Contents

Introduction
Roxanne Power .......................................................................................................................... viii

Occupoetics and Eco-poetics
Terri Cohn: “Interventions: Politics, Participation, and Shape Shifting” ........................................ 1-2
David Lau: Excerpts from “Letter from Oakland” ........................................................................ 3-5
Reverend Billy and Savitri D: “Earthaluah! Occupy the Earth Crisis” .......................................... 6-13
Eco-Arts and Poetics .................................................................................................................... 14
Kim Anno: “Darkness on the Delta” ............................................................................................. 15
Kristin Prevallet: “Four Tuesdays in June: Mourning the Gulf Stream” ....................................... 16-18
Laura Mullen: “The Origin of a Dress” ......................................................................................... 19-21
Kim Anno: “The Water Photographs” ......................................................................................... 22-23

Eco-poetics & Environmental Justice: a panel discussion at UC Berkeley’s “Color, Crosstalk, and Composition” Conference
Judith Goldman: “Poetry as the Texture of Externalities” ............................................................. 24-27
CAConrad: “Resurrect Extinct Vibration” ..................................................................................... 27-28
Craig Santos Perez: from “understory” ........................................................................................ 29
Brenda Iijima: “Notes on Two Wolf Dances” ............................................................................. 30-31
Marcella Durand: “Placing the Wild Imagination” ....................................................................... 32
Tyrone Williams: “Among Imaginations” .................................................................................... 33
Laura Elrick: “Poetry, Ecology, and the Reappropriation of Lived Space” .................................... 34-36
Newton and Helen Mayer Harrison: “Tibet is the High Ground” .............................................. 37-41
Kim Anno: House .......................................................................................................................... 42

An Inter-Arts Gallery
Robin Lasser and Adrienne Pao: Picnic Dress Tent .................................................................... 43
Robin Lasser and Adrienne Pao: Cross Dress Tent and Ms. Yekaterinburg ................................. 44
Robin Lasser and Adrienne Pao: Ms. Yekaterinburg: Camera Obscura Dress Tent ..................... 45
Trena Noval: “The Dress Tents of Robin Lasser and Adrienne Pao” ............................................ 46-47
Linda Weintraub, Robin Lasser, and Adrienne Pao: “The Dress/Tent Project” ............................. 48-49
Anthony Raynsford: “Floating World by Robin Lasser and Margueritte Perret” ......................... 50-51
Vincent Katz: “Experimenting with Power: Journey to Black Mountain” ................................... 52-56
Brenda Hillman (with The Hope Mohr Dance Company): “Far from Perfect” ............................ 57
Forrest Gander (poetry) and Douglas Culhane (sculptures): “A Clearing” ................................. 58-59
Amaranth Borsuk and Andy Fitch: “As We Know” .................................................................. 60-61
Amaranth Borsuk and Brad Bouse: “Whispering Galleries” ....................................................... 62-63
Susan Bee and Charles Bernstein: “Before You Go” ................................................................... 64-67

Live Film Narration: A Gallery of Benshis – Essays and Script Excerpts
Neo-Benshi: an Introduction ........................................................................................................ 68
Konrad Steiner: “A Little Backtalk” ............................................................................................ 69-71
Tisa Bryant and Jen Hofer: “Not To Fill In The Blanks: Some Collaborative Notes On Live Film Narration” ............................................................................................................... 74-78
Jaime Cortez: “Make it New – Again: Reflections on Neo-Benshi” ........................................... 79
Nada Gordon: “Operatic Benshi” .................................................................................................. 80-81
Stephanie Young: “Whose Theater?” ........................................................................................ 82-83
Roxi Power: “Neo-Benshi: The Poet as Ventriloquist” ............................................................... 84-86
"Intervene! Interrupt! Rethinking Art as Social Practice":
a special section documenting the historic University of California, Santa Cruz conference

Subversive Complicity
- E.G. Crichton and Dee Hibbert-Jones: “Subversive Complicity: The Concept” 88-93
- Dee Hibbert-Jones: “Subversive Complicity: The Street” 94-95
- Laura Chipley: “The Urban Homesteading Project: Sidewalk” 96-97
- Center for Tactical Magic: “Wells Fargo Embargo” 98-99
- Heather M. Mikolaj: “Subversive Complicity: The Exhibit” 100
- Holly Crawford: “Critical Conversations in a Limo” 101
- Terri Cohn: “Talk Sandwich: We Are Building Art” 102-103
- Laura Parker: “Am I Expected to Eat Dirt?” 104-105
- Sharon Daniel: “Public Secrets” 106-107
- Dee Hibbert-Jones and Nomi Talisman: “Psychological Prosthetics” 108-109
- Laurel Beckman: “Project Rainbow” 110
- Laurel Beckman, Andy Bichlbaum, Sharon Daniel, Dee Hibbert-Jones, Bradley McCallum, Jacqueline Tarry, moderated by Jennifer Gonzalez: “Subversive Complicities Panel discussion” 111-113

Low Footprints
- Marilyn Arsem: “Oceans Rising” 114
- Julie Louise Bacon: “Chimeras” 115
- Adina Bar-On: Three performance interventions 116
- Shannon Cochrane: “Something with Nothing” 117
- Angela Ellsworth: “Sister/Wife Project: Is This the Place II” 118
- Pawel Kwasniewski: “This Performance Will Start in 15 Minutes” 119
- Hiroko Kikuchi: “The Water is the Message: An Invention of Effect” 120
- Stephanie Loveless + EE Miller: “Tuning In: Santa Cruz” 121
- Dan McKereghan: “In Loving Memory” 122
- Markus Wernli Saitô: “Mobile Actions with Cell Phones” 123
- Veronica Wiman: “The Telepathic Talking Circle” 124
- Natalie Loveless, Lindsay Kelley, and Jamie McMurray: “A Short Reflection on Low Footprints” 125
- Low Footprints color images: Angela Ellsworth; Marilyn Arsem; Sal Randolph; Markus Wernli Saitô 126
- Subversive Complicity color images: the Yes Men; Laurel Beckman; Bradley McCallum & Jacqueline Tarry 127
- Interruption of Hierarchies color images: Judith Rodenbeck; Martha Rosler; Lisbeth Eva Rossof; Tina Takemoto 128
- Art and Life color images: Annie Sprinkle and Elizabeth Stephens: “Seven Years of Getting Married” 129

Art and Life
- Judith Rodenbeck: “Art and Life, Life and Art: Creating Community” 129
- Elizabeth Stephens: “Becoming Eco-Sexual” 130-131
- The Green Wedding of Annie Sprinkle and Elizabeth Stephens 132
- Greg Archer, Tobin Keller, and Rose Seller: “Lover Nature: Seven Ways to Be a Good Lover to 21st Century Earth” 134
- Isabel Reichert and Sean Fletcher: “Green Wedding” 135
- Newton and Helen Mayer Harrison: Homily: “Making Earth” 136
- Annie Sprinkle and Elizabeth Stephens: Wedding Vows 137
- Guillermo Gómez-Peña: “High Aztec Priest Green Wedding Philosophical Tantrum” 138
- Sasha Hom and Dylan Bolles: “Once Upon a Wedding” 139
- Tina Takemoto: “Ringbearer” 141
- Angela Ellsworth: “Bridal Bouquet and Accessories” 142
Annie Sprinkle and Elizabeth Stephens: “Linda M. Montano’s Archive” ................................................................. 142
Linda M. Montano, Elizabeth M. Stephens, Annie M. Sprinkle: “Art/Life with Linda M. Montano: an Interview” ........ 143-145
Sampada Aranke: “Guillermo Gómez-Peña: an Introduction” ................................................................................. 146
Guillermo Gómez-Peña: “Philosophical Tantrum” for the Art and Life panel ...................................................... 147-148
Susan O’Malley: “This Show Needs You”: an Interactive Exhibit ................................................................. 149

**Interruption of Hierarchies**

Shelby Graham: “Introduction to Interruption of Hierarchies” .............................................................................. 150-152
Allegra Fortunati: “Institutional Critique” .................................................................................................................. 152
Joseph DeLappe: “dead-in-Iraq: Online Gaming/Performance Intervention” ...................................................... 153
Martha Rosler: “Art in the Field of Engagement” ...................................................................................................... 154-155
Tina Takemoto: “Memoirs of Bjork-Geisha: Art World Orientalism” ................................................................. 156-161
Nato Thompson: “Joke/No Joke”: a Talk for the Interruptions of Hierarchies panel ........................................... 162-163
“Inflatables”: an Ant Farm tradition revived at UC Santa Cruz .............................................................................. 164

**Art Interventions: A Gallery**

Felicity D. Scott: “Blow Up: from Living Archive 7: ANT FARM” ........................................................................ 165-171
Elen Babcock: “The Orphan Sign Project” .............................................................................................................. 172-173
Jon Rubin: “Conflict Kitchen” and “The Waffle Shop” .......................................................................................... 174-175
Yaelle Amir: “Public Movement/Spring in Warsaw” ............................................................................................... 176
Brenda Hillman: “The Body Politic Loses Her Hair (a haibun)” .......................................................................... 177
Nestor Armando Gil: “Know Their Names Project” and “Incidents” .................................................................... 178-179
E.G. Crichton: “LINEAGE: Matchmaking in the Archive I and II” .................................................................. 180-183

**Curatorial Interventions: a special section on interventionist curating**

Lissette Olivares and Lucian Gomoll: “Intervention and Interventionism in Curatorial Practice” ..................... 184-185
Clare Carolin: “Curating Performance/Translating Poetry: Regina Jose Galindo: The Body of Others” .............. 190-194
Claire Tancons: “Carnival as Counter-Curatorial Intervention” ........................................................................... 199-203
Catherine M. Sousloff: “Intervening with the Curator” ......................................................................................... 204-205

**An Inter-Arts Gallery** ........................................................................................................................................ 206

Rachel Blau DuPlessis: X from Draft CK: Primer ..................................................................................................... 207
Nicholas Piombino (text) and Toni Simon (images): from “Contradicta” .......................................................... 208-209

**The Poetics of Healing: a special section from the San Francisco State University program series**

Eleni Stecopoulos: “Geopathy (Postscript)” .......................................................................................................... 210
Petra Kuppers: “Sadie Wilcox: Dancing the Scrawl” .............................................................................................. 211
Petra Kuppers: “Somatic Poetics: Cancer Vibrations” ........................................................................................... 212-213
Bhanu Kapil: “Chrysalis for Ban: A Poetics of Healing [Notes Beyond the Fact]” .............................................. 214-215
Lynn Marie Kirby: “Listening”, “Ode to Broken Blossoms”, “Welcome to Garfield Square Listening Field” ...... 216-218
Felicia Rice: On “DOC/UNDOC: Documentado/Undocumented Ars Shamanica Performatica” ...................... 219-220
W.S. Di Piero: “Resika’s Boat Pictures” ................................................................................................................ 221
Varujan Boghosian: Five Mixed Media Collages .................................................................................................. 222
John Yau (text), Varujan Boghosian and Paul Resika (images): “Duet” .............................................................. 223-224
Paul Resika and Varujan Boghosian: Collaborations, Collages, and Paintings .................................................. 225
Moving Parts Press: Tired of Walking ..................................................................................................................... 226-227
Moving Parts Press: from Codex Espangliensis .................................................................................................... 228-229
Roxanne Power (poems), Sky Power (paintings): “Imprints of the Other World” ........................................ 230-232
Stephen Kessler, “George Hitchcock: Jorge-of-all-trades” ................................................................. 233-234
George Hitchcock and Friends, 1973 ........................................................................................................ 235
Santa Cruz: A Literary Scene under the Redwoods, 1973 ......................................................................... 236
A Santa Cruz Renga, 2016 ....................................................................................................................... 237
Rodrigo Toscano: “The Laboristics of Conferences” ........................................................................... 240-241
Juliana Spahr: “The Cthulhu of Privatization and my Psychosexual Poetry Scene” .................................... 242-245
Chris Nealon: “Scenic poem” .................................................................................................................. 246
Katrina Rodabaugh: “Poetry is the Process: Reflections on The Dresses/Objects Project” ..................... 247
Sandra and Ben Doller: from Sonneteers ............................................................................................... 248-251
Timothy Liu: “Hall of Mirrors” ............................................................................................................... 252-253
Rae Armantrout: Three Poems ............................................................................................................ 254-255
Karen Yamashita: “Mystery Spot: 95065” ............................................................................................ 256-257
M. NourbeSe Philip: “In Conversation with the UC Santa Cruz Graduate/Faculty Seminar” .................... 258-265
Anne Tardos: from Nine ...................................................................................................................... 266-267
Eleni Sikelianos: “First Hour” ............................................................................................................... 268-269
Rachel Blau DuPlessis: 7 from Draft CX Primer .................................................................................... 270
C.S. Giscombe: “Field Trips” .............................................................................................................. 271
Elizabeth Robinson: “Poetics/Ethics/Rhythm/Pattern” ......................................................................... 272-273
Bin Ramke: “Continuous Computation (1 through 3)” ..................................................................... 274-277
Kazim Ali: “Phenomenal Survivals of Death in the Mountains” after Louise Glück .................................. 278
Melissa West: The Pilgrim Bears the Burden of Identity ......................................................................... 279
Chris Tshy: from Our Lady of the Flowers, Echoic ............................................................................ 280-281
Brent Cunningham: “If You Want to See Flying Go to the Circus” ..................................................... 282
Micah Ballard: “A Salty Salute” ........................................................................................................... 286
Alli Warren: from Throng ...................................................................................................................... 287
Jesse Sposato: “Breaking Down Walls with Sister Spit, Every Generation” ............................................ 288-289
Gary Young: “The Books that Should be Written” ............................................................................. 290-291
Paul Skenazy: Two Stories .................................................................................................................. 292-293
Don Rothman: “Taos Pueblo” ............................................................................................................. 294
Kristen Orser and Chelsea Cossu: from Midas Eyes ............................................................................ 295-299

Biographies of Contributors ............................................................................................................... 300-311

Acknowledgements .......................................................................................................................... 312
**Introduction**  
**Roxanne Power**

*Viz. Inter-Arts* is a trans-genre anthology series that enacts genre interventions and salutes recombinant forms. By breaking down barriers between textual, visual, performative and scholarly modes, we encourage conversations between communities and genre specialists who too often only hear their news from tribal echo chambers. Through the juxtaposition of multiple "galleries" and sites in the book, the reader can enter an acre-sized Ant Farm inflatable, then turn a corner into the quiet of a poem or painting before walking outside with CAConrad to lie on a blanket by Walmart listening through headphones to the songs of extinct birds. How do the sites and sounds of this *Viz.* coalesce, and why should pathways like these intersect?

Because we need to stage some art interventions! Interventions not only on economic practices that destroy ecological habitats and promote social inequality, but interventions on the ways that books, conferences, exhibits and events tend to organize around genre purity or career silos, often to the exclusion of more interesting explorations. Perhaps many of us are bound up in ironic affiliations between institutions and more anarchic impulses. Essays here by Rodrigo Toscano, “The Laboristics of Poetry Conferences,” and Juliana Spahr, “The Cthulhu of Privatization and my Psychosocialsexual Poetry Scène” explore such labor pains and contradictions within idealistic and idealized poetry communities.

*Viz.* endeavors to mix it up with new minds and modes for bigger causes, intervening on monocultures and monopolies across multiple related environments – from the natural to the social to the aesthetic. In particular, the slash that connects or destroys each side of the Ecology/Economy divide necessitates new practices and purposes for art as well as intersectional logics that demand that we blur oppositional lines between art and life, artist and audience, public and private, and more. In that spirit, this edition – *Viz. Inter-Arts: Interventions* – dilates the view to include art as social practice, hastening the artists’ crucial response to social and environmental crises. At the same time, we leave room for work whose “interventions” may play out on the level of genre such as neo-benshi’s brash interventions upon the sacred single envelopes of film, theater, and poetry.

There are many ways to stage art interventions. Nato Thompson, co-author of the groundbreaking book *The Interventionists,* gave a talk at a University of California, Santa Cruz conference on interventionist art – the many events and talks of which are archived in this edition of *Viz.* In his talk, Thompson embraced the concept of “tactical” over “interventionist” art practices, even though the book he co-authored with Gregory Sholette had to occupy and manipulate the language of commercialism after communism’s trouncing in 1989, these “trespassers” have had to adopt and manipulate the language of commercialism in ever more sophisticated ways. In recent decades, those who would remove all restraints on capitalism – including the art cultures that protest its excesses – have ingeniously adopted the artists’ subversive tactics to convey the coolness of their message. Thompson’s explication of the self-styled Che Guevara Taco Bell Chihuahua in a beret drives the point home.

In different ways, we are all complicit with power structures we may find abhorrent in the abstract. “Subversive Complicity” – one section of the UC Santa Cruz conference on interventionist art – used tactical events to capture this paradox effectively. The ravages and rewards of globalization’s continually emerging technologies often coincide with the submerging of others’ access to their opportunities. Many of us at least try to subvert our own complicity with this system. Whether they would self-identify as interventionists, tactical artists, or something else altogether, the trespassers in *Viz. Inter-Arts: Interventions* keep trying out cleverer ways to deal these blows. Drawing from the deck of Ant Farm’s tactics, some – including the Yes Men and Reverend Billy – use mass media as a tool to undermine the influence of mass media and its fame-making machinery, even as they become somewhat famous trying. Felicity D. Scott’s essay on Ant Farm’s inflatables explores the tactics of a collective that laid several critical templates for the site-busting interventionist artists gathered in this collection who continue to inflate the presence of “the commons,” making surprise entrances into the rarefied, privatized spaces of the economic elite.

Others work on more local levels, eschewing any alliance with mass popular culture, subversive or not. Many poets in this collection emerge from social networks such as those that Daniel Kane explores in his book, *Don’t Ever Get Famous,* whose work is driven more by “the poetics of sociability” and “making it new” than the need to produce *New Yorker*-style and similar poetic subgenres that could help them land university jobs or contracts from big publishing houses. Just as Ant Farm was a seedbed for many current interventionist artists, Black Mountain College seeded the practices of many inter-arts poets of *Viz.* Vincent Katz’s essay, “Experimenting with Power: Journey to Black Mountain College,” synthesizes a history of collaborators and innovators who are the direct ancestors of many poets in these pages. Katz writes, “Knowing the conventions, and knowing how to subvert them, is the key to being an artist. Black Mountain College taught subversion.”

Neo-Benshi (Live Film Narration) is one of the more subversive forms invented by poets, many of whom trace their ancestral inspiration back to BMC’s collaborative cross-form experiments by the likes of Cage/Cunningham/Rauschenberg. The benshi was the “film teller” who stood to the side of the screen narrating the action of silent films in Japan and Korea. For over a decade, poets have been adapting this form to the “talkies,” subverting
the original words and supplying their own in a scintillating mix of theater, poetry, and film. Other collaborators in Viz. draw from digital media sources, like Amaranth Borsuk and her collaborators whose genres literally reinvent the book. Sandra and Ben Dolier reinvent the sonnet (again) with their playful and brilliant word/collages. Writers collaborate with visual artists, including Charles Bernstein and Susan Bee; Forrest Gander and Douglas Culhane, and many more; others with dancers, like Brenda Hillman. John Yau writes of the collaborations of painter Paul Resika and collaborist Varujan Boghosian. Dee Hibbert-Jones' and Nomi Talisman's collaborative short documentary, The Last Day of Freedom – nominated for an academy award this year – explores the death penalty and the darkest sides of war veterans' experiences. Some, like M. NourbeSe Philip and CAConrad, collaborate with their environments and history, ritualizing loss and extinction. They too might carry some specks of Black Mountain dirt on their shoes.

Collaborating with the local environment to create new art forms is a generative legacy of Black Mountain College: Buckminster Fuller's geodesic domes were invented with the help of his students there, and it took a large meadow to experiment. Similarly, the grand site-specific Dress Tents of collaborators Robin Lasser and Adrienne Pao evoke Fuller's preoccupation with portable homes. Other artists use the Situationist tactic of détournement to summon new meanings from existing structures. Ellen Babcock repurposes the "orphaned" business of détournement to summon new meanings from existing structures. Some, like M. NourbeSe Philip and CAConrad, collaborate with their environments and history, ritualizing loss and extinction. They too might carry some specks of Black Mountain dirt on their shoes.

Viz. is organized around a series of thematic sections interspersed with eclectic work gathered in Inter-Arts galleries and Art Interventions sites. The first of these sections, Ecopoetics and Occupoetics, leads off with two pieces that occupy the potentially busy intersection between the Occupy movement and Eco-activism, both of which are richly rooted in responses by poets across the arts. After poet David Lau's report from the occupied freeway ramps of Oakland's mass general strike in the fall of 2011, Reverend Billy and his partner/director of the Church of Stop Shopping, Savitri D. transport us to Zucotti Park in New York and to an awareness of the effects of our consumer-driven inner and outer lives. Other artists and writers in this critical section occupy sites near and far with activist performance and art: from hometowns and their Walmarts, to the BP oil spill and the gyre of floating plastic. Poet-critics envision new, sustainable imaginaries and models of oikos – our shared lived and linguistic spaces. Pioneering eco-artists Newton and Helen Mayer Harrison translate their poetry into feats of engineering, assisting European governments to map out sustainable relations to watersheds and rivers, or gracefully retreat from coastal sites, rebuiting inland, before the oceans rise.

The largest section of the book curates the many events and talks of the historic UC Santa Cruz conference, “Intervene! Interrupt! Rethinking Art as Social Practice.” The multi-site, multi-day extravaganza was divided into four themes. Subversive Complicity, organized by Dee Hibbert-Jones and E.G. Crichton, suggested "a full range of practices from the most direct politically focused work to art projects that appear complicit within the structures of everyday life." In Low Footprints, Natalie S. Loveless and Lindsay Kelley curated many site-responsive outdoor performances that "intervened in the modes of exchange traditional to the university conference format.”

Art and Life, organized by Elizabeth Stephens, documents their Seven Year Wedding project – inspired by Linda M. Montano's Seven Year Art venture – with a focus on their fourth “Green Wedding to the Earth” that launched their Ecosexuality movement. Judith Rodenbeck historicizes a lineage of those who have "worked in the gaps between art and life," in Robert Rauschenberg’s famous formulation: from the dandyists to the Dadaists; from Allan Kaprow’s happenings to Guillermo Gomez-Pena’s famous "Cruci-fiction," documented in this section. Shelby Graham organized the section of the conference entitled Interruption of Hierarchies and curated the accompanying exhibit at UCSC’s Porter College. Graham, like panelist/writer Nato Thompson, questioned the ironic role of institutions in interventionist art. In her essay, Martha Rosler agrees that art offers “the possibility of intelligible political engagement” but warns against "the flattening of political art by trendiness or vital but short-term political exigencies."

And so the centuries-long conversation about “art for art sake” versus “political art” continues here with more nuance: whether one intends to intervene on anything or simply extend the reach of art’s special influence on culture, Viz. hopes to be a part of the conversation and serve as a nexus connecting those inter-artists who may have missed each other along the way. Our previous edition, Viz. Inter-Arts: Event, won an Independent Publishing Award (IPPY) and extended the dialogue a bit – as a book that was adopted in varied literary/arts university courses, and as the provocateur of many inter-arts events around the country – entering into the flux of the many gift economies that enable artists’ expression outside of corporate media. In a talk I gave at a Naropa University panel on the gift economy, I referred to Ted Purves, who writes in What We Want is Free. “One of the first things to be learned from gift economies is that gifts are not free, and neither are they the products of generosity. Gifts are offers. They produce bonds. They are a token through which social relationships are forged...” These social relations build outposts where we create our own new ecologies of art practice that add a little oxygen to the air.

Many poets in Viz. work within the art/activism ecology of academic labor organizing. As president of the lecturers’ labor union at UC Santa Cruz. I’ve tried to infuse our social practices with a little art. Our muse, “Saint Precaria,” has a choir, a set of songs, some huge San Francisco Mime Troupe-style puppets, and theater skits with which we’ve intervened in official spaces, trying to expand the commons within a public university environment that’s become increasingly privatized, and where much of the labor is gifted.

One gift in particular must be acknowledged: the Porter College Hitchcock Poetry Fund has supported Viz. for years, thanks to the generosity of George Hitchcock and his wife, Marjorie Simon. We include a tribute to Hitchcock’s long-time work as poet, painter, UCSC lecturer, labor advocate, and editor. And of course, we’d be nothing without the gifts of these incredible pieces created by the contributors to Viz. Please support small press efforts by ordering copies as gifts, for your class, and telling book stores and libraries about us: spdbooks.org.
Earthalujah! Occupy the Earth Crisis
A talk and performance at University of California, Santa Cruz, Porter College
May 2012
Reverend Billy and Savitri D

Reverend Billy [Begins to sing]:
When you're wondering what to do, apocalypses come right through. Flames are high; the floods are too. In this world I thought I knew — this natural world that brought me you. Fires, floods, tsunamis, quakes. What a difference apocalypse makes. When you're wondering where to turn, apocalypses make us learn. The sky it burns. The blackbirds cry. In this world where I will die — this natural world. We all must die. Fire, floods, tsunamis, quakes. What a difference apocalypse makes.

Amen! Earthalujah! (Audience shouts in kind). I'd like to talk about the arts today. What role do the performers, storytellers, comedians and yes — preacher-types! — what are we doing in this time of Apocalypse?

Visiting in the Bay Area from New York, I am here in the community where the Church of Stop Shopping began its first forays into its secular and political take on preaching. After we moved to New York in the 90’s — I say we, my teacher Rev. Sidney Lanier then in his 60’s, me in my 40’s — we moved to the apple, and he put me in front of the Disney Store in Times Square. This decision surprised me at first: this brutal place with its white noise and giant super models, and the ten foot tall Mickey Mouse that looked down on me from the storefront, the most famous logo in the world. Sidney explained that we needed to confront the reigning American religion.

So he leaves me preaching against consumerism there in front of the consumer machine of Disney. We named the character Reverend Billy at that point, but the Church of Stop Shopping evolved out of the Disney era, a couple years of preaching in the wilderness with my dapper retired Episcopal priest taking notes at a distance.

Who were the artists — the ones who take on the task of creating meaning through words, jokes, songs, ringtones, protest chants, and all manner of storytelling — who were they? This is the time of the Millennium. There wasn’t a 9/11 just yet, and climate change wasn’t blowing super storms every week. The artists who landed meaning in the 90’s had to be visionary in the extreme. There was Laurie Anderson — “Oh, Superman.” Gil Scott Heron: “Winter in America.” Twilight from Anna Deavere Smith, Tony Kushner’s Angels in America. Sidney said — “Invest in New York when blood is running in the streets…” Well, OK.

So the anonymous sidewalk shouter, Reverend Billy, with one human being for my congregation — Sidney. Well, and thousands of tourists. But the church began. We would stand in circles together on the sidewalk passing the bullhorn, talking about consumerism, the impact of the shopping culture on our souls, on our neighbors and on our country.

And at this point, in 1999, Sidney moved back to California, saying I was doing fine, just keep preaching. By that time, after preaching for three years in the blinding intersection of Broadway and 42nd Street — in other words, by the time I could really preach out there, really hit my whoop — at that point, nobody could have said what I was. Is this a political rally? Is this a comedian looking for a producer? Is this an actual religious leader?

If you can’t name me, I’m starting to affect you. In the consumer ear, the label is key. That’s when people gathered around me and began to clap. That’s when I realized I wasn’t alone. Then, we walked into the Disney Store and held our service there in the middle of constellations of neurotic trolls and talking dogs and mindless princesses — the Disney characters that rule America.

When I was in my youth, when I was in college, San Francisco State just up the street — I had a belief in the arts as a part of a great human project, and this human project was moving all of us forward. We were all becoming better together, partly because of our artist heroes. Amen. I believed that when I was 13, 14, 15, 16. I was already
Viz. Inter-Arts: Interventions

Inter-Arts: Interventions

thousand times. We are in a species of life than would ordinarily pass from life across the thousand by an apex predator. It's one times the number of a mass losing hundreds of kinds of life every day. We're in the midst of each other, all kinds of stuff is happening right now that's a rails. They're accelerating, the feedback loops are joining the fact that the physical systems of the earth are just going off seem that there is a mechanism – is that corporate marketing again? – for isolating those studies. The last study I saw was that the oceans are evaporating and causing precipitation at a faster rate than anyone ever realized. Amen. So that's tougher droughts; that's bigger floods; that's bigger hurricanes. The water cycle is speeding up. Amen? I caught that news by accident. It was down in the corner of the Times buried in the science section. Why wouldn't that be at the top of the front page instead of something about J.P. Morgan Chase? How do they make their choices? It would seem that was a life or death bit of news.

Just forget the word "arts." Let's just talk about you and me and the Stop Shopping Church here today. What are we going to do? Some of us in this room are thinking about careers, thinking about decades of evolving activities. How do you ask that question if physical life is endangered? [Sadly, silently]. Amen. Earthalujah. Now let's go back to the tornado. What we want to do here today is ask the right questions, ask the questions that are language. Help us learn the problem for someone. Life is dying. The arts are nearly silent on the question. Now we have, each of us in this room has artist friends who are addressing that question. Don't we? Amen, praise be. I am – I'm trying to. A lot of us are working in isolation from each other, making an earth inquiry with our work. A lot of us completely fall out of category and don't have careers – can't market it. Amen, praise be. That's the devil. [Audience chuckles]. So we have the arts: capital "A" Arts. Just use the Arts section of the New York Times (I'm addicted to it) as some sort of indicator: there is silence there, basically an accumulating silence year after year. The Arts are as silent about what's happening with the earth as politics. Politicians are basically not talking about it at all. Amen. Obama and Hillary Clinton just a little. We won't be able to live very soon. We might be in denial about it. Okay, it's a hard thing to admit. But we're not even telling each other it's happening. There seems to be a mechanism – is that corporate marketing again? – for isolating those studies. The last study I saw was that the oceans are evaporating and causing precipitation at a faster rate than anyone ever realized. Amen. So that's tougher droughts; that's bigger floods; that's bigger hurricanes. The water cycle is speeding up. Amen? I caught that news by accident. It was down in the corner of the Times buried in the science section. Why wouldn't that be at the top of the front page instead of something about J.P. Morgan Chase? How do they make their choices? It would seem that was a life or death bit of news.

Now I got to a point in my life, where I would look across the history of the arts and just feel good about it. It started with the Surrealists. After World War I the idea was that the human species was so vacant of meaning, so incapable of having a culture in which life could be nurtured. You know what they did? They started over. Tristan Tzara, Hugo Ball, and all those people. Who's the artist that did the grunting? [Channeling him brilliantly]. He tried to start language over. That hope. Amen. Hallelujah. You could start the project over after every war. Undaunted, we kept doing that after every generation. High modernism. It was a project of hope. It was the human project.

There came a moment when I had to start dealing with the end of that view of the arts. At this point, I'm kind of unsettled about what the arts are. I don't really know. The fact is that the word "arts" isn't very useful. When you pick up the Arts section of the New York Times, it is just full of artists. Whoa! Every square inch of that section enoting people—looking up at you from the page, waving their arms in their play, in their song. Hundreds and hundreds of people clawing at you, bug-eyed, ready to capture your attention. Amen, praise be. And they cover my Facebook page. [Audience laughs]. But what are they really accomplishing? What's really happening there? There seems to be no connection; there seems to be very little connection to the supreme question of our time. Physical life: will it continue?

In some way, we may not be involved; we may be dis-invited. We may have caused that dis-invitation ourselves. But it would seem that there is no issue that affects our lives more than the fact that the physical systems of the earth are just going off the rails. They're accelerating, the feedback loops are joining each other, all kinds of stuff is happening right now that's a complete surprise to the scientists. It's just racing ahead. We're losing hundreds of kinds of life every day. We're in the midst of a mass extinction. It's a self-conscious, induced extinction by an apex predator. It's one thousand times the number of species of life than would ordinarily pass from life across the last one hundred million years. One thousand times. We are in a massive…life is dying. But that would seem to be an existential problem for someone. Life is dying. The arts are nearly silent on the question. Now we have, each of us in this room has artist friends who are addressing that question. Don't we? Amen, praise be. I am – I'm trying to. A lot of us are working in isolation from each other, making an earth inquiry with our work. A lot of us completely fall out of category and don't have careers – can't market it. Amen, praise be. That's the devil. [Audience chuckles]. So we have the arts: capital "A" Arts. Just use the Arts section of the New York Times (I'm addicted to it) as some sort of indicator: there is silence there, basically an accumulating silence year after year. The Arts are as silent about what's happening with the earth as politics. Politicians are basically not talking about it at all. Amen. Obama and Hillary Clinton just a little. We won't be able to live very soon. We might be in denial about it. Okay, it's a hard thing to admit. But we're not even telling each other it's happening. There seems to be a mechanism – is that corporate marketing again? – for isolating those studies. The last study I saw was that the oceans are evaporating and causing precipitation at a faster rate than anyone ever realized. Amen. So that's tougher droughts; that's bigger floods; that's bigger hurricanes. The water cycle is speeding up. Amen? I caught that news by accident. It was down in the corner of the Times buried in the science section. Why wouldn't that be at the top of the front page instead of something about J.P. Morgan Chase? How do they make their choices? It would seem that was a life or death bit of news.
My Land Cut in Half

Moving Parts Press

From the artist's book, CODEX ESPANGLIENSIS: from Columbus to the Border Patrol (Moving Parts Press, 1998).
Guillermo Gómez-Peña (text), Enrique Chagoya (images) and Felicia Rice (bookwork). More at movingpartspress.com