrigan	Michael McClanathan
John Perreault	Peter Schjeldahl
Sarah Dalton	Yvonne Rainer
Lee Crabtree	Robert Rauschenberg
Alan Sarret	

cover by LES LEVINE



The Dial - A - Poem Poets

**Biting off the Tongue of a Corpse**

WILEN ADAM  
JOHN ASHBERY  
ED BERRIGAN  
WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS  
JOHN CAGE

EDWIN DENBY  
CIANE DI PRIMA  
ROBERT DUNCAN  
JOHN GIORNO  
KENNETH KOCH  
DENISE LEVERTOV

FRANK O'HARA  
CHARLES OLSON  
ED SANDERS  
CHARLES STEIN  
GARY SWINER  
JOHN WIENERS

Side 1  
"THE TIGER" - JAMAICA THE WILD MUSHROOM, AVOCADO, ONE SHOULD NOT  
"WALLA" - A CALLED WINTER, THE BIRDS, THE BIRDY, THE BIRDY  
"THE TIGER" - JAMAICA THE WILD MUSHROOM, AVOCADO, ONE SHOULD NOT  
"WALLA" - A CALLED WINTER, THE BIRDS, THE BIRDY, THE BIRDY

Side 2  
"THE TIGER" - JAMAICA THE WILD MUSHROOM, AVOCADO, ONE SHOULD NOT  
"WALLA" - A CALLED WINTER, THE BIRDS, THE BIRDY, THE BIRDY

GIORNO POETRY SYSTEMS records



**THE DIAL-A-POEM POETS**

Ted Berrigan	Diane DiPrima	Ed Sanders
Joe Brainard	Alice Ginsberg	Aram Saroyan
Michael Brownstein	John Giorno	Harris Schiff
William Burroughs	Brian Gysin	Bobby Seale
John Cage	David Henderson	John Sinclair
Jim Carroll	Leora Handal	Rona Waldman
Nathleen Cleaver	Bernadette Mayer	Philip Whalen
Clerk Coolidge	Taylor Mead	Emmett Williams
Robert Creeley	Frank O'Hara	Heathcote Williams

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GIORNO POETRY SYSTEMS records



**JOHN GIORNO**

Side 1 - 29:30 mins.  
SUCKER BUTTA, 10:30 mins.  
EATING HUMAN MEAT, 18:47 mins.  
Side 2 - 30:51 mins.  
SERVICING DEMONS IN AMERICA, 30:51 mins.

**WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS**

Side 1 - 32:54 mins.  
"from 'THE WILD BOYS', 'THE CHIEF SMILES',  
recorded by KPFA, Berkeley, Bob Keating, Friday, Robinson,  
University of California, November 7, 1974, 6:50 mins.  
"from 'THE WILD BOYS', 'THE GREEN GLEN',  
recorded at St. Mark's Church, New York, April 24, 1974, 3:32 mins.  
"from 'AH PROOK IS HERE', recorded at Columbia University, New York,  
April 17, 1975, 12:00 mins.  
"from 'CITIES OF THE RED NIGHT' (an unpublished novel),  
recorded at Columbia University, New York, April 17, 1975, 10:00 mins.  
Side 2 - 31:47 mins.  
"from 'JUNKIE', 'LITH STREET BOYS', recorded at WRAL, New York,  
March 5, 1975, 7:29 mins.  
"from 'NAKED LENSEL', recorded at WRAL, New York,  
March 5, 1975, 20:29 mins.  
"from 'EXTERMINATOR', 'FROM HERE TO ETERNITY'.



**THE DIAL-A-POEM POETS**

**DISCONNECTED**

Charles Amirkhanian	Frank Lima
John Ashbery	Michael McClure
Imamu Amiri Baraka	Gerard Malanga
Bill Berkson	Bernadette Mayer
Paul Blackburn	Frank O'Hara
Joe Brainard	Charles Olson
Michael Brownstein	Peter Orlovsky
William S. Burroughs	Maureen Owen
John Cage	Ron Padgett
Jim Carroll	John Perreault
Tom Clark	Charles Plymell
Clerk Coolidge	Ed Sanders
Gregory Corso	Jack Spicer
Robert Creeley	Lorenzo Thomas
Diane Di Prima	Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche
Ed Dorn	Diane Wakoski
Larry Fagin	Anne Waldman
Allen Ginsberg	Philip Whalen
John Giorno	John Wieners

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# THE NOVA CONVENTION

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Associate producer: Laurie Anderson  
Produced by Bobby Bielecki  
Photography by Steve Scalet  
Designed by George DeMerrico

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William S. Burroughs

# BETTER AN OLD DEMON THAN A NEW GOD

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Produced by Bobby Bielecki  
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Designed by George DeMerrico

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# BETTER AN OLD DEMON THAN A NEW GOD

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# BETTER AN OLD DEMON THAN A NEW GOD

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# SUGAR, ALCOHOL, & MEAT

The Dial-A-Poem Poets

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# A DIAMOND HIDDEN IN THE MOUTH OF A CORPSE

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# A DIAMOND HIDDEN IN THE MOUTH OF A CORPSE

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# A DIAMOND HIDDEN IN THE MOUTH OF A CORPSE

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# YOU'RE THE GUY I WANT TO SHARE MY MONEY WITH

Photography by Jimmy DeSana  
Designed by George DeMerrico  
Engineering by Bobby Bielecki at ZBS Media

Produced by John Giorno & Greg Shiffin  
Associate Producer: James Grauerholz

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# YOU'RE THE GUY I WANT TO SHARE MY MONEY WITH

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Engineering by Bobby Bielecki at ZBS Media

Produced by John Giorno & Greg Shiffin  
Associate Producer: James Grauerholz

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# SMACK MY CRACK

Photography by Jimmy DeSana  
Designed by George DeMerrico  
Engineering by Bobby Bielecki at ZBS Media

Produced by John Giorno & Greg Shiffin  
Associate Producer: James Grauerholz

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# SMACK MY CRACK

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## Five Hundred Mirrors

### K Allado-McDowell and Marcus Boon in Conversation

What is the relevance, half a century after its launch, of *Dial-A-Poem*, an ongoing experiment in free, horizontal, uncensored distribution of poetry via the intimacy of the telephone? What can we learn about our present from that collaboration between artist John Giorno (1936–2019), the human voice, and a machine-operated mass medium, intertwining language, technology, and sociality? Giorno’s artistic practice—encompassing poetry, visual arts, technology, community activism, and spirituality—was deeply rooted in relations. To discuss the pivotal role of collaboration in his work, we invited writer, journalist, and professor Marcus Boon, editor of Giorno’s *Subduing Demons in America: Selected Poems, 1962–2007* (2008) and K Allado-McDowell, writer, speaker, musician, and innovator in the collaborative use of AI and machine learning. Their conversation spans poetry and memoir, contradiction and compartmentalization, memes, social media, and the impact of Buddhism on Giorno’s passion for iteration, reproduction, and endless multiplications of words.

K ALLADO-MCDOWELL

John Giorno is a fascinating figure through which to look at our respective historical periods, especially now, because of the way we’re using language and how technology and language are interacting, the way language is being distributed. And also given the intensely social element in Giorno’s practice, the way he narrated his life through relationships. It’s not just the technology, but how technology and sociality are intertwined through relationships, and how his work is deeply entwined with relationships. I regard his memoir *Great Demon Kings* (2020)<sup>1</sup> as a codex to interpret his work.

MARCUS BOON

John’s relationship to his collaborators was complex—and of course it’s very hard to disentangle the romantic, sexual, artistic, and social aspects of his relationships with these famous men, for instance Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, William S. Burroughs, or Brion Gysin. John produced poetry—and by poetry I mean not only words written on a page, or performances, but sound-poem recordings, psychedelic happenings that included poems played through amplified speakers, the *Dial-A-Poem* (1968–ongoing) events at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the later poem-paintings in which phrases are writ large on canvas, or on stone, in which he freely acknowledged the influences of these figures and relationships. Until he met his husband, Ugo Rondinone, I think there was an asymmetry to the collaborations in that they were not necessarily acknowledged by the various collaborators—or by the world more generally—as being valuable in the way they thought their own work was valuable. The exhibition-installation *I ♥ JOHN GIORNO*, which Rondinone organized at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, and various venues in New York between 2015 and 2017, was a massive and much-needed act of reparation in those terms. I’m so happy John got to see it. Giorno’s memoir, which I helped edit, has an

interesting history. He wrote it over decades, accumulating these vignettes describing, say, having sex with Rauschenberg, or time spent with Gysin, which were like routines that he developed and performed over the years. The first four hundred or so pages of the manuscript were a kind of autobiographical greatest hits, filled with descriptions of famous people and his relationships to them. But in the next two hundred pages, there was a radical shift of tone, with John taking this very deep dive into his own Italian ancestry. In the last two decades of his life, Giorno spent a lot of time in Italy, working to track his family’s ancestry in the Basilicata region all the way back to medieval times. And his Buddhist beliefs became entangled with thoughts on this Italian ancestry. He wrote poems like “God Is Man Made” (2015) in which he imagined the Italian medieval ancestors being like Tibetan meditators who were having these realizations of emptiness within the context of a Christian practice.

It was pretty far out, and my initial reaction was like, “What is this? This doesn’t fit at all with the pages before!” I felt bad for saying so, because he was revealing something about himself that was, within the context of the autobiography, very separate from his collaborations. He understood that what people expected

and wanted from him were the stories about famous people. When he revealed this other aspect of his own personal past, he perhaps expected that it would be rejected, and in fact, it was edited out of the memoir. I felt that we fell into a trap there, in that his own individuality and separateness from his collaborators got crossed out yet again. I think that separateness really comes across in his poetry, especially the great poems from the 1970s and 1980s like “Grasping at Emptiness” (1978), which are driven by a tension between gregarious social scenes and overwhelming feelings of aloneness, sadness, wanting something and never quite getting it—which of course is what opens up into a Buddhist vision of emptiness-awareness in the poems.

Something that recently came up in a conversation with curator Laura Hoptman in the context of the exhibition *John Giorno: Jasmine Burn* at kurimanzutto, New York, was that both of us had asked him, “Why didn’t you have a chapter about your own poetry in your memoir?” Giorno was one of the great innovators of twentieth-century poetry and poetics, yet I think he felt his poems had failed from a certain point of view and that nobody wanted to hear about them. Which is quite strange, because at other times he was obviously very proud of what he did and believed in it enough to pursue it over many decades. So there’s an interesting tension between his practices of collaboration and his own work, in which the latter seemed to fall into a weird void, even as he wrote in that void and did something extraordinary there, too.

K

Right, there are only one or two poems included in the memoir, but Giorno does open up about the ways his poetry comes alive with sound and performance, like the repetition that he uses. He talks about the process of writing and using repetition in writing to create emphasis, and anyone who has heard him perform understands what the function of that repetition was. It brings to mind Diane di Prima (1934–2020) and some of her use of repetition. It made me feel like I was missing out on what poetry was for those people in their lives as they lived them, in the spaces and times where they heard the poetry. It’s not obvious when you read it on the page, but the orality of it, and its relationship with recording, transmission, broadcast, and the telephone is obvious when you watch readings on YouTube or experience *Dial-A-Poem*.

It’s unfortunate that it wasn’t expressed in the memoir, but discovering it through the audio recordings really changed my perspective on what that was for him. You’re absolutely right that things are missing in the memoir, and it seems to come from that same fear he expresses all through the text—that he’s being overshadowed by other people, but at the same time, he’s allowing them to overshadow him. He’s constantly talking about how he’s putting his feelings aside to make other people happy, but because he adores them and worships them.

This is just one of the many ironies and contradictions that relentlessly surface in his writing, in the way he frames a story. He’ll tell a story, describing something really horrible, and say, “This is the worst thing that ever happened,” and then, “We thought it was so funny and so fabulous.” Or he’ll say, “I was full of bliss and ecstatic that I was acknowledged by these people, these heroes of mine,” and then the next sentence is, “And then I was extremely depressed for a year.” Really intense contradictions.

MARCUS

I think that’s part of his Buddhism, and part of what makes his poems so great. He’s able



to hold those contradictions together—in the work, but also in his life. “It was totally horrible and it was great!” That’s how he was about people as well. He was a fairly gossipy person, and he would say about a certain poet’s work: “Oh my god, they’re the worst, just dreadful poems. How can anyone bear to listen to them?” And then he’d be like, “But they’re fantastic,” and just shrug. There was that Buddhist sense of emptiness, of the way one thing turns into another, the way in which all experiences, anything that happens to us, is beyond concepts. As soon as you apply concepts or judgments or feelings to things, you’re trapped in a world of delusion. “The world just makes me laugh,” as he said in “Welcoming the Flowers” (2004).

What was amazing about Giorno is that he allowed himself to experience all these feelings so deeply. There was always a space there for those feelings or experiences, whatever they were, to turn into something else. Most of his poems follow that basic structure. They begin with some scene of worldly fabulousness—parties, drinks, getting high, sex, whatever—a peak is reached, and then a black hole suddenly yawns in the middle of this great experience. There’s a very intense depressive feeling, and everything turns to shit. Then in the heart of the abyss, in the heart of abjection, this Buddhist vision of emptiness suddenly opens up, and there’s a feeling of equanimity, of the darkness and the light interchanging, and an affirmation that it’s all beyond concepts. Think of his poem “Suicide Sutra” (1975), one of his greatest. The idea of “suicide” and “sutra” stuck together—a Buddhist practice of suicide—it’s incredible and strange. He takes you through this visualization of killing yourself, and then afterward the act has changed nothing, and you’re, in some weird reincarnated sense, still there. The whole thing has happened in this expanse of emptiness-awareness.

κ He mentions Chöd practice too, so there’s direct parallels. There’s also the moment where he gives the Dalai Lama a copy of the poem “Balling Buddha” (1970). There is an element of East-West interaction that is very generational. I am at the end of Gen X, early millennial, from the San Francisco Bay Area, and reading this, it was very clear to me how the exile of Tibetan Buddhism impacted New York specifically. The artists of that generation there who are known for their Buddhist practices had a specific geopolitical history that influenced their spiritual paths. There’s also—I feel a little bad for saying this—a kind of “boomer thing” going on with the East that fell apart in so many different ways over that time period, but was also authentic in so many other ways, and was connected to crazy wisdom traditions, to tantra and the indulgence in hedonism as a path of spirituality.

I’ve had a lot of frustration trying to parse out how much those traditions achieved what they sought to achieve through loss of judgment, or embracing non-dualistic perception, or non-judgment on the path to enlightenment. But Giorno’s reversals and Buddhist flips of perception were enlightening. They were also really frustrating in this generational sense as I’ve experienced it, from the way the East intersected with the West in the mid-century and the ways that it was misinterpreted, the current conversations we have now about what’s happening with wellness and spirituality. This is why I think

it’s an important entry back into those moments, his life, because he touched on technology, community, spirituality, health.

Also, Eastern religion seems a place where queer people found spiritual practice at that time. It seems like that was a big piece of what was going on there too: a path toward spiritual practice seemingly without the judgment of Christianity.

MARCUS

For sure. I’ve been spending a lot of time in the last year or two reading Christopher Isherwood’s *Diaries* (1939–60/1960–69/1970–83). Isherwood studied with Swami Prabhavananda at the Vedanta Society temple in Hollywood from the 1940s on. He’s very explicit about how for him, as a gay man, Vedanta was an open religion that allowed him to be himself in a way that he couldn’t within a Christian context. And I think that was true for John too—he talked about the way that, even when it didn’t explicitly come up, he felt accepted a gay man, as a human being, by H. H. Dudjom Rinpoche, the great Nyingma Tibetan Buddhist he began studying with in the early 1970s. I think for John, gay liberation, Buddhist enlightenment, and the total aesthetic and political freedom that the twentieth century avant-gardes were seeking all came together in a complex but intuitive way in his poems.

I’m also a practicing Tibetan Buddhist, Gen X

I guess, so my perspective on this is somewhat specific, but for me, so many of these East-West experiments were a kind of train wreck. Anyone who’s participated in actual Western Buddhist communities knows how crazy, distorted, and exasperating they are. I don’t even think it’s just a problem of “Western Buddhists” or boomers. To my mind, Buddhism, wherever it’s found, is a work in progress, an unfinished project, and the pathos of it is contained in that fog of suffering and delusion in which we find ourselves and from which we—collectively!—try to free ourselves. One of the things I liked about Giorno’s interest in Buddhism is that he never set himself up as a teacher or a savant, even though he hosted many Buddhist teachers over the years at the Bunker and elsewhere, he practiced every day on his own, and beyond that, Buddhism was integrated into the practice of the poems themselves. Something like the AIDS Treatment Project, which John ran starting in the 1980s in response to the AIDS crisis, strikes me as very Buddhist in its practice of unlimited compassion, just giving out money to whoever needed it, without preset criteria or conditions. But John never, to my knowledge, talked about it in Buddhist terms.

Some of what you might call the “ideology of Buddhism” has become clear over time, with all the scandals around gurus, teachers, and so on. The often massive gaps between what is said and what is done. And our understanding of cultural appropriation, of what it means to take ideas from another culture and present them as one’s own, have shifted a lot. Giorno was always fairly modest about it. When I first met him, I got interested in editing the poems and wanted to talk to him about being a Buddhist poet, and he would always say, “No, I’m not a Buddhist poet. I’m a poet and I’m a Buddhist, but I’m not a Buddhist poet. I believe in compartmentalization!” I found that kind of shocking, iconoclastic. It shook my fantasy of “Buddhist poetry,” but it also made no sense if you considered even the titles of his poems: “Suicide Sutra,” “Grasping at Emptiness” (1978), “Vajra Kisses” (1972), and so on. To me, John took the open field of twentieth-century poetry—T. S. Eliot, Allen Ginsberg, Charles Olson—and transformed it via a Buddhist idea of space and emptiness, generating a new kind of poetry and a new way of registering what mind is.

I was reading some of his old emails recently, and I found one where he’s talking about how he thinks a poem works. He explains that, first of all, the poem itself is a mirror of mind so that when the poet writes, the poet mirrors both his/her/their individual mind but also mind more generally, and the poem manifests in and as language, a mirroring of mind. When you perform the poem live to an audience, the mirror appears in the minds of all of the audience members so that you suddenly have, say, five hundred mirrors, because each listener has this mirror experience where the language mirrors their own mind, but it also mirrors the poet’s—and the collective mind too.

That’s a really interesting path into something like *Dial-A-Poem*, where if the essence of poetry is to mirror mind, then poetry does become in part a question of distribution and dissemination. In *Dial-A-Poem*, the phone system, and then LP recordings and radio, become a way of multiplying the mirrors. Of course, today the internet multiplies the mirror effects even more. There’s a whole Buddhist media theory that you can tease out of Giorno’s work. Even that first stage, where the poem appears as a mirroring of the poet’s mind, but not necessarily like a confessional poem in the old-fashioned sense where it’s, like, my heart and soul poured into words. There’s something more: the words of the poem that appear in your mind could come from anywhere. They could come from a queer pornographic text that in 1965 suddenly appeared to John as a poem in “Pornographic Poem” (1965). They could be things overheard in a conversation, or cut-ups from the news media, television—who knows where the words that appear in our minds come from?

When Giorno started working with Robert Moog in the late 1960s on the sound pieces, he was interested in echo effects, in multiplying the ways in which words echo themselves. This was also an important part of the Poésie Sonore scene in Paris that he participated in from the mid-1960s. He also pursued this with the dual-column poems in which the words in one column are reflected and echoed in the other. Perhaps on the basis of his experiences in meditation, he was fascinated by the ways in which the words echo and echo and echo and echo. He pursued that with *Dial-A-Poem*, with the paintings, with the slogans, which are like Instagram pieces designed in 1989. It’s fantastic that he could imagine a poem as something that would later be so adaptable to an Instagram feed.

κ

I thought of a couple of things when you were mentioning Buddhist media theory and repetition. Through automation, the prayer flag and the prayer wheel are machines for propagating language and mantra. I’ve done quite a bit of looking back at broadcast media,<sup>2</sup> thinking about all the phases of it we’ve been through, and it seems that at that moment, people were trying to understand how broadcast messages were changing consciousness. *Dial-A-Poem*, and those kinds of projects, were trying to use a newly dominant consciousness-manipulating broadcast medium to propagate a different frequency, or a different set of sensibilities and identities, through electronic media.

This idea of a Buddhist media theory—where you are looking at the way language repeats, looking at the way automated systems propagate language that propagates consciousness, that propagates identity, that propagates lifestyle possibilities or ways of living, life-ways—makes it seem like we’re very clearly living in the aftermath of that negotiation. There was a singular source for all that broadcast, or a few singular sources, and now we’re living in a world of memes, so the idea of an Instagram slogan, painting, or message is very close to our minds. The idea of viral replication of ideas, all these things that

were in the avant-garde stew of philosophy of language, are lived in a very real way, every day, by people now.

Looking at the psychological effects of generations who have grown up with social media, I think it’s not at all a stretch to say that a Buddhist media theory would be quite useful in understanding what this is doing to us. In helping us ameliorate the effects of repetition of messages, of repetition and amplification of language. The Buddhist understanding of mind and attention, and the Buddhist techniques that reveal and reshape identity, can be immensely helpful in our current media environment. At the same time, technocentric logics often get folded into attempts to distribute or “scale” these techniques, and the originating context gets lost. Ideally, this synthesis would come from East and West, as in Yuk Hui’s work framing technology through Chinese cosmology. In any case, it’s not a stretch to say that media heavily structure our desires, and Buddhism has powerful techniques for working with desire.

MARCUS

In my book *In Praise of Copying* (2010), I tried to explore and develop that. I’ve been thinking about René Girard and his concept of mimetic desire—the way in which what we desire is always a copy of what we think someone else has, or wants, or is doing. The whole thing for Girard is a disaster, because we’re always copying and repeating something that we think someone else desires or needs. Which leads to rivalry, jealousy, and violence. One of my questions in *In Praise of Copying* was that if there is mimetic desire, and if we can’t help ourselves from copying and repeating, are there other traditions that approach repetition in a way that’s different, that heads off in a different direction?

It’s quite striking that Giorno gave up doing the more media-based work in the last twenty years of his life and returned to a more existential idea of poetry, where the poet is standing physically in a space and speaking the poems to a site-specific (though open) community. Even the paintings have a particular presence. They need to be seen for themselves and in person, and although they can be amplified through something like Instagram, it’s like Giorno wanted to move away from this echoing and multiplication of mass media toward some other idea of community, practice, and being together. We see these ideas circulating today in, for instance, Jenny Odell’s critique of the attention economy. The idea that if the mind is the new factory, the place of alienated labor in a neuro-capitalist society, then regaining control over “the means of production” (our minds) takes on a new kind of political, even revolutionary, meaning.

That might be a good place to talk about the importance of psychedelics in Giorno’s work. John famously did these poetry-happening-installation pieces called ESPEs (Electro Sensory Poetic Environments) from 1967 to 1970, where a pitcher of LSD featured as one of the attractions. I remember John saying that he still took LSD a couple of times a year, even in his last years, just to keep his mind loose. Psychedelics famously have a mind-revealing quality to them. I’m curious about that in your own work, K. I read your book *Pharmako-AI* (2020), and if art is about the mirroring of mind, I thought *Pharmako-AI* was so interesting because it seemed like you were presenting two new, but not new at all, mirrors of the mind—AI and ayahuasca—and how they might mirror each other, but also how some new way of articulating what mind is might be emergent from that. I’m curious whether you were thinking in those terms when you were working on that project.

κ

I was definitely thinking about AI as a medium that is easier to understand if you have ex-



perience with psychedelics. For me, there is something very psychedelic about the experience of working with AI. I think that AI is mind manifesting, maybe not in the sense that it itself has a mind in the conventional definition, but rather that when we interact with it, mind is manifested, like the way that Burroughs and Giorno practiced manifesting a third mind between the two of them by sitting in meditation together. This is maybe something that's happening as well with AI, which is built from language, from massive amounts of other people's language. There is a manifestation of mind in the way that we use it, but we have to understand ourselves differently in observing how that works.

I think you're right that *Pharmako-AI* is pointing to a different sense of who we are and a different type of subjectivity. I think our moment is defined by the emergence of a kind of post-humanism. We need to balance speculative or techno-fetishistic post-humanism with an ecological version of post-humanism, where we see ourselves as part of a larger network that is technological in nature but also biological, organic, and ecological.

To me, all signs point to the shedding of the anthropocentric worldview as a deep necessity for survival in the twenty-first century. The literary history of psychedelics that Giorno is a part of was a trail for me personally to understand how we could reconceive our subjectivity as more expansive. Part of my research for this conversation was watching Ginsberg interviewed by William F. Buckley Jr., which is a really illuminating video, especially now.<sup>3</sup> It struck me how much Ginsberg is talking about the originating insight of the Beat Generation and the hippies being that our consciousness is more than just our individual ego self, which obviously resonates with Buddhism, Hinduism, and psychedelics. But it also struck me how much that is still the project of trying to live with these cognitive technologies, and live with the ecological crisis. Those things are challenging the definition of ourselves, and that message still resonates.

There are many ways that we can see it playing out technically. AI is part of that. But the message they were trying to present is still the one we have to unpack. It made me question whether I am also just repeating something I grew up with. I'm from Northern California, and I lived in San Francisco for nine years. I was brainwashed into this hippie stuff, too. Am I just regurgitating that message, or have I actually come upon it organically?

MARCUS

One thing I found interesting in *Pharmako-AI* is the gentleness with which these two very different technologies and voices are addressing each other, or relating to each other. It's surprising how nonviolent their interplay is. I thought that was a real achievement. Looking back at someone like William Gibson, who was obviously very influenced by Burroughs—in books like *Neuromancer* (1984), AI is such a violent, blunt force. I don't know whether you're actually interested in the *synthesis* of psychedelics and AI, but certainly that they would touch each other a little bit—

K

It's more an existential condition that I'm trying to accept and deal with. It goes back to those mid-century moments, with Xerox PARC, Douglas Engelbart, the Bay Area counterculture, psychedelics, and technolo-

gy all being huge pieces of that terroir. This is the world that I happen to be in, and they're both maturing in a certain way at this time. I don't know if I *want* to synthesize them, but it's necessary to orient myself in the world I inhabit.

Questions of the military and the violence of technology are constantly on my mind, especially now, given recent news stories about what AI is being used for, and the disagreements between the researchers and the companies that develop it regarding how it's being deployed. Going back to conversations that were happening in the 1960s, so much of this discussion around consciousness, psychedelics, pleasure, sexuality, and censorship was happening against the military-industrial complex, and I don't see that right now—even though war is actively breaking out and there's widespread protests. Somehow those things got a little disconnected in our understanding, in our discourse. The anti-war movement was, back then, such a critical piece of the conversation, and when they talked about consciousness, they addressed it within the context of military actions overseas. Something's missing there today, I feel.

MARCUS

Partly, on the left it feels like there has been a relatively uncritical adoption of social media as a transparent and effective part of political mobilization, while right-wing politicians seem to have a much more cynical and dark vision of "InfoWars" and the ability of AI and digital media more generally to manipulate populations and gain strategic advantage in war zones. I go back to the writing of someone like the English Romantic poet William Blake (a major influence on the Beats, and Ginsberg in particular) and his idea of "mental warfare." Which I take to mean that the mind itself is a field of neuropolitical struggle—a struggle that unfortunately the right has a much better handle on than the left at the moment. I think you're right: all of that was much clearer to the Beats than it is to most of us today, partly because of the successes of liberalism in realizing some of the demands of 1960s protest movements within the framework of the neoliberal marketplace, such that we have tended to trust these technosocial institutions, or at least imagine them as neutral, when in fact they're not.

As for psychedelics, maybe the politics of psychedelics and ayahuasca point toward a different kind of eco-politics and politics of indigeneity that's also playing itself out on a global scale. This struggle is amplified and distorted in all kinds of ways by ayahuasca tourism and the explosion of interest in psychedelics as medicine and therapy, so that you have huge amounts of money pouring into places that historically had very little money and agency, and the rapid privatization of a vast human-nonhuman commons of the Amazon region. Again, it feels like you're in the middle of a very complicated struggle, and it's not clear what a real emancipatory perspective on that would be.

Not to be too smooth about it, but I do find meaningful the fact that Giorno went back to this idea of the poverty of poetry, especially that it came down to a presentation of the self that was relatively organic and realistic. There's an interesting politics to that as well. I teach contemporary literature classes, and it's striking how many novels about the internet feature someone who throws away or loses their iPhone, often as an attempt to escape social media. This seems like a basic impulse today, to try to "leave society," as Tao Lin says. But then two days later, they just buy another iPhone.

There's a human drama there that's playing out in terms of who we are, what we actually want, that is very intense. The entire power of global capitalism is focused on amplifying desire in all these complex ways, and we're left wondering what it would mean to have politics that could actually step outside of that and speak to it.

K

What you're saying makes me think of the avant-garde, and of the radical possibilities of technology that they were trying to forefront. I feel it's so important, when there's a new technology, to as soon as possible establish its radical possibilities and potential, so as to raise the bar of expectations. This is what I was trying to do with *Pharmako-AI*: How far can I take this thing now? There's obviously some less-interesting things we can do with it, but how can an art form, or a new medium, establish itself with the most interesting beginning? Things like *Dial-A-Poem* were ways of bringing the radical possibilities of a new medium forward as early as could possibly be done.

One of the things that drives me crazy about the internet, and now even more so with chat-based AI systems, is that you can learn anything so much more quickly than you ever could in all of human history, yet people choose to do so many other things. So many distractions, so much numbing that people are seeking from technology versus the enrichment that's waiting there. This was the dream of the internet in the beginning, and I think this was the dream of all these avant-garde technology programs: to bring forth the poetics, the radical possibilities, of technology. Instead we get the baseline of human interest, what we are manipulated into desiring.

Going on YouTube and seeing videos of Giorno reading with ten thousand views, hearing the poetry in that very organic way, recorded and capturing the depth of the voice, the presence, and the way his experience travels, having access to his memoir and being able to put it all together—this is the radical possibility of distribution. At the same time, there are these crazy-naïve developments, like the NPC characters trend on TikTok, where people are role-playing video game characters, or the way that language is developed—even just, like, vocal fry and "influencer voice." Certain things that are happening are definitely phenomena of this network, and the way language and voice move through platforms like TikTok, the evolutions of language that are extremely radical, schizo posters and things like that, those are also really radical, but maybe they're not understood that way. It seems there's still some potential for a profound use of these technologies, but it's buried in a sea of garbage, unfortunately.

MARCUS

In terms of the mirroring of mind, the internet is the most detailed mirror of the human mind that has existed by a long shot, and for good and bad reasons, the granularity of that mirror is only going to increase. But this brings us back to fundamental philosophical questions of who we are, and as much as it's important to be capacious in our understanding of the vastness of the forms of human consciousness, and accommodating that in its absolute multiplicity, the danger is that we mistake the endlessly variable content that appears in the mirror for what is truly astonishing but hidden—the mirror of awareness itself. Perhaps, even beyond these

questions about the planet, about sharing it, what all these mirrors we've surrounded ourselves with ask is that we address ourselves, actually face ourselves in detail. And that's the hardest thing to do.

That's what I think is so helpful about the way that mirror is framed within Buddhism. You have a mirror that is non-dual, that is beyond concepts, but you also have an aspiration toward compassion, toward awareness, and there's a guiding light, a North Star, even within the field of non-conceptual understanding. There's still something that your conceptual mind can grasp and work toward as an aspiration. We've lost some of that. There isn't consensus around what we're aspiring toward as people, or as a culture. It's a funny story, but I know somebody who recently met some aliens and they were like, "This planet is so trashy. You guys are just really trashy."

The takeaway is, we have this beautiful paradise that we've been living in, and look what we've done with it. Maybe there's some access to its outside through fiction, or through certain kinds of stories that would help us get a little perspective.

MARCUS

I suppose the hope with psychedelics, as with Buddhism, is that that perspective would become an existential fact for people. A few lines from Giorno's poem "It Doesn't Get Any Better" (2008) come to mind:

"It doesn't get better  
it doesn't get better,  
it doesn't get any better,  
it doesn't get any better than this,  
it doesn't get any more fabulous;  
and as bad as it is,  
it does not get any better."<sup>4</sup>

There's something so emancipating about it. You'd think that that's the worst thing you could find out—that it doesn't get any better, can't get any better—but in a way, an acceptance of that is really profound.

K

It's a perfect expression of that duality, and such a perfect conclusion to this conversation.



- 1 John Giorno, *Great Demon Kings: A Memoir of Poetry, Sex, Art, Death, and Enlightenment* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020).
- 2 K Allado-McDowell, "Neural Interpellation," *Gropius Bau Journal*, 2024, <https://www.berlinerfestspiele.de/en/gropius-bau/programm/journal/2024/kalladomcdowellneural>.
- 3 Allen Ginsberg in conversation with William F. Buckley Jr., "Firing Line with William F. Buckley Jr.: The Avant Garde," May 7, 1968, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBpoZBhvBa4>.
- 4 Full text: "It doesn't get better / it doesn't get better, / it doesn't get any better, / it doesn't get any better than this, / it doesn't get any more fabulous; and as bad as it is, / it does not get any better. / Stuck in a traffic jam and the scenery is beautiful, / irritating gusts of boredom, / and on the radio is playing, / if you don't like my oceans don't swim in my seas, / you can't hurt me, / cause storms can't hurt the sky, / sugar skulls / and long necklaces of rotting human skulls / of police officers, lawyers and judges / symbolizing the triumph over abuse and injustice, / fat chance, / ring da alarm, / being always addicted to anger, / when you have hepatitis / everything looks yellow, / my anger ate the goose / that laid the golden eggs, / thick bacon and a little something sweet, / and a most surprising change / is becoming the god of your enemy, / the eagles fly below us. / The illusion / that makes life bearable / the illusion that makes / life bearable / the illusion that makes life bearable, / when you lose / the illusion / that makes life bearable, / when you lose the illusion / that makes life bearable, / when you've lost whatever it is / you believed or invented, / were imprinted or scarred by, / unthinkable loss, / deluded inside delusion inside delusion inside delusion, / everything is delusion / including wisdom, / and then, there is the illusion, / that makes life / bearable / the illusion / that makes life bearable, / the illusion that makes life bearable, / abiding / in the continual flow, / I'm here to do / whatever is your pleasure, / empty words, / gone without a trace. / All I had to do, / was get / through it / all I had to do / was get through it / all I had to do was get through it, / you can't win / you can't break even / and you can't even quit the game, / it doesn't get better / it doesn't get better, / it does not get any better, / the sand is snow, / a hurricane in a drop of cum / You will find / your true love / in the end / you will find your true / love in the end, / you will find your true love in the end, / when you die / you will find your true love / in your mind, / when you die / you will find your true mind, / in the deepest night is the brightest light, / clear, / unlocatable, / emptiness / awareness."



**K ALLADO-MCDOWELL**

is a writer, speaker, and musician. They are the author, with GPT-3, of the books *Pharmako-AI* (Ignota, 2020), *Amor Cringe* (Deluge, 2022), *Air Age Blueprint* (Ignota, 2022), and *And Out Side. Between Art and Hallucination* (JBE Books, 2024), and a coeditor of *The Atlas of Anomalous AI* (Ignota, 2020). They created the neuro-opera *Song of the Ambassadors* (2022) and record and release music under the name Qenric. Allado-McDowell established the Artists + Machine Intelligence program at Google AI. They are a conference speaker, educator, and consultant to think tanks and institutions seeking to align their work with deeper traditions of human understanding. Allado-McDowell has spoken at TED, the New Museum, Tate, Serpentine Gallery, HKW, the Moderna Museet, Christie's, the MacArthur Foundation, MfN Berlin, Ars Electronica, Sónar, and many other venues, and has taught at SCI-Arc, Strelka Institute, and IAAC.

**MARCUS BOON**

is a writer and professor of English at York University in Toronto. He is the author of *The Road of Excess: A History of Writers on Drugs* (Harvard University Press, 2002), *In Praise of Copying* (Harvard University Press, 2010), and *The Politics of Vibration: Music as a Cosmopolitical Practice* (Duke University Press, 2022) as well as coauthor (with Timothy Morton and Eric Cazdyn) of *Nothing: Three Inquiries in Buddhism* (University of Chicago Press, 2015). He coedited a collection of writings on practice in the visual arts with Gabriel Levine (MIT/Whitechapel, 2018) and is the editor of John Giorno's *Subduing Demons in America: Selected Poems, 1962–2007* (Soft Skull, 2008).



Top: John Giorno, Khenpo Palden Sherab, and Khenpo Tsewang during a Fire Puja at 222 Bowery, New York, 1997. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York. Bottom: *You're The Guy I Want To Share My Money With* art work originals: William Burroughs, Laurie Anderson, John Giorno, 1981. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York. Photo: Marcia Resnick







- 1–2 *Raspberry / Pornographic Poem*, 1967. The Intravenous Mind. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 3–4 *The Dial-A-Poem Poets*, 1972. Giorno Poetry Systems Records. © Giorno Poetry Systems. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 5–6 *The Dial-A-Poem Poets: Disconnected*, 1974. Giorno Poetry Systems Records. © Giorno Poetry Systems. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 7–8 *The Dial-A-Poem Poets: Biting Off the Tongue of a Corpse*, 1975. Giorno Poetry Systems Records. © Giorno Poetry Systems. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 9–10 *William S. Burroughs and John Giorno*, 1975. Giorno Poetry Systems Records. © Giorno Poetry Systems. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 11–12 *John Giorno and Anne Waldman: A Kulchur Selection*, 1977. Giorno Poetry Systems Records. © Giorno Poetry Systems. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 13–14 *The Nova Convention*, 1979. Giorno Poetry Systems Records. © Giorno Poetry Systems. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 15–16 *The Dial-A-Poem Poets: Sugar, Alcohol, & Meat*, 1980. Giorno Poetry Systems Records. © Giorno Poetry Systems. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 17–18 *You're The Guy I Want to Share My Money With*, 1981. Giorno Poetry Systems Records. © Giorno Poetry Systems. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 19–20 *The Dial-A-Poem Poets: Better An Old Demon Than A New God*, 1984. Giorno Poetry Systems Records. © Giorno Poetry Systems. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 21–22 *A Diamond Hidden in The Mouth of a Corpse*, 1985. Giorno Poetry Systems Records. © Giorno Poetry Systems. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 23–24 *Smack My Crack*, 1987. Giorno Poetry Systems Records. © Giorno Poetry Systems. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 25 Giorno Poetry Systems, mailer for the AIDS Treatment Project 1993–94 Fiscal/Physical Report, 1994. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 26 *A HURRICANE IN A DROP OF CUM*, 2012. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna
- 27 *I RESIGNED MYSELF TO BEING HERE*, 2012. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna
- 28 *I WANT TO CUM IN YOUR HEART*, 2012. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich
- 29 *IT DOESN'T GET BETTER*, 2012. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich
- 30 *EATING THE SKY*, 2012. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich
- 31 *FILLING WHAT IS EMPTY, EMPTYING WHAT IS FULL*, 2015. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich
- 32 *BAD NEWS IS ALWAYS TRUE*, 2015. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich
- 33 *EVERYONE IS A COMPLETE DISAPPOINTMENT*, 2015. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich
- 34 *PREFER CRYING IN A LIMO TO LAUGHING IN A BUS*, 2015. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich
- 35 *WE GAVE A PARTY FOR THE GODS*, 2015. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich
- 36 *THANX 4 NOTHING*, 2012. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich
- 37 *LIFE IS A KILLER*, 2015. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich
- 38 *DON'T WAIT FOR ANYTHING*, 2015. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich
- 39 *SPACE FORGETS YOU*, 2015. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich
- 40 *GOD IS MAN MADE*, 2015. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna
- 41 *FILLING WHAT IS EMPTY, EMPTYING WHAT IS FULL*, 2013. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna. Photo: Matthew Booth
- 42 *JUST SAY NO TO FAMILY VALUES*, 2015. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich
- 43 *EVERYTHING IS A DELUSION INCLUDING WISDOM*, 2015. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich
- 44 John Giorno handing out poems at Street Works event, New York, 1969. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York. Photo: Fred W. McDarrah
- 45–48 Bernadette Mayer and Vito Acconci, Street Works supplements, excerpt from *The Kama Sutra of John Giorno*, 1969. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 49–50 *Dial-A-Poem* reading schedules from Museum of Modern Art Log Book, New York, 1970. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 51 *Cancer In My Left Ball*. Barton, VT: Something Else Press, Inc., 1973. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 52 *Birds*. New York: Angel Hair Books, 1971. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 53 John Giorno and Richard Bosman, *Grasping At Emptiness*. New York: The Kulchur Foundation, 1985. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 54 *Subduing Demons In America: Selected Poems 1962–2007*. Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2007. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 55 John Giorno working on *Dial-A-Poem*, New York, 1969. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York. Photo: Michael McClanathan
- 56 John Giorno with *Dial-A-Poem*, New York, 1970. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York. Photo: Gianfranco Mantegna
- 57–59 *Ugo Rondinone: I ♥ John Giorno* installation views at Hunter College Art Galleries, New York, 2017. Collection Rubin Museum of Art. Photo: Daniel Pérez
- 60 John Giorno, India, 1971. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 61 John Giorno during a ceremony with His Holiness Dodrup Chen Rinpoche, Bunker, 222 Bowery, New York, 1989. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 62 *Balling Buddha*. New York: The Kulture Foundation, 1970. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 63 John Giorno, “Pornographic Poem,” in *Gay Power*, 1969. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 64 Giorno Poetry Systems, program for We Shall Live Again: A Benefit for AIDS Treatment Project, 1987. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 65 John Giorno reading, Paris, ca. 1980. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York. Photo: Françoise Janicot
- 66 John Giorno reading, Paris, 1976. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 67 John Giorno reading, City Lights Italia Festival, Florence, 1998. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York. Photo: Michele Corleone
- 68 John Giorno reading, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1983. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York. Photo: Françoise Janicot
- 69 John Giorno, letter to Joe Brainard and Kenward Elmslie, July 7, 1970. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 70 “Who says poetry should be READ?” in *Florida Flambeau*, 1982. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 71 John Giorno, cut-up letter to Brion Gysin, October 8, 1965. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 72 John Giorno and George Mulder, 1991. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 73 John Giorno, cut-up letter to Brion Gysin, 1965. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 74 John Giorno, cut-up letter to Brion Gysin, December 15, 1965. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 75 John Giorno, Les Levine, and Robert Rauschenberg, poster for *Three Events*, New York, 1967. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems Archive, New York
- 76 *UGO RONDINONE: I ♥ JOHN GIORNO* installation view at Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2015. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York. Photo: André Morin
- 77–78 Ugo Rondinone, *THANX 4 NOTHING*, 2015, *UGO RONDINONE: I ♥ JOHN GIORNO* installation views at Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2015. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York. Photo: André Morin
- 79 Pierre Huyghe, *Sleep Talking*, 1998, *Ugo Rondinone: I ♥ John Giorno* installation view at How! Happening, New York, 2017. © Pierre Huyghe by SIAE, Rome, 2024. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York. Photo: Daniel Pérez
- 80–81 *space forgets you* installation views at Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich, 2017. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York, and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich
- 82 *CRYSANTHEMUMS ARE A GARLAND OF SKULLS*, 2017. Courtesy: Thomas Brambilla Gallery, Bergamo. Photo: Matteo Zanardi
- 83 *PEONIES TOPPLING MILK OF MALICE*, 2017. Courtesy: Thomas Brambilla Gallery, Bergamo. Photo: Matteo Zanardi
- 84 *POPPIES PACKED WITH DRUG TREATS*, 2017. Courtesy: Thomas Brambilla Gallery, Bergamo. Photo: Matteo Zanardi
- 85 *ALMOST AMERICA ROSE*, 2017/2023. Courtesy: Thomas Brambilla Gallery, Bergamo. Photo: Matteo Zanardi
- 86 *CHERRY BLOSSOMS ARE RAZOR BLADES*, 2017/2023. Courtesy: Thomas Brambilla Gallery, Bergamo. Photo: Matteo Zanardi
- 87 *DAFFODILS BUPTIZED IN BUTTER*, 2017/2023. Courtesy: Thomas Brambilla Gallery, Bergamo. Photo: Matteo Zanardi
- 88 *IRIS PURPLE SPEARS UNSHEATH WRESTLING WRATHFUL*, 2017/2023. Courtesy: Thomas Brambilla Gallery, Bergamo. Photo: Matteo Zanardi
- 89 *ORCHIDS ARE THE TONGUES THAT LIED*, 2017/2023. Courtesy: Thomas Brambilla Gallery, Bergamo. Photo: Matteo Zanardi
- 90 *DAFFODILS BAPTIZED IN BUTTER*, 2017/2024. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and kurimanzutto, Mexico City / New York. Photo: Zach Hyman
- 91 *MARIGOLD TIGHT AS A CRAB'S ASS*, 2017/2024. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and kurimanzutto, Mexico City / New York. Photo: Zach Hyman
- 92 *ZINNIAS SHOUT POSITIVE PARANOIA*, 2017/2024. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and kurimanzutto, Mexico City / New York. Photo: Zach Hyman
- 93 *MARIGOLD TIGHT AS A CRAB'S ASS*, 2017. © John Giorno. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Almine Rech
- 94 *John Giorno: Jasmine Burn* installation view at kurimanzutto, New York, 2024. © kurimanzutto, Mexico City / New York. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and kurimanzutto, Mexico City / New York. Photo: Zach Hyman
- 95 *I am a Poet* installation view at Almine Rech, Shanghai, 2023. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Almine Rech. Photo: Alessandro Wang
- 96 *EVERYTHING IS DELUSION INCLUDING WISDOM*, 2015. Courtesy: Thomas Brambilla Gallery, Bergamo. Photo: Matteo Zanardi
- 97 *NOTHING RECEDES LIKE SUCCESS*, 2015. Courtesy: Thomas Brambilla Gallery, Bergamo. Photo: Matteo Zanardi
- 98 *God is Man Made* installation view at Almine Rech, Paris, 2015. © Giorno Poetry Systems, New York. Courtesy: Giorno Poetry Systems, New York and Almine Rech



TREAT A COMPLETE STRANGER  
 AS A LOVER, HUG THEM  
 AS GOOD FRIENDS, AS THEY ARE  
 OR AS 10 YEARS AGO YOU MIGHT HAVE HAD  
**FABULOUS SEX**  
 WITH ABSOLUTE ABANDON  
 WITH THE SAME STRANGER.  
 NOW LIFE IS RAVAGED  
 AND WE OFFER LOVE FROM THE SAME ROOT OF BOUNDLESS  
**COMPASSION**

A HURRICANE  
 IN A DROP  
 OF CUM

I RESIGNED  
 MYSELF  
 TO BEING HERE

I WANT TO  
**CUM**  
 IN YOUR HEART

IT DOESN'T  
**GET**  
 BETTER

EATING  
 THE SKY

**FILLING**  
 WHAT IS EMPTY  
**EMPTYING**  
 WHAT IS FULL



32  
**BAD NEWS  
IS ALWAYS  
TRUE**

33  
**EVERYONE  
IS A COMPLETE  
DISAPPOINTMENT**

38  
**DON'T  
WAIT  
FOR ANYTHING**

39  
**SPACE  
FORGETS  
YOU**

34  
**PREFER  
CRYING IN A LIMO  
TO LAUGHING ON A BUS**

35  
**WE GAVE A PARTY FOR  
THE GODS  
AND THE GODS  
ALL CAME**

40  
**GOD  
IS MAN MADE**

41  
**FILLING  
WHAT IS EMPTY  
EMPTYING  
WHAT IS FULL**

36  
**THANX  
4  
NOTHING**

37  
**LIFE  
IS A KILLER**

42  
**JUST SAY  
NO  
TO FAMILY VALUES**

43  
**EVERYTHING IS  
DELUSION  
INCLUDING WISDOM**





His fingers slowly spread  
 His fingers slowly spread  
 His fingers slowly spread  
 the fleshy hair-lined pussy-lips  
 the fleshy hair-lined pussy-lips  
 the fleshy hair-lined pussy-lips  
 apart, and his middle finger entered her cunt and his middle finger entered her cunt and started to explore the moist heat and started to explore the moist heat of the interior of her womb of the interior of her womb.

His fingers slowly spread  
 His fingers slowly spread  
 His fingers slowly spread  
 the fleshy hair-lined pussy-lips  
 the fleshy hair-lined pussy-lips  
 the fleshy hair-lined pussy-lips  
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from THE KAMA SUTRA OF JOHN GIORNO

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from THE KAMA SUTRA OF JOHN GIORNO

EXHIBITIONIST male, 27, handsome, loves nakedness, long hair, good ass, eight inches with foreskin, eight inches with foreskin. Will take it off anywhere, anytime, with anything or anyone, for public sex, photography, pornography and performing. you name it  
 EXHIBITIONIST male, 27, handsome, loves nakedness, long hair, good ass, eight inches with foreskin, eight inches with foreskin. Will take it off anywhere, anytime, with anything or anyone, for public sex, photography, pornography and performing. you name it

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from THE KAMA SUTRA OF JOHN GIORNO



DIAL-A-POEM, MOMA

	7032	7033	7034	7035	7036	7037	7040	7041	7074	7075	7076	7077
9/5	SINCLAIR	BORRUGHES	GINSBERG	"	"	BRAINARD	"	RAPHAEL	BURROUGHS	GINSBERG	"	"
9/6	24192	18468	15137	12244	9225	7602	4786	3252	2662	1863	2033	1631
9/7	DI PRIMA	O'HARA	WILLIAMS	CLEVER	HOFFMAN	GYSIN	SAROYAN	BERRIGAN	"	"	DI PRIMA	"
9/8	BURROUGHS	HOFFMAN	CLEVER	SEALE	GINSBERG	DI PRIMA	WALDMAN	HOFFMAN	WALDMAN	WALDMAN	WALDMAN	WALDMAN
9/9	WALDMAN	GINSBERG	DI PRIMA	NEFF	SEALE	BRAINARD	ELINDIE	SAROYAN	"	"	DI PRIMA	"
9/10	CAGE	BURROUGHS	SEALE	K. CLEVER	KANDEL	SINCLAIR	BROWNSTEIN	MACHOIS	BURROUGHS	"	"	K. CLEVER
9/11 2:30 pm	27607	21446	17468	14588	11521	9856	6750	5280	5958	3527	3757	3020

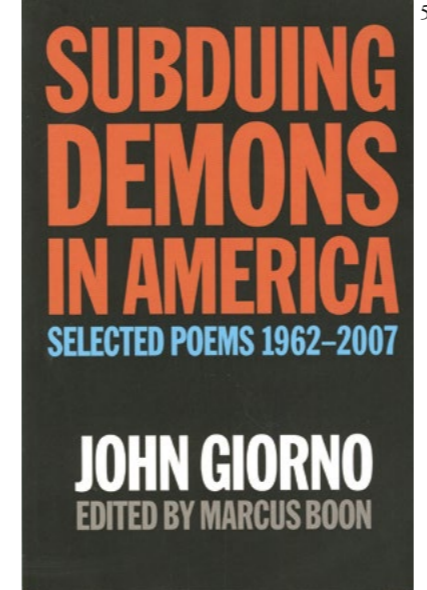
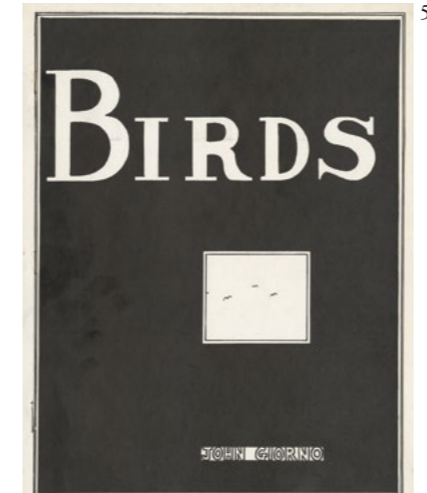
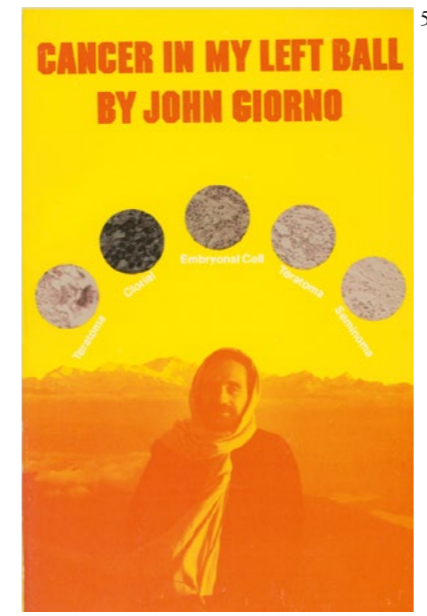
130, 778

DIAL-A-POEM, MOMA (SCHEDULE)

	956	7032	7033	7034	7035	7036	7037	7040	7041	7074	7075	7076	7077
7/3	ELDRIDGE	O'HARA	GINSBERG	HOFFMAN	MAHER	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
7/5	WALDMAN	ELDRIDGE	DI PRIMA	GINSBERG	O'HARA	HOFFMAN	CAGE	ROSENBERG	GINSBERG	DI PRIMA	ELDRIDGE	WALDMAN	WALDMAN
	5	10	9	10	7	7	5	8	8	10	10	10	10

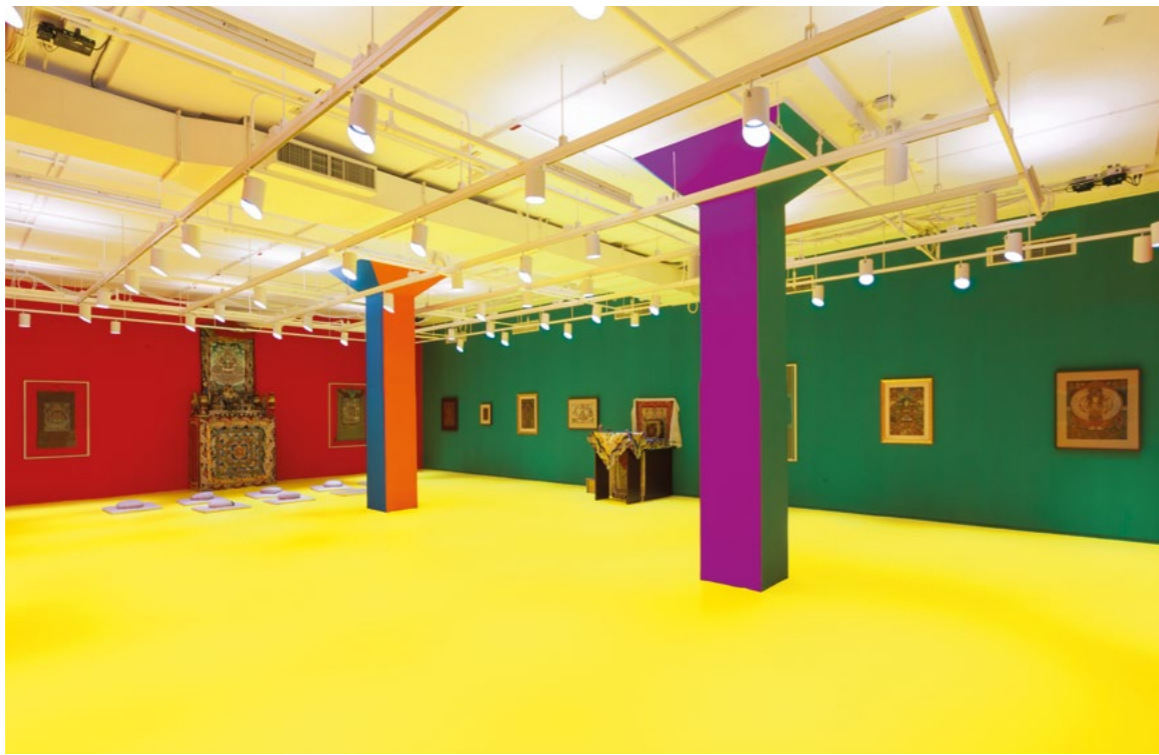
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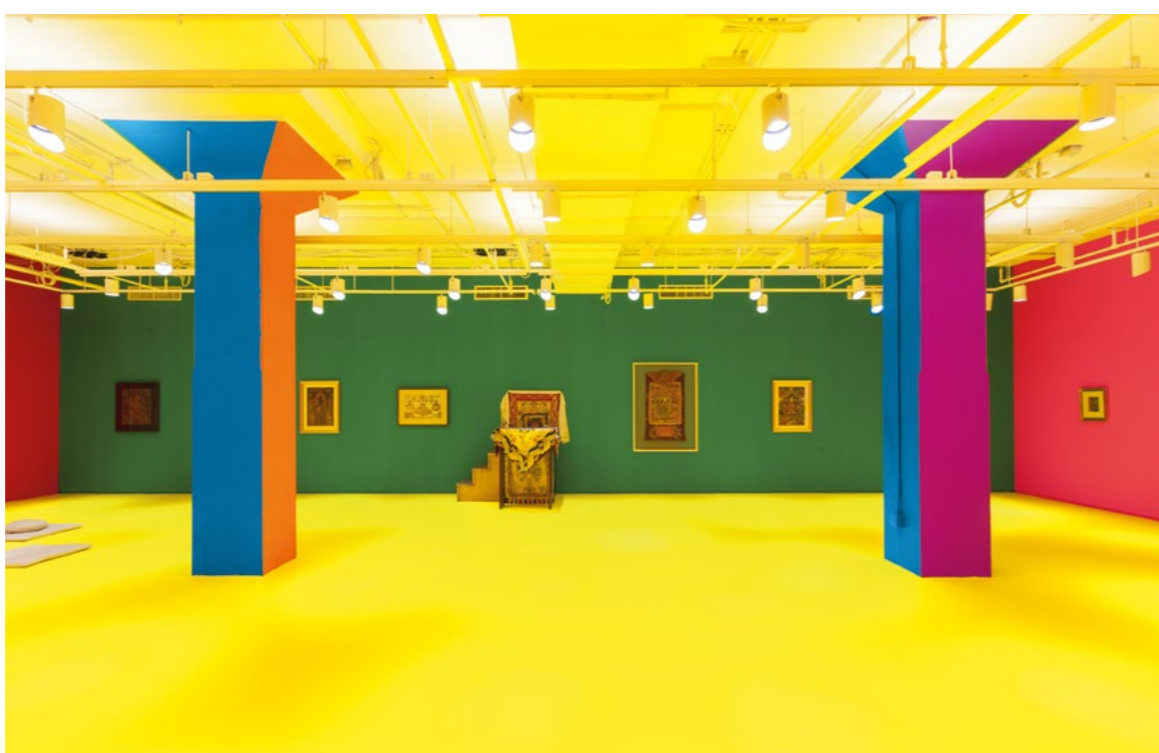
57



58



59

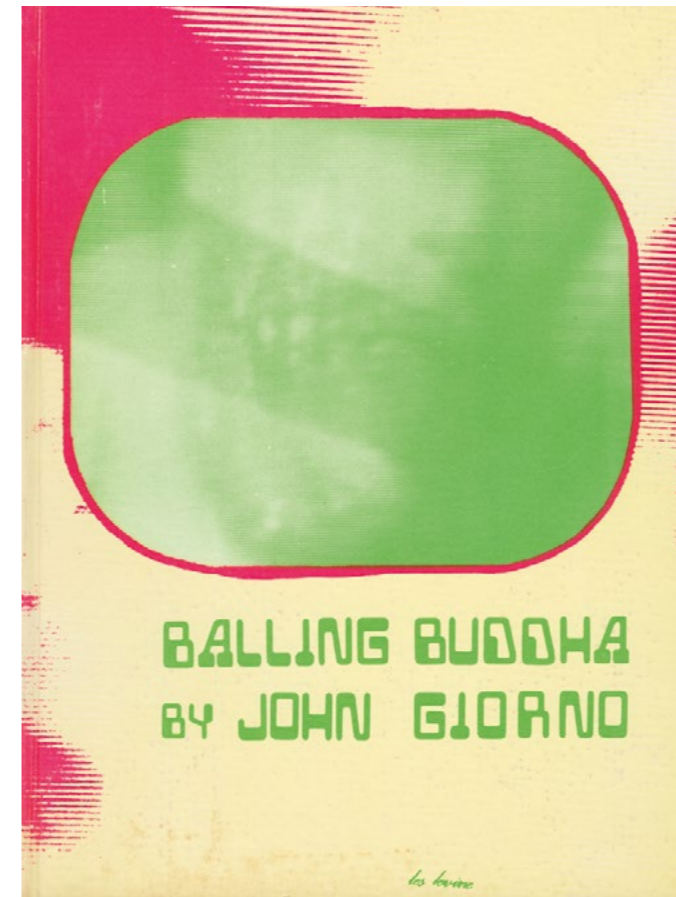


60



61

62







Seven Cuban  
 army officers  
 in exile  
 were at me  
 all night.  
 Tall,  
 sleek,  
 slender  
 Spanish types  
 with smooth dark  
 muscular bodies  
 and hair  
 like wet coal  
 on their heads  
 and between their legs.  
 I lost count  
 of the times  
 I was fucked  
 by them  
 in every conceivable  
 position.  
 At one point  
 they stood  
 around me  
 in a circle  
 and I had  
 to crawl  
 from one crotch  
 to another  
 sucking  
 on each cock  
 until it was hard.  
 When I got all  
 seven up  
 I shivered  
 looking up  
 at those erect pricks  
 all different lengths  
 and widths  
 and knowing  
 that each one  
 was going up  
 my ass hole.  
 Everyone  
 of them  
 came  
 at least twice  
 and some three times.  
 Once they put me  
 on the bed  
 kneeling,  
 one fucked me  
 in the behind,  
 another in the mouth,  
 while I jacked off  
 one  
 with each hand  
 and two  
 of the others  
 rubbed  
 their peckers  
 on my bare feet  
 waiting  
 their turns  
 to get  
 into my can.  
 Just when I thought  
 they were all spent  
 two of them  
 got together  
 and fucked me  
 at once.  
 The positions  
 we were in  
 were crazy  
 but with two  
 big fat  
 Cuban cocks  
 up my ass  
 at one time  
 I was  
 in paradise.

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# PORNOGRAPHIC POEM



## We Shall Live Again

Native American tribes despairing of ever regaining their nation, danced the ghost dance to revive their dead warriors so that they might at last have the strength to reclaim their lands, their hope and their self respect. After more than a decade of living day to day with the virus in our midst, it has for many, become a metaphor for the death of hope.



Tonight we gather here to reach out to our friends and lovers, and also to dance the ghost dance, to renew the hope and spirit of those left behind to fight.

### PLEASE NOTE!

During the spoken word portion (8:00 - 11:30) of tonight's program, if you need to smoke please step outside to do so.

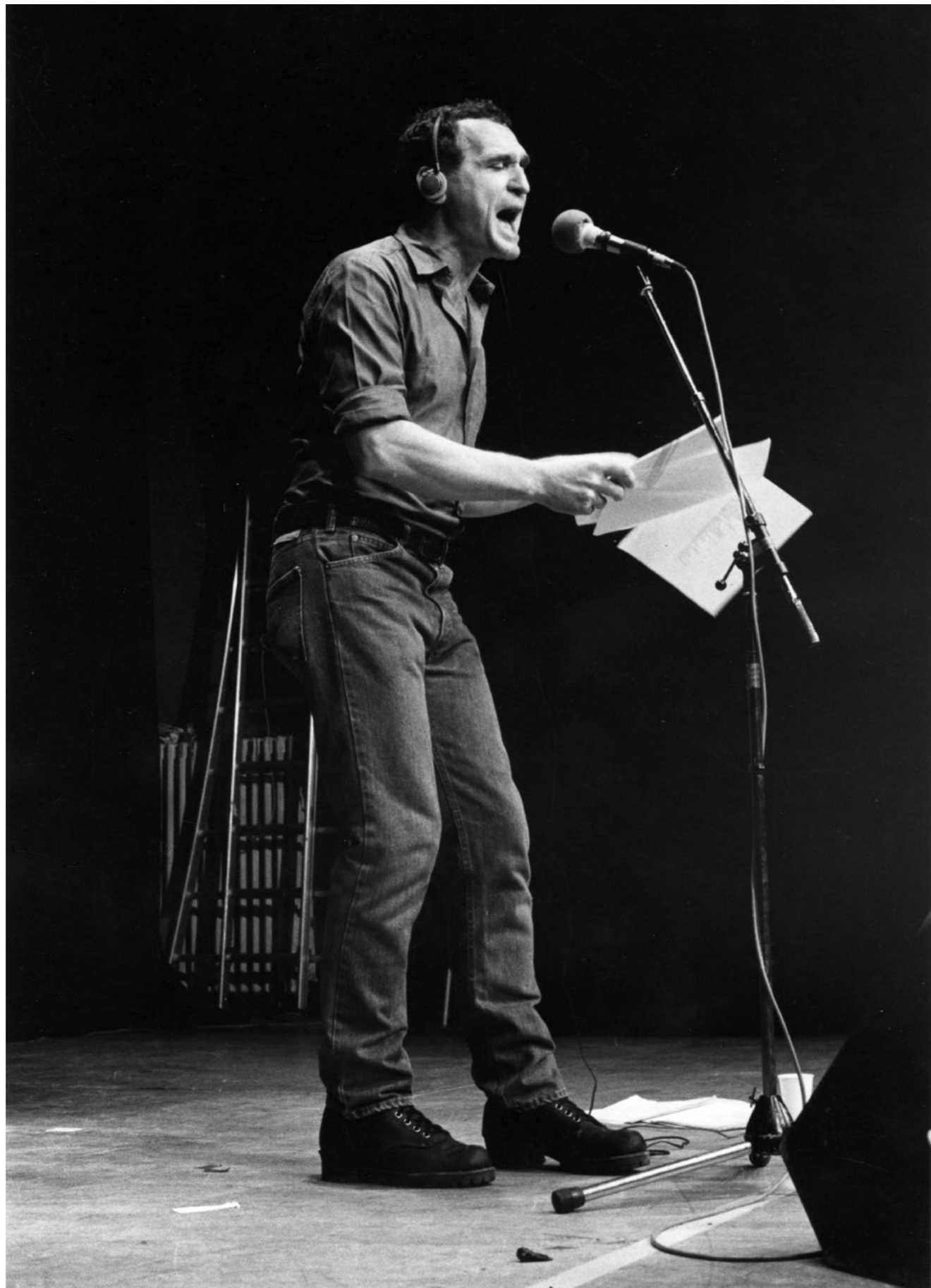
bottom line, emotionally, even a tiny charcoal scratching done as a gesture to mark a person's response to this epidemic means whole worlds to me if it is hung in public; bottom line, each and every gesture carries a reverberation that is meaningful in it's diversity; bottom line, we have to find our own forms of gesture and communication. You can never depend on the mass media to reflect us or our needs or our states of mind; bottom line, with enough gestures we can deafen the satellites and lift the curtains surrounding the control room.

- David Wojnarowicz -

Baron Von Blumenzak	8:00
Joe Budenholzer	8:07
Wanda Phipps	8:14
Jose Padua	8:21
Mike Osterhout	8:28
Ann Rower	8:35
Bob Holman	8:42
David Rattray	8:51
Carl Watson	8:58
Eileen Myles	9:07
John S Hall	9:19
Legs McNeil	9:26
Syvere Lotringer	9:38
Christian-X- Hunter	9:50
Taylor Mead	10:02
Peter Lamborn Wilson	10:14
David Huberman	10:26
Emily XYZ	10:33
John Giorno	10:40
Matthew Courtney	10:52
Kembra Phahler	10:59
Penny Arcade	11:06
HOMER EROTIC	
I LOVE EVERYBODY	
DRUNKEN BOAT	

AIDS Treatment Project wishes to thank: Brian Tobin - sound  
 Jeanne Palomino - lights  
 Christine Geugni - stage Mgr.





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# GIORNO POETRY SYSTEMS

July 7, 1970

Dear Joe & Kenward

Went down to Santa Fe for the Summer Solstice. About 1,000 of us camped in a dried out river bed in the desert for a week and did the heavy trip. On the morning of the solstice it rained while still dark and everyone gradually woke up and started chanting to the east and the rain stopped and dawn came and the chanting got louder and louder and the sun rose and there was an unbelievable rush.

DIAL-A-POEM began at The Museum Of Modern Art last week with 12 telephone lines and the number is (212) 956-7032. Both of you are in the catalog as poets, so please send tape.

Love John

222 BOWERY, NEW YORK, N. Y. 10012  
(212) 925-6372

# AT WEEK'S END

FLORIDA FLAMBEAU

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 29, 1982

John Giorno

## Who says poetry should be READ?

BY STEVE DOLLAR  
SPECIAL TO THE FLAMBEAU

Performance artist John Giorno is no poet in the conventional sense of the word. Employing the random images and phrases of everyday life and an inventive use of echo, reverb and electronic buzz, Giorno crafts his blank verse in a distinctly oral fashion.

Far from the tweedy wordsmith who cautiously composes every sentence, Giorno relies instead on a vocal-improvisational style that only really takes shape in live performance.

Tallahassee has its chance to see Giorno Saturday night at Smitty's Club on Bannerman Road, where Giorno headlines a Halloween Eve bill with local rockers Persian Gulf and the Know-It-Alls. Tickets are \$3.

"What I feel like (when I'm performing before an audience) is really different from what poetry's been like for a long time," said the 45-year-old artist in an interview with Jay Murphy of Tallahassee's *Red Bass* magazine, which is sponsoring the show.

"At least traditionally, the last 500 years for sure, the purpose of a poem was to be read by a person late at night sitting in a chair by himself when he was lonely and bored. When it was 1850 and he couldn't turn on the TV set or radio," Giorno said. "You did it to create some mind thought, something which went on in your mind. I don't do that and I wouldn't expect anyone else to do that."

Appropriately, Giorno's poems are best known through a collection of collaborative albums released through the poet's Giorno Poetry Systems label.

Working with such avant-garde performance and literary luminaries as John Cage, Allen Ginsberg, Peter Gordon, Gary Snyder, Patti Smith, Phillip Glass, Byron Gysin, Timothy Leary and Frank Zappa, Giorno has orchestrated a small revolution in distributing spoken-word recordings.

His "Dial-A-Poet" series—began in 1968 as an innovative museum installation at the Architectural League of New York—has blossomed into a number of albums.

"We don't print that many of them, 2,500 or 3,000; they get scattered all over the world," Giorno explained.

Giorno's latest work is a collaboration with Beat-Godfather William S. Burroughs (who shares a Bowery apartment with the poet) and performance artist extraordinaire Laurie Anderson ("O Superman") The album, *You're the Guy I Want to Share My Money With*, ranges from Anderson's playful electronic aural attacks to calm readings from Burroughs' apocalyptic opus *Cities of the Red Night*.



John Giorno, flanked by William S. Burroughs and Laurie Anderson, will bring his performance artistry to Tallahassee Saturday.

Giorno's best track is a maddening rave—triple-tracked in echos—called "I Don't Need It, I Don't Want It, And You Cheated Me Out Of It."

The *sturm und drang* revenge mantra veers away from the concerns of some of the poet's previous titles, poems like "Eating Human Meat," "Suicide Sutra," "Cancer In My Left Ball," and "Shit, Piss, Blood and Brains," which reveal an obsession with

disease and vital body fluids.

For Giorno, however, live performance seems to take precedence over recorded and written words. Having toured last fall with Burroughs and Anderson on the fabled "Cities of the Red Night" performances, Giorno finds audience interaction vital to a living, growing art form.

"I've done many things over the years, worked with found poetry and that kind of

thing," he said. "What's happened the past few years...one is performing so much one finds what one is doing in any place, is talking to somebody."

"You're talking to 500 people or however many, that are paying attention to you, so there's this dialogue going on. It's changed the way I write the poems. I think of these poems the way they arise in my mind, as listenings."

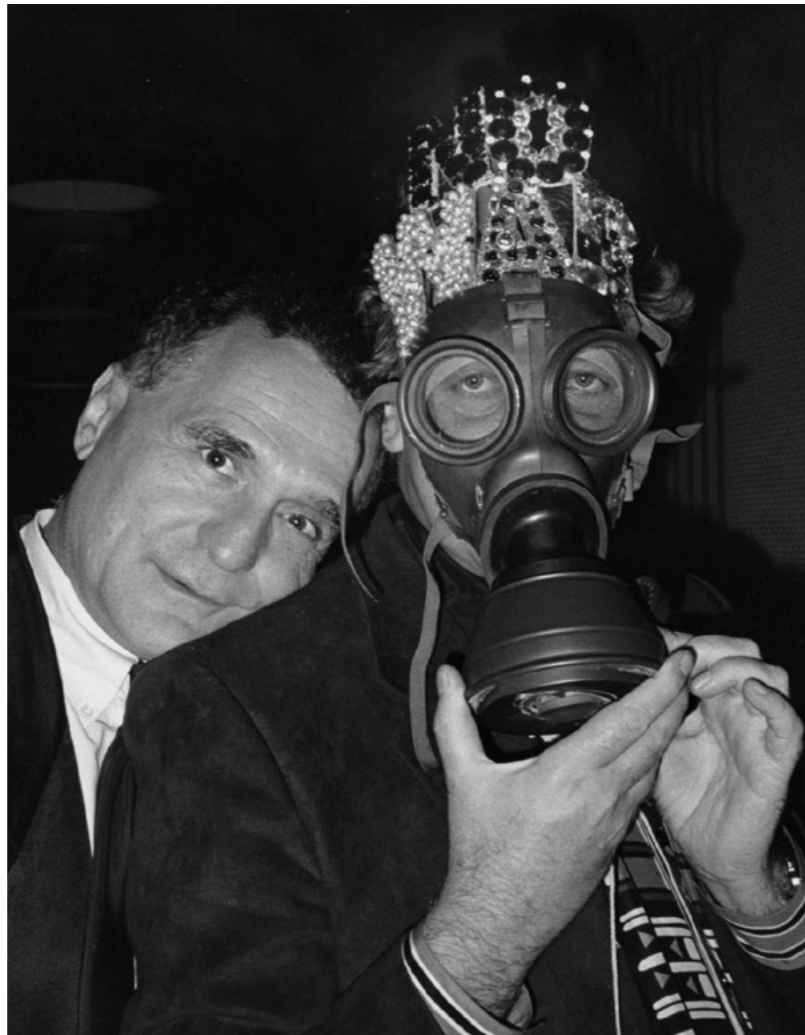


October 8, 1966

Dear Br Dear Brion Brion

Photos At opening (Sept 18 - Visiting of Motherwell junk measure William De Nagy, st Pool heater, drink and talking to the full para Is the Kelly and Beunt's caretaker, larry, back to id? Horrible end of skirting fo wedding. I don't war corners of I thought i 'Art So fiber, look Sept 19 - John McK again Betty a sweet fagi there. to Larry Ri and hacc, can't lovers, Sherman woods to plit Kynato back almost man. It's getting touching min brush up of Broadve cordial almidied me very muchost unevivil. on pile. John D'Archs and flaming firewood. He and y resentment, James. He was if you mor the Dream M: the house. Rainy arachine not be bread. Olin D if you In BURNING (it won't start. THURAZI DOLL AT me. Michael' in Gold people Brion: match and all arcs and John, ar2N when I of butler, William, me with flesh hanging ther. Two night through ward recipe images. Wha down. I was left to about those oks as though my left waste of ti: Sunday night. Had (ne? Reading Me' me know what my arm Canada. Met Beekman grant, has someone calli, sex for man off the forents, he vast dining room, and some other, and isn't i busy ta and the gowaiting on Garson i rrament has gi Beautiful sp: ghosts about Canada: we were eating, so: Ian Broadeas ti'w much he dug harpic god: get to be no one, go on talk: performed at floor. Have i fuck me in November thigh, look to see. Could have the wise makin copy aw a month ago no, Sally on my lei. I sit her whil of TangYork, marri: Ask Sally after we ad to Japanese, gloomy corri my will Gallery, so She says "Yes." Th he's grateful ward in she and say New York, mad woman locked i photos of swase. Say to Underst to sound ge Jill Johnston comm:ed. Making mov: keep extens god-fat: mask. Next office in Bulgaria, BIRDS, WORD, L. Pain must be sound: Making GUNT double ward doors i tape. Couldn' urs off. Hear wedding accepted in Under cloak is stovitation from 'as. Ruminig K-9, yo ART SCENE. Inside sit at long h made my bloo: He about boug late to ne Jasper. Told Wyn over to: brought country: meal out qu after i (Rhinebeck) don't you fuck me?'. Fuckin as w Doll. Arriv inherity: like you ve Please send tape of:ry much. When in bed, ale a week when they' rapping on your Love Jo to sleep ea Wyn and Sally say say. on Yugoslav Eline as in your house? Shou Did a man tell you. Was to Ramo Sagitarus on Oct 2

Love John  
John



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# JOHN GIORNO LES LEVINE ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG



# NYU LOEB STUDENT CENTRE TUES MARCH 7

THREE EVENTS  
SPONSORED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF ART EDUCATION  
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY  
TUESDAY MARCH 7TH 8:30PM  
DONATION \$1.00 STUDENTS 50¢

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18, 1965  
Dear John  
I want to come 'out-up? Spent beautiful on jury with New York teate, spiced for five hours a called the NEWS made me nervous; DREAM MACHINES, ll down unlighted a passport, photos, et in the flowerin' r 7 years. Had been looking r 7 years Hassan I Sabbah, to prepare F, accountant Larr ry. I'm afraid to re-read countant back also ain. Those nights got William to send me, Frank O'Hara of iron cordial. A small disorted (MOTHER, Box 94, rigged to am house. McKendry: type of cut-up, from six people am house. McKendry: type of cut-up, Panna's the other of Art News)'s chael Zimer would after not returning to get me keeps. It was a hor of Poets. Barbara Guest and she said she'll the young Everyone in New Yorked anywhere from the Hungarian Puroat. are always as Caned 'Hara poem. I look while we were asp ends, trying Someone man: Kusan: ten in 1959, the one arrived. There's a Gallery) . Out Canada." We very onion skin paper, dining-room, etc to publish "To be no one. Gog: Magazine. If I write from childhood, a't know, November thig. y poems, then Frank'll slept in 3 days. Leave. a month ago. "Ho, ish he has. Besides who Panna had me 12 (sometimes 20) ar-New York. He at P who only copy Frank's their to save or couple of . Typewriter illu! he would never i do I'm going to kiss me. Now belled from American Book Hungarian maid, Hope I can say to understand way, American Eagle, Then there was to ask him e moves. Ira is in etc. It's the text the Kurt-Sade to ask him keeps house. Shouln't. It's going to aphedamine-hero: in front rds, did a man tell the tape and will send hands and ankle outdidn't ain-could Pluto to in MOTHER are the five for hours and h s hard to rius on Oct of Ci: rhjeldahl (editor of on her lap at 2 later. Barone Ci: rlay tape, and i'm have nearly sha Looked at me, no . ets, curts, art scene. and talks. She e will be called i. After I was 'OU book hasn't sold it. should it bet X: silk-screen Jilala does inheri. in bed. "sleep, n and recieved 2 copies. he got that mus shadow like TV Hat. Wyn and the ng Sagitarus on (reek, who sentenced them five \$1 bi. It's comeout sars in prison. I've her theatre beautiful 22-year-old in 4 days. Apparently, the Pink I'm suppose to: Doll last July and xxxxx m. Mumy has been seein 500 pitch occasionally avoid her at present. housands ways down, t after I burned Crazy i ht you ways of passage. le who've bought it, ha a land around and littl: g house. could bring some LSD to in a thermos and keep pi there any LSD in Tangi:

Mousse Magazine 88

SURVEY

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A. Coplan, K Allado-McDowell, M. Boon

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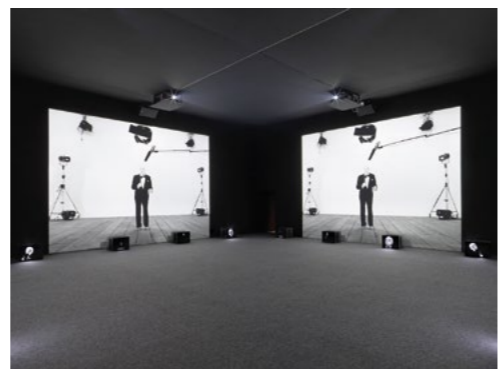




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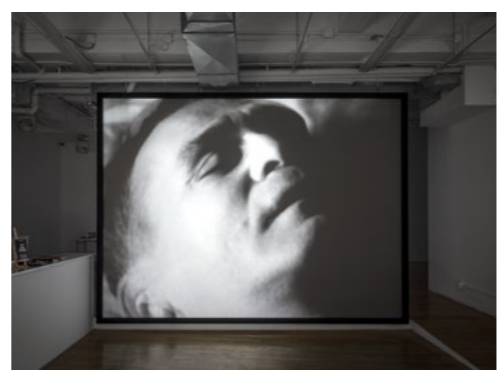
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**CHRYSANTHEMUMS  
ARE A GARLAND  
OF SKULLS**

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**PEONIES  
TOPPLING  
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**DAFFODILS  
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**MARIGOLD**  
**TIGHT**  
AS A CRAB'S ASS

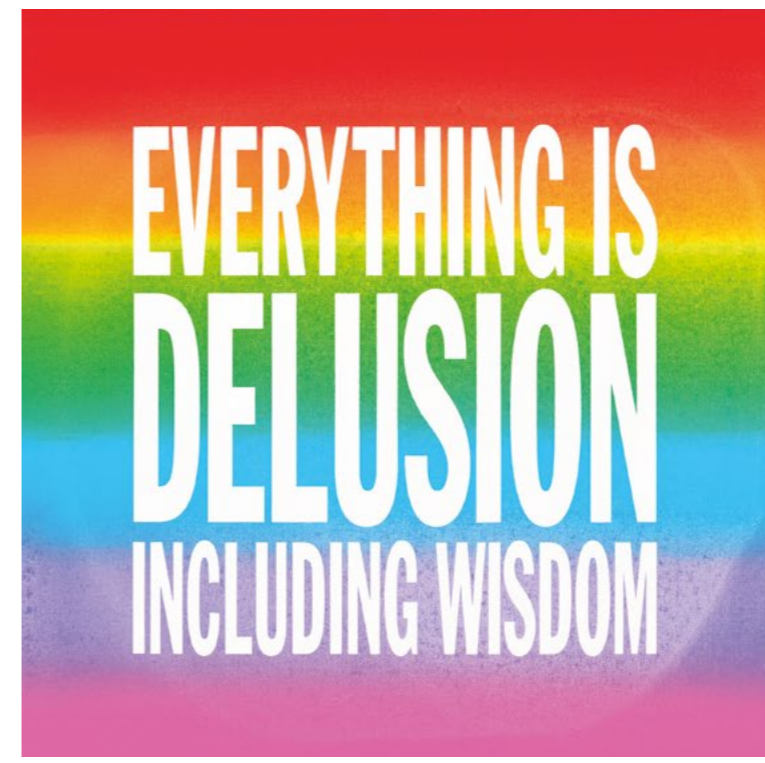
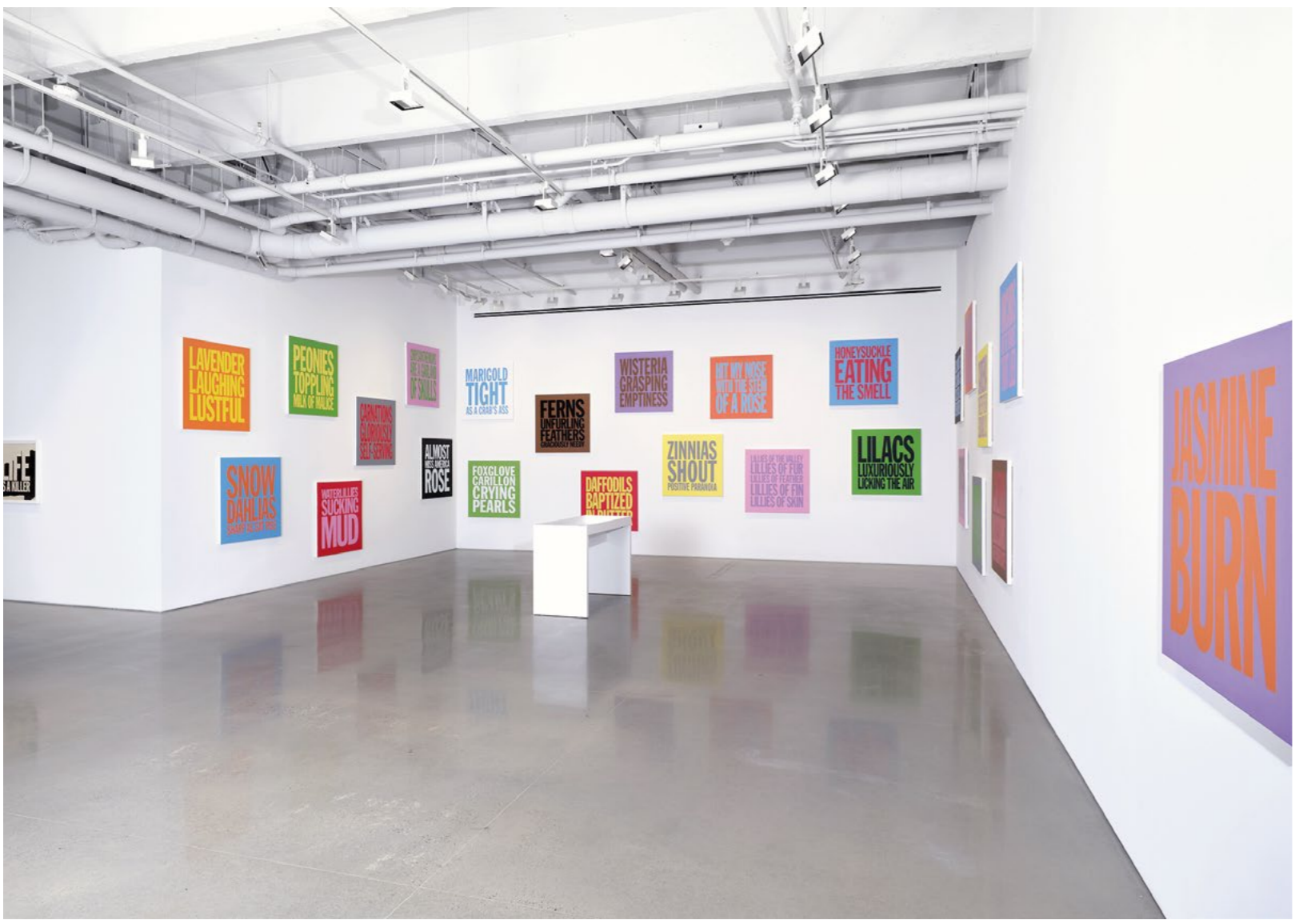
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**CHERRY**  
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ARE RAZOR BLADES

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**DAFFODILS  
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IN BUTTER**

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**ZINNIAS**  
**SHOUT**  
POSITIVE PARANOIA

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**MARIGOLD**  
**TIGHT**  
AS A CRAB'S ASS









- 2024 ○ [Upcoming]
- 2024 ○ *John Giorno: Jasmine Burn*
- 2023 ○ *John Giorno's Dial-A-Poem*
- 2023 ○ *I Am A Poet*
- 2023 ○ *Perfect Flowers*
- 2023 ● *What are words worth?*
- 2023 ● *Call It Something Else. Something Else Press, Inc. (1963–1974)*
- 2022 ○ *John Giorno*
- 2022 ○ *Cherry Blossoms are Razor Blades*
- 2022 ● *Nature Doesn't Know About Us*
- 2021 ○ *John Giorno*
- 2021 ○ *John Giorno*
- 2021 ● *From The Archives: White Columns & 112 Greene Street – 1970–2021*
- 2021 ● *Petits papiers du 20e siècle*
- 2021 ● *I Know Where I'm Going - Who Can I Be Now*
- 2021 ● *Rites of Spring*
- 2020 ● *In Focus: Statements*
- 2020 ● *Color & Complexity: 30 Years at Durham Press*
- 2020 ● *Andy Warhol*
- 2020 ● *It Never Ends*
- 2020 ● *John Giorno Poetry Day*
- 2020 ● *Feel the Sun in Your Mouth: Recent Acquisitions*
- 2019 ○ *John Giorno: DO THE UNDONE*
- 2019 ● *Artists Need to Create on the Same Scale that Society Has the Capacity to Destroy: Mare Nostrum*
- 2019 ● *You Got To Burn To Shine*
  
- 2018 ● *Je m'appelle Cortana*
- 2017 ○ *John Giorno: Perfect Flowers*
- 2017 ○ *Ugo Rondinone: I ♥ John Giorno*

- 2017 ○ *John Giorno*
- 2017 ○ *space forgets you*
- 2017 ● *Voyage d'hiver*
- 2016 ○ *SPACE FORGETS YOU*
- 2016 ● *The Seeable and the Sayable*
- 2016 ● *III Seen III Said*
- 2016 ● *The Power and The Glory*

- Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Vienna
- kurimanzutto, New York
- Museum of Modern Art, New York
- Almine Rech, Shanghai
- Thomas Brambilla Gallery, Bergamo
- McEvoy Foundation for the Arts, San Francisco
- Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid
- 208 Bowery Sign Project, New York
- Morán Morán, Los Angeles
- Sculpture Milwaukee
- Almine Rech, London
- Sperone Westwater, New York
- White Columns, New York
- Centre Pompidou, Paris
- The Modern Institute, Glasgow
- LongHouse Reserve, Easthampton
- Copenhagen Contemporary
- Allentown Art Museum
- Tate Modern, London
- KANAL — Centre Pompidou, Brussels
- MAMCO Genève
- Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington
- Sperone Westwater, New York
- Complesso della Chiesa di Santa Maria delle Penitenti, Venice
- Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Roma
- Frac Franche-Comté, Besançon
- Elizabeth Dee, New York
- Artists Space, New York; High Line Art, New York; Howl Happening, New York; Hunter College Art Galleries, New York; The Kitchen, New York; New Museum, New York; Red Bull Arts New York, New York; Rubin Museum of Art, New York; Sky Art, New York; Swiss Institute, New York; White Columns, New York; 80WSE Gallery, New York
- Cahiers d'Art, Paris
- Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich
- Château de Versailles
- Le Case D'Arte, Milan
- Kunstneres Hus, Oslo
- White Flag Projects, St Louis
- Charles Riva Collection, Brussels

- 2016 ● *Beat Generation*
- 2016 ● *Looking Back: The 10th White Columns Annual*
- 2015 ○ *God is Man Made*
- 2015 ○ *UGO RONDINONE : I ♥ JOHN GIORNO*
- 2015 ○ *Un mois autour de la poésie – John Giorno*
- 2015 ○ *SPACE FORGETS YOU*
- 2015 ● *Greater New York*
- 2015 ● *The Exhibition of a Film*
- 2015 ● *Maurizio Nannuci – Top Hundrer*
- 2015 ● *Artists and Poets*
- 2014 ○ *John Giorno*
- 2014 ● *Sed Tantum Dic Verbo (Just Say The Word)*
- 2013 ○ *Le cri du mur*
- 2013 ● *Ceremonie*
- 2013 ● *Futur simple, saison 1*
- 2013 ● *Kilomètres/heure*
- 2013 ● *39greatjones*
- 2012 ○ *Interventions sur le bâtiment*
- 2012 ○ *John Giorno Paintings*
- 2012 ○ *Thanx 4 Nothing*
- 2012 ● *Le paysage, l'art et le fleuve, Estuaire 2007.2009.2012*
- 2012 ● *Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language*
- 2012 ● *Les Maîtres du désordre*
- 2011 ○ *Star 69: Dial-A-Poem Relics*
- 2011 ● *15 Minutes: Homage to Andy Warhol*
  
- 2011 ● *It's For You, Conceptual Art and the Telephone*
- 2011 ● *WE GAVE A PARTY FOR THE GODS AND THE GODS ALL CAME, last party*
- 2010 ○ *Eating the Sky*
- 2010 ○ *Sonopoetics (de la parole à l'image, de la poésie au son)*
  
- 2010 ● *It's All American: Inaugural Exhibition*
- 2010 ● *Rip It Up and Start Again*
- 2010 ● *Diagonales: son, vibration et musique dans la collection du Centre national des arts plastiques*
- 2009 ○ *Thanx 4 Nothing: Drawings and Print Poems*
- 2009 ● *Modern modern*
- 2008 ● *Traces du Sacré*
- 2008 ● *Printed in France*
- 2008 ● *Martian Museum of Terrestrial Art*
- 2008 ● *LA CHUTE OU LA LUTTE / LA CADUTTA O LA LOTTA / FALL OR FIGHT*
- 2007 ● [Title unknown]
- 2007 ● *WELCOMING THE FLOWERS*
- 2007 ● *Words and Music*
- 2007 ● *Wisdom of the Witches*
- 2006 ● *Renegades 25 Years of Performance at Exit Art*
- 2005 ● *Multiplo\_3*
- 2005 ● *Multiplo\_1*
- 2004 ● *Multiple Strategies*
- 2004 ● *c neal ephemeris*
- 2003 ● *Zona non profit art space - Firenze 1974/1985*
- 2002 ● *Selections from Since 1986: Lowland Lullaby*
- 1997 ● [Title unknown]
- 1993 ● *Manger Le Ciel*
- 1993 ● *Fabulous Sex/Compassion*
- 1992 ● *Masks for AIDs*
- 1988 ● *Whatever Window Is Your Pleasure*
- 1970 ● *Information*
- 1969 ● *Software*

● Selected group exhibitions ○ Selected solo exhibitions

## 📞 CALL DIAL-A-POEM

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