REMEMBERING
EL CORNO EMPLUMADO / THE PLUMED HORN

AMONG THE NEIGHBORS

SERGIO MONDRAGÓN

TRANSLATED AND AN ADDITIONAL COMMENTARY BY MARGARET RANDALL

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Remembering El Corno Emplumado /The Plumed Horn

Sergio Mondragón

delivered January 16, 2015, at Centro Cultural Tlatelolco
translation by Margaret Randall

El Corno Emplumado's editorial adventure began for me almost casually toward the end of 1961. I was finishing up my journalism studies and doing some reporting for the Mexican magazine *Revista de América*. It was October, and I'd just interviewed the painter David Alfaro Siqueiros in prison; he was a political prisoner at the time. Among much else, I'd asked him about his relationship with the U.S. painter Jackson Pollock, and the supposed influence the Mexican muralists had on that school of which Pollack was a pioneer, the school that in the United States would later be known as "action painting."

I was immersed in writing and researching that interview, when my classmate at the school of journalism, the poet Homero Aridjis—who had just published his first book—invited me to meet the "beat" poet from San Francisco, California, Philip Lamantia. Philip had arrived in Mexico City shortly before.

That meeting was a revelation. At Lamantia's apartment the group of poets who were gathered immediately began to read in their respective languages. Soon after, Lamantia called to say he wanted us to meet Margaret Randall, recently arrived from New York. That very night we were once again reading our poems to one another. The walls of Margaret's apartment were covered with paintings she'd brought with her, abstract expressionist works. This was a painting style I was seeing for the first time

(outside of books), and its aesthetic would have a certain influence on the magazine. All this helped me put the finishing touches on my feature about Siqueiros (and that artist would later illustrate the book we devoted to the North American poet Walter Lowenfels).

From then on, it was a whirlwind. We began to make translations and, once the word was out, other poets came around: the Nicaraguans Ernesto Cardenal and Ernesto Mejía Sánchez, both of whom lived in the city; the Mexican Juan Martínez, painters Felipe Ehrenberg and Carlos Coffeen Serpas, and U.S. poets Ray Bremser and Harvey Wolin. It was at one of those gatherings that the group "discovered" the lack, and "saw" in the magic that had brought us together the opportunity or need for a magazine that would showcase "both worlds": that of Hispano-American poetry and that of poetry from north of the border. In other words, the poetry being written at the time the length and breadth of the Continent.

We soon baptized the magazine with the name *El Corno Emplumado/The Plumed Horn* (alluding to the jazz horn of the United States and Quetzalcoatl, the plumed serpent who was the iconic god of Mesoamerica's pre-Hispanic cultures). Although none of the three of us had previous editing experience, Margaret Randall, Harvey Wolin (another beat poet who was visiting), and I took charge. The two of them were responsible for the publication's English side, and I for the Spanish. The money we needed to assure that the first issue would appear in January 1962 we were able to collect during those initial poetry readings.

El Corno was, on the one hand, the search for and encounter with one expression of Mexico's and Latin America's modern cultural production: the new Mexican poets no longer wrote the

way poets had been writing up to that time, professing a total devotion to formal perfection, the color gray, the discreet tone, a lineal discourse, idiomatic purity, anecdotal transparency, etc. We wanted to break with that world and all that it represented. It had all begun a bit earlier, with the poetry of Marco Antonio Montes de Oca and the prose of Juan Rulfo and Carlos Fuentes (not unlike what was happening in the rest of our countries with respect to their own traditions). On the other hand, in *El Corno*'s pages the North American poets were following a similar path. They no longer thought or wrote like T.S. Eliot or Ezra Pound, and with a *howl* they renounced both a past and a present that felt asphyxiating: the smiling U.S. world that had dropped the Bomb on densely populated Japanese cities and emerged from the Korean war with its conscience intact and face clean-shaven, even as it got more deeply involved in its war in Vietnam, and that shattered everything unwilling to give itself wordlessly to the project of the "American Dream." The Beats had a dual proposition: a truly liberated language, and a human being who was also liberated but, furthermore, sacred, beatific, with the right to be considered and treated with respect, and with the potential for building and inhabiting a Nirvana-like world. It was an idea they had borrowed from Asia, an intense, calm and positive world, not to be globalized but to become profoundly personal although readily shared. In both cases, the poetry of *El Corno*, of those "two worlds," the North American and the Latin American, emitted a language of rebellion, and at the same time it was a legacy bequeathed us by the great masters of the past and of the Vanguard.

The cosmopolitan vocation which, more than merely *El Corno*'s project, was the sentiment that nurtured the era, bore immediate fruits. We distributed the magazine in Mexico, New York, and San Francisco. Animated by Margaret Randall's dynamism—

she had an exceptional organizational skill and a great capacity for work—and thanks to a list of places where the Fondo de Cultura Económica sold its books throughout the continent, a list given to us by its director Don Arnaldo Orfila Reynal, who looked sympathetically upon our magazine, in a few short weeks *El Corno* was in bookstores in Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Bogotá, Lima, Santiago, Caracas, Quito, La Habana, Managua, Montevideo…And the response was rapid. Soon our post office box was filled with greetings, biographies, and submissions. From the Beats we moved on to other schools of North American poetry: Creeley, Olson, Black Mountain. The first to get in touch with us were Miguel Grinberg, Haroldo de Campos, Cecilia Vicuña, Raquel Jodorowsky, Pablo Antonio Cuadra, Gonzalo Arango, Alejandra Pizarnik, Edmundo Aray and groups such as the Tzántzicos, Nadaístas, Concrete Poetry, *Eco Contemporáneo*, Techo de la Ballena, City Lights Bookshop… They were attracted to *El Corno* because of its innovative poetry, experimental typography, ideas and words that sounded real, drawings whose lines were thin incisions in the skin of an era.

And we realized, in both directions, that everywhere the same thing was happening: we were saying goodbye to one time and initiating another. We were experiencing a new human vibration. The Cuban revolution appeared on the horizon like a hopeful dawn (at a time of ferocious military dictatorships throughout Latin America). The whole world was giving birth. It was the energy of the now mythic, horrendous and golden Sixties that divided the century and our literatures in two—although we had already been served a Vanguard aperitif on the dazzling dinnerware of modern art. In *El Corno* we called all this that passed before our eyes "spiritual revolution," and we spoke about "a new man" who inhabited "a new age." *Eco Contemporáneo* called for a "new solidarity."

The Mexican poetry anthology produced in 1966 by Octavio Paz, Homero Aridjis, Alí Chumacero, and José Emilio Pacheco, and that was titled *Poesía en Movimiento* (*Poetry in Movement*), in more than fifty percent of its contents used the work of the new poets, with poems taken from *El Corno Emplumado* as well as from editorial projects similar to ours, such as *Pájaro Cascabel*, *Cuadernos del Viento*, *Diálogos*, *El Rehilete*, *La Cultura en México*, *Revista Mexicana de Literatura*…In the prologue to that anthology the editors emphasized the concept they called a "tradition of rupture."

The power of these events and the originality of the poems and letters we published, the visual art and great web of communication we were able to establish at a time when the internet had not yet been invented—something Raquel Jodorowsky called "*circulación sanguinea de poesía*" (the poetry running in our veins)—went far beyond any project *El Corno* alone could have envisioned. In any case, we shared the great privilege of being a part of it all.

That Pan-Americanism, more than a deliberate project, was a fact of the spirit, and as always the politicians appropriated its language. Those were also the years in which The Organization of American States and its cultural branch The Pan-American Union emerged. These were instruments intended to submerge Latin America even more completely in underdevelopment (we can see the results today). Ernesto Cardenal was quick to understand those realities, and wrote a letter of messianic tones which we published in January 1963: "The true Pan American Union is that of the poets, not the other…we must struggle until we reach every corner of Latin America, aided now by the Yankee poets…that is another of *El Corno*'s missions…"

The so-called "counterculture" was and is, in fact, culture itself: Aureliano Buendía, Pedro Páramo, and Artemio Cruz were all countercultural, although they breathed tradition: and so were the lines of Ginsberg's "Kaddish" and the combination of regular and irregular accents in Octavio Paz's "Piedra de Sol" ("Sun Stone"). The great youthful rebellions that gave way to today's world were simply an expression of the crisis.

Our poetic generation lived those years trying to keep up with what was happening and become conscious of it. We tried to rise to the demands of our circumstances, learn to be critical, and not take ourselves too seriously. The great modern artists had already sensed and announced it all: cubism breaking down the walls of what was supposedly real (and even before, impressionism blurring the lines). "Something is readying itself," André Breton had warned. (Or was it Benjamin Péret?) The Sixties, with its youthful rebellions and its magazines and its poets, were only the blink of an eye in that barbarous and lovable century; and they contained as much infamy as humanity, something that some of us are trying to begin to assimilate as part of our personal histories. It's worth repeating here what Gabriel García Márquez said in his book *Vivir para contarla* (*Live to Tell*): "Life isn't what one has lived, but what one remembers, and how one remembers it in order to pass it on."

And so seven years of joyous, painful, arduous activity went by. Until the night of Tlatelolco, October 2, 1968 arrived, that criminal repression, to date unpunished, that Gustavo Díaz Ordaz's government launched against the Student Movement —a movement that the magazine supported and of which it was a part, just as were the vast majority of Mexico's artists, writers,

and intellectuals, and that not only unleashed the fury of death, exile, persecution, suffering, prison, and terror upon so many people—a wound in Mexico's heart that has bled for decades and may never close—putting an end to the golden dream of the Sixties and to…*El Corno Emplumado*. Because that was the beginning of the end of the magazine.

The economic support from government institutions ended abruptly, and the "forces of order" hunted down the Movement's protagonists and many of its sympathizers, those who had escaped with our lives. It dispersed people, forced them to flee, submerged them in silence and into a long and humiliating assimilation of the tragedy. One voice, as we know, raised itself the day after the massacre and in the midst of the confusion that followed. It's important to remember it. Days after the massacre and from his diplomatic post in India, Octavio Paz renounced his position as Mexico's ambassador to that country in protest against that which had been perpetrated.

The depth of the historic insult inflicted upon our youth was of such a magnitude that today, almost 50 years later, expositions and events such as these continue to question, interview and write about the Student Movement of 1968, as opposed to the oblivion and indifferent demands in which some still wish to embalm that horrendous history, and resulting from the growing interest that the events of Mexico 1968 continue to awaken. And we can listen to people, weathered by age, with broken voices and holding back their tears, speak of the details of their participation and of the quota of suffering they have had to endure.

The translation of this remembrance first appeared on Open Door Archive hosted by Northwestern University for their exhibit "*El Corno Emplumado*: Hemispheric Networks, 1962-1969" in April 2017.

An additional commentary on El Corno Emplumado /The Plumed Horn

Margaret Randall in conversation with Edric Mesmer

Edric Mesmer: I'm trying to get a sense of that alchemical and collaborative process that precipitated your curatorial choices, such as El Corno's moving through schools of North American poetry, from Beats to Black Mountain—where else did your editing move you? What groups, movements, or schools? How did you all go about this? Was Donald Allen's New American Poetry a part of these decisions?—what other collections, or other magazines informed you as editors?

Margaret Randall: Sergio's starting point was extraordinarily interesting to me: his description of interviewing David Alfaro Siqueiros in prison and listening to the muralist describe the ways in which abstract expressionism had impacted his own work. I too had been deeply influenced by abstract expressionism; my closest friends in New York were artists who identified with that

school. So, I guess I would begin by saying that those of us coming up in the late 1950s and early 1960s (I arrived in Mexico at the end of 1961) were open to multiple creative energies. We drew inspiration from visual artists, the music of the times, the literature being written by our mentors and contemporaries, as well as from social situations, the land, ancient cultures, and a variety of spiritual manifestations. During *El Corno*'s eight-year run, we published poems written by painters (issue #9, January 1964) and poetry and drawings created by indigenous artists. Although feminism's dictum, "the personal is political," was still in the future, poets were making important connections between their own experience and the larger social sphere.

The alchemy you speak of was born of curiosity and the willingness to explore a broad palette. I vividly remember how curious I myself was about the sort of poetry being written by poets of my generation in Latin America. As a young U.S. American recently arrived in Mexico, probably one of the first things I had to learn was that Latin America wasn't a single entity. It was made up of dozens of disparate countries and hundreds of different cultures: national, ethnic, indigenous, generational.

In our nightly gatherings at Philip Lamantia's apartment in Mexico City's Zona Rosa, we listened to one another read. Juan Bañuelos's socially conscious poetry was different from Ernesto Cardenal's ponderous voice—his references to indigenous loss or haunting evocation of Marilyn Monroe's voice on the telephone with God.

Raquel Jodorowsky's surreal imagination soared, while Carlos Coffeen Serpas sketched tortured creatures in scenarios that took us back to medieval mystery. The Nicaraguans were writing in a conversational style, while the descendants of César Vallejo were inventing new language.

And if those of us from the North hadn't read most of the great new voices from the South, the same was true in reverse. The Beats had made an impression on young poets throughout Latin America (and in other parts of the world, like India where the Hungryalists also thought of themselves as "beat"), but I remember wanting to make other U.S. voices accessible: Robert Creeley, Amiri Baraka (still LeRoi Jones at the time), Thomas Merton's contemplative work, Kenneth Patchen's picture-poems, Denise Levertov, Diane Wakoski, Diane DiPrima. I think I have always had a desire to cross borders, break down walls. And in Sergio I found a kindred spirit. When either of us discovered work that excited us, our first thought was to enable as many people to read it as possible. This was where the collaborative part of the equation was simply natural to our editorial process.

Reading to one another, as I have written elsewhere, awoke our awareness of our ignorance or limitations. Those of us from north of the border were unfamiliar with Neruda, Vallejo, Huidobro, Mistral. Those south of the border had never read Williams or Pound, or even Walt Whitman or Hart Crane. You have to remember that translation was sparse back then, and good translation almost nonexistent. And the newer or more

experimental work was completely unknown. We felt called upon to fill those voids.

With *El Corno Emplumado*, I think our main goal at the beginning was simply not to favor any single group of poets or poetic style. Naturally, we began with our friends. Many of mine were the Beats, and poets who had been at Black Mountain, Deep Image poets such as Jerome Rothenberg and Robert Kelly, and others I knew personally. In some cases, there was a geographical connection. I had lived in New York and so knew and appreciated many of the poets I'd known there. Sergio was most familiar with the poets of his generation in Mexico, and some from previous generations. There were also a number of fine poets who were living in Mexico because that country had given them refuge from the political persecution they'd experienced in Europe or Latin America.

The great Spanish poet León Felipe, already elderly but still producing fine work, walked Mexico City's streets, identifiable by his black beret and affable manner. Jacobo Glantz had escaped European fascism; he owned a café in Mexico's Zona Rosa district, where he could be seen daily sitting in a corner writing in Hebrew, pushing his typewriter's carriage in the opposite direction of those with which we were familiar. Jacobo was also generous when it came to young poets eating at his restaurant; if he knew we were struggling he wouldn't charge us.

After the journal's first or second issue, our horizons spread rapidly: as *El Corno* became known in different places, the poets who lived in those places began sending us their work. We designated representatives in different countries, young poets like ourselves who were willing to sell subscriptions, haul copies of the journal around to bookstores, solicit work from the poets they liked, tell us what they thought we should charge for an issue where they lived—which meant what they thought a young poet like themselves would be able to pay for a poetry publication. Eventually, many of these representatives sent us small anthologies of new work from their countries, and we published those anthologies, sometimes bilingually but more often (because the work of translation itself was a bigger challenge than we anticipated) simply in their original language. It is probable that many of these anthologies featured the work of a particular group favored by the representative. But I want to believe that Sergio's and my broad vision also encouraged them to be inclusive.

Looking back, our choices were eclectic, but that in and of itself had meaning for us. We always felt that if a poem was good, if it communicated effectively, we would publish it; no matter whether it was beat, concrete, written by a Catholic priest or Communist guerrilla. We often said that the only criteria that would keep us from publishing a poem would be if it was fascist or racist in its content. We had no consciousness at the time of the dangers of poetic misogyny or homophobia, and when I read *El Corno* today I find a number of poems that objectify women or laud heterosexual love as if it were the only option.

Our eclecticism led us to believe we were setting an example contrary to so many little magazines that only published a particular style of work, usually what the editors and their friends were producing. There were times, as well, when reverence for a particular writer led us to publish his or her work. One example of this was when Herman Hesse sent us an unpublished poem. It moved us that someone of his stature would notice and want to support *El Corno*, and we were thrilled to be able to publish what he sent.

Another practice on which we prided ourselves was that we wouldn't publish someone simply because he or she was a friend. We felt that would be disrespectful of the work. Norman Mailer, whom I had known briefly in New York, sent me a series of poems I didn't like. Much to his astonishment, I rejected them. He was so surprised by my reaction that he sent a small monetary donation by return mail. This policy sometimes backfired, though. Cassius Clay sent us a series of anti-war haiku, which I didn't like and I rejected them as well. I could not have imagined that Cassius Clay would one day be Mohamed Ali, and that publishing his poems against the American war in Vietnam would have been a coup.

Donald Allen's *New American Poetry* was important to us as it was to anyone who read or wrote poetry at that time. But I don't think we consulted the book for names; by the time it was published, I knew many of its contributors, at least through their work. In any case, after a year or so we solicited very little work; the

journal's reputation had been established by then, and we were getting some 30 submissions a week. In retrospect, I believe this was one of our shortcomings. The quality of work we published might have benefitted from reading more, seeking out writers whose work interested us, and asking them for poems. We did do this more when it came to essays. For example, we published an important piece by the French/Mexican anthropologist Laurette Séjourné, an interesting essay on the Senoi dream culture, and a fine interview with James Baldwin.

One more thing I want to say about being so broad in our interest, publishing different sorts of poetry in a single issue, is that it allowed us to understand, at least somewhat, what motivated these different poetries. For example, why were poets in Brazil writing what came to be known as "concrete verse"? When you saw the words "Coca-Cola" transform themselves into "cloaca" (sewer) on the page, the message about what the U.S. Coca-Cola monopoly was doing in Brazilian culture was instantly clear. The dark humor evident in Topor's drawings gave us a vivid sense of sophisticated French culture during the Sixties (leading up to the events of Paris in 1968). We learned about the complex cultures of countries such as Finland or Greece from the work of their young writers.

The raw passion we read and heard in the poetry being written by some of the guerrilla poets—Leonel Rugama of Nicaragua, Otto René Castillo of Guatemala, Javier Heraud of Peru—gave us a very real sense of what the life and death struggles of the times were like in those

countries. Publishing what was being written by Cubans who were living the early years of their country's revolution allowed our readership to experience the day to day reality of that revolution at a time when no honest news of it was getting to the U.S. And publishing Latin Americans in general showed a U.S. readership, still feeling the lingering effects of McCarthyism, that in other parts of the world it was okay to write about social issues.

"Getting the news" through the sensibilities of poets and at a time when most major news outlets were already controlled by corporations or dictatorial governments, was profoundly important to us and our readers. Understanding such a variety of different situations through the words of the poets who were their protagonists, or at the very least their honest witnesses, provided the basis for further discussions that crossed international borders. We were learning that we didn't have to depend on biased or vitiated news reports for our information. In fact, we were beginning to learn that journalists and even historians and social scientists didn't necessarily provide dependable information about places and events. We trusted the words of poets more.

The foregoing might give the impression that we favored content over form, that we viewed poetry primarily as "communicating the news." This wasn't the case at all. We saw form and content as intimately linked. We valued poetry for its sound, its rhythms, its essence. We believed in the magic that links words and creates a poem. And we believed poetry could change the world.

EM: I would love to know more about the editors' interactions with the authors Sergio lists, from Miguel Grinberg through Edmundo Aray, and the many groups mentioned too! While I am certain much is recorded in the pages of the journal and in correspondence, this kind of personal knowledge (especially anecdotal) is often informative and otherwise difficult to discover. (I think of your interview with me where you talked about Rosario Castellanos and Philip Lamantia, for example.)

MR: Our interactions with these authors and the groups to which they belonged was vibrant, vital, and manylayered. It took place through the work itself, through letters, and through person to person contact. This was all the more interesting, given the fact that our communication back then was exclusively carried out via the regular mails. It took a long time, sometimes three or four months, for a letter to make its way from Buenos Aires to Mexico City, a month or more for one to come to us from any part of the United States. This was decades before email, and none of us had the

resources to make long-distance calls. Even telegrams were rare.

Despite these impediments, poets sent us work and wrote to us: there was a hunger for contact, exchange. Poets from all over wrote long letters describing their daily lives, their concerns, including the literary and the social. Some of these letters found their way into our letter section at the back of each issue, but we could have published entire issues with these letters alone, and many of our readers—at the time and since—have said that the letter section was one of the most interesting features of the journal.

Soon, writing wasn't enough. Poets—even when they had to sell vehicles to get the travel money, or invest in "fly now, pay later" plans—began coming to Mexico City. They visited us and often slept on our couches or floors. Our home was where we put the magazine together, and it was almost always filled with poets and artists who stayed for days or weeks. It bore their living imprint, from one whole wall covered with photographs our contributors sent to us to their presence when they passed through.

Perhaps one reason for this was that Mexico City was a kind of midpoint; if you lived in Latin America and were traveling to the U.S., you might pass through Mexico. If you were living in the U.S. and were traveling south, and especially if you were traveling to Cuba back then, you would naturally go through Mexico. Our home became a meeting ground, a haven and a place where work was

shared, issues discussed. Young poets must have told other young poets they would likely have a place to stay with us. Endless discussions about poetry, about art, about the role of the poet and artist in society, took place in our home. Young poets met older more consecrated poets, who sometimes became their mentors. Older poets were constantly being refreshed by the ideas and language of the young.

The February 1964 Meeting of Poets (Encuentro de poetas) was also central to bringing us together. Dozens of poets and writers we had published or would soon publish arrived in Mexico for that event, and we got to know one another personally. I believe this was when we first met the poets of El Techo de la Ballena, such as Edmundo Aray and Juan Calzadilla (Venezuela), *Los Nadaistas* (Colombia), Jaime Carrero (Puerto Rico), Miguel Grinberg (Argentina), Roque Dalton (El Salvador), Roberto Fernández (Panama). Others had come to Mexico previously: Ernesto Cardenal, Raquel Jodorowsky, Ernesto Mejía Sánchez, etc. Some had been present at the evening salons at Philip Lamantia's apartment where the idea for *El Corno* was born. The political crises in a number of Latin American countries also brought important poets to Mexico as refugees. So, there were many reasons why and how we might personally meet some of the poets and artists whose work appeared in our pages.

Cuba was a story unto itself. Almost from *El Corno*'s beginning, we had begun to correspond with Cuban writers and artists. We published a small anthology of their work in our issue #7 (July 1963). Perhaps because

of that, Sergio and I were invited to a gathering there, honoring the hundredth anniversary of Rubén Darío, in January of 1967. This was el Encuentro con Rubén Darío. It was at that event that I first heard a very young Nancy Morejón read her work. As well as more established poets such as Roberto Fernández Retamar and Pablo Armando Fernández. I returned alone a year later to attend the Cultural Congress of Havana. Both these trips were formative to my beginning to know and love Cuban literature.

By traveling to Cuba, we were defying the "sugarcane curtain" erected by the United States, and Cuban poets and artists were appreciative of the risks we took and enthusiastic about the magazine. Despite explicit threats from the Pan-American Union, cultural arm of the Organization of American States, we devoted our entire issue #23 (July 1967) to Cuban writing and art. This was immensely important to our North American readership, that otherwise had no access at all to what was being written within the context of the Cuban Revolution. It was in Cuba, as well, that we first met important Latin American poets such as Mario Benedetti from Uruguay, Thiago de Mello from Brazil, René Depestre from Haiti, and José María Arguedas from Peru.

Word of mouth was paramount in those years. For example, U.S. poet Paul Blackburn had translated the work of Argentinean writer Julio Cortázar into English. I can remember driving Paul around Mexico City as he spread some of Julio's work out on the dashboard of my car and read aloud from it. Later we would meet Julio

himself. Larry Ferlinghetti, Susan Sherman, Carol Bergé, Allen Ginsberg and many others travelled to Mexico, visited our home, staying with us for varying periods of time. They in turn introduced us to others, or to the work of others. And so it went: ever-expanding concentric circles of creativity, much of it outside the canon. We all had a hunger to know how other poets lived, how they used language, the many things they had to do to earn a living, what role poetry played in their lives.

Some of these visits happened in circumstances that were in themselves unique. Allen Ginsberg stayed with us for a few days on his way to Cuba in 1965; his experience on the island would lead to passionate discussions around politics and art. Lawrence Ferlinghetti visited us during the 1968 Student Movement but several months before the repression that put an end to the journal. He wanted to get a sense of what was happening with students in other parts of the country, and he and I travelled together to Oaxaca. The South African poet Dennis Brutus visited us the day after the Tlatelolco massacre in October 1968; I was able to give him a couple of rolls of film taken during that massacre, he in turn took them to London where he was living at the time, and the photos appeared on the front page of one of that city's principle daily papers. They told the world what had been perpetrated, a story Mexico itself was trying hard to suppress. Denise Levertov also visited us at the height of the Movement. These poets were able to bring the news back to their home countries in person.

EM: I'm getting a sense of the broader scene of Mexican poetry, and would also like to know more about the specific periodicals which El Corno operated among (or set itself apart from): El Corno in a context among the other magazines mentioned by Sergio (Pájaro Cascabel, etc.) and what those other magazines were up to; whether you or your contributors also published in those magazines; whether you had shared or differing aesthetics…

MR: We shared a common aesthetic with many of the editors of the other small independent literary magazines in Mexico and elsewhere. I remember that we had ongoing exchanges with several hundred of them. Although, again, our horizons were broader, probably for two reasons: 1) because we published work from all over and one of our stated intentions was not to get bogged down with "schools" or "cliques," and 2) because *El Corno* was bilingual and thus had access to a much larger number of writers and readers.

Of course, each publication had its own editors, and to a great extent those editors' personal tastes dictated what they published. There was also the question of genre. In Mexico, I remember a journal with which we had great relations; it was called *El Cuento* and only published short stories. Its editor, Edmundo Valadés, was a good friend and great supporter of *El Corno*, but his interest was exclusive to the short story. We were close to Thelma Nava's magazine, *El Pájaro Cascabel*, and to another called *El Rehilete* edited by Beatriz Espejo. As I write this I am suddenly struck by the fact that so many of the magazines had women editors, at a time when

many more men than women were publishing. I would venture to guess that women possessed the energy needed to keep these projects going, even when it was harder for us to publish our work.

Some magazines did spring from specific groups, and published mostly or only work by members of those groups. And yes, we published one another, and in general all of us published in one another's journals. We all valued a sense of camaraderie, solidarity. None of us wanted to be exclusive or practice one-upmanship with another journal; we considered that to be the kind of thing the more officialist institutions did.

In the United States, we identified with a number of independent literary magazines: Jerome Rothenberg and Robert Kelly's *Trobar*, *The Floating Bear* edited by Diane DiPrima and LeRoi Jones (later by Diane alone), Jon and Gypsy Lou Webb's *The Outsider*, Thomas Merton's *Monk's Pond*, George Hitchcock's *Kayak*, *The Evergreen Review* edited by Barney Rosset, and many others. There was *TriQuarterly*; each of its issues had as many pages as ours and it also featured work in translation. I know I am forgetting many with which we had important and ongoing relationships.

If one of us discovered a writer we considered exciting, we would advertise the fact, encouraging other magazines to take a look at his or her work. There were people like Miguel Grinberg in Argentina, who had a magazine called *Eco Contemporáneo*. Miguel's interests were always very international; he had visions of creating

a new human being ("new man" we said back then), who would be motivated by comradeship, collaboration, and the desire for peace rather than by conquest and competition.

There were definitely magazines we admired and with which we felt an intense bond, and others we didn't care for. Robert Bly's *Fifties*, and later *Sixties*, seemed to have a lot in common with *El Corno*, since Bly's goal was to make poetry available in translation. But we didn't think his translations were good. We had closer ties with Clayton Eshleman's *Sulfur* and later *Caterpillar*. Latin American publications such as *Rayado sobre El Techo de la Ballena* (Caracas), *Eco Contemporáneo* and *Airon* (Buenos Aires), *Los Tzanzicos* (Quito), *El Pez y la Serpiente* (Managua), and *Casa de las Américas* and *Santiago* (Havana and Santiago de Cuba, respectively) were journals with which we felt a profound kinship.

EM: I know you have written about the consequences of the suppression of the Student Movement (in the Lost & Found pamphlet and elsewhere), but I am hoping you could speak particularly to its effects, as you saw them, on the cultural legacy of Mexico's arts climate going forward. (I apologize if this is an overly broad question on such significant events.)

MR: The suppression of Mexico's 1968 Student Movement did not happen in a vacuum. Similar crackdowns took place at the time across the United States, Latin America, Europe, and also in other parts of the world. The Sixties had produced a reaction to the coercive controls of the 1950s. Poets, among other creative spirits, were the spokespeople for a great explosive surge. We rejected the social hypocrisy of our elders, the greed and wars, the increased gap between rich and poor, the image of "the man in the gray flannel suit." We became dangerous to the establishment.

In certain places, such as in Mexico as that country prepared to host the Summer Olympics, and for a variety of reasons too complex to go into here, these explosions prospered and threatened the existing political structure. The repression was swift and ferocious. Hundreds if not thousands of people were murdered and/or disappeared, many of them young people. Hundreds were imprisoned or had to go into exile. Some, like myself, suffered repression a year later, as the Movement's survivors made plans to commemorate the first anniversary of our losses. As Mexico's government lashed out against any and all protest, this also affected other areas of life, including—and perhaps especially—the life of the arts: poetry, painting, music, theater, dance. Writers and artists had been among the most effective voices in the call for a healthier set of social relations. We were speaking truth to power. And so, we had to be silenced.

You ask specifically about the effects of the suppression of the Student Movement on Mexico's cultural legacy going forward. I would say the effects were profoundly damaging. For thirty years—THIRTY YEARS—after the massacre at Tlatelolco, censorship of what the Díaz Ordaz government had done was almost total. The archives remained closed. People were discouraged from writing about what they had experienced or seen. The single exception to this was Elena Poniatowska's *Night of Tlatelolco*, a book of oral histories. Because she was already such an important literary figure, Elena got away with publishing that book. Most were coerced into silence. With that sort of censorship in effect, selfcensorship is bound to follow. This was true for poets and artists as well as for journalists. Only at the turn of the 21st century did this censorship begin to lift.

Mexico has an important history of supporting the arts, so this long silence was deadening. When it ended, people were able to draw on deep traditions of witness and voice. In Mexico, in January of 2015 when I went down to a commemoration of *El Corno*, I was not only impressed by the beautiful temporary exhibition depicting the journal's place in the cultural life of the 1960s, but also by a permanent museum in the same building:
a moving memorial to the events of 1968.

After it sided with the students, *El Corno Emplumado* immediately lost all Mexican governmental subsidy, which made up a large percentage of our support. We weren't alone. The government stopped supporting all the independent journals and groups. We lasted a bit

longer than most, because we also had support from the United States. Perhaps this made the government angrier, determined to finish us off. As an outspoken, active, woman of U.S. origin living in Mexico, I was particularly vulnerable. In the summer of 1969, plainclothed paramilitary operatives came to my house and stole my passport at gunpoint. We had to go into hiding. That basically made continuing to publish the magazine impossible. I remember that we were acutely aware of *El Corno* as a target of official ire, and got a friend, Ecuadorian poet Miguel Donoso Pareja, to place a small article about its demise in *El Día*, the local newspaper for which he wrote. But that wasn't enough. Eventually we had to find our way out of the country. At the time, *El Corno* #32 was at the printers. It would never see the light of day.

Still, although the journal expired beneath the boot of Mexican government repression, it lived on in terms of its significance. Over the years, I have received dozens, perhaps hundreds, of letters from young (and not so young) poets, voicing gratitude for the magazine and telling me how important it had been to their own projects. At the 2007 Guadalajara Book Fair, when I attended a premier for the film "El Corno Emplumado: Una Historia de los sesenta," the viewing room was packed. People were standing two- and three-deep against the walls. During the Q&A, a number of young Mexican poets said they felt that *El Corno*'s legacy had made it possible for them to launch similarly "impossible" projects. Just the other day, I received an email from Nika and Aron Chilewich in Mexico City,

who have a bilingual journal called *Erizo*. They wrote: "We are emailing you because *El Corno Emplumado* is a major influence on *Erizo*. It has provided a model for thinking about what a transnational publication can and should be." I find it significant that they refer to the journal in the present tense.

In the United States, as well, I know of several fine literary magazines that consider themselves inheritors of *El Corno*: publications such as *Mandorla*, and more recently *Malpaís Review*. And it wasn't just the fact that *El Corno* was bilingual that inspired younger generations of poets. They were intrigued by the magazine's letter section, by the fact that we published many different sorts of voices, by our willingness to give space to the experimental and outrageous in form as well as content. Hundreds of "little" magazines at the time were part of the web we created, even if many of them were small mimeographed publications or printed mostly local poets. But there were also those, back then and later, that shared our goals: eclecticism, translation, and other ways of bridging borders. And, needless to say, there have been those that have taken our vision further than we were able to do.

Perhaps the single attribute that links us, is the courage to do the "impossible." Not so much who we published, what sort of work, what themes any of us favored, or whether or not we were interested in translation. It was more about going out, without any institutional backing, beholden to no one, and creating something extraordinary. Something filled with imagination and possibility. When others said it couldn't be done, we did

it. Failure never even occurred to us. I think this is our most important legacy. The rush of those years, the excitement Sergio and I felt as we walked the great city's streets, visiting poets, asking for work, begging for money. We must have seemed brash to many. But after we'd published an issue or two, people realized we were serious, and also that we were capable of making this great project happen.

Half a century later, interest in *El Corno Emplumado* has remained and has recently re-emerged, exploded, in Mexico and elsewhere. The week-long event in Mexico City in 2015, where Sergio and I spoke, was certainly evidence of this. The extraordinary website Harris Feinsod put up with help from Northwestern University. The SITE Santa Fe biennale that featured the journal. The number of times I've been asked to write about our experience, or people have interviewed me about it. And the growing number of excellent masters' theses and doctoral dissertations on the journal. It is clear to me that *El Corno Emplumado* is a solid part of Mexican culture, featured in many important books about that country's artistic history in the 1960s.

EM: Lastly: Where do you see the concerns of El Corno today? Do you think that certain journals or magazines, editors or series, have taken up the conversation you facilitated through El Corno Emplumado?

MR: To some extent I've answered this above, when speaking of *Mandorla*, *Malpaís Review*, or *Erizo*. Your own work has been important, as has Ammiel Alcalay's *Lost & Found*

and Lynne DeSilva-Johnson's *The Operating System*. At *Casa de las Américas* in Cuba, on handwritten index cards and lacking the sort of technological innovation we've enjoyed in the U.S., the institution's library has kept an important project going that for decades has looked at the connections and influences among the "little" magazines of the Americas. There are many important projects today that continue *El Corno*'s legacy in one way or another: either because they feature translation and attempt to cross borders, or because they prioritize quality but use broad criteria when accepting work for publication rather than establishing themselves as a showcase for any one group.

The conversation is certainly ongoing, and always will be as long as people read and write poetry. But today it is more all-embracing, including—often featuring—women's voices, LGBTQ voices, the chorus that speaks out against violence and war, against the current U.S. administration and its policies that has made so many of us feel spiritually and politically hijacked. Following our last presidential election, a number of anthologies appeared: collections of poems written in protest against the current encroachment of fascism.

Today's conversation, or conversations, also take place in more technologically advanced venues. Digital publishing, blogs, zines and online magazines enable people to publish with less money and more immediacy. Performance poetry is popular, and many poets are paying more attention to how they present their work. Poetry slams have been around for a while, and have involved many young people in poetic expression. I am

old-fashioned enough that I still prefer journals and books I can hold in my hands, touch, feel, smell and appreciate for their physical qualities as well as their contents. At the same time, I understand that the technology that makes more exciting work available is a good thing.

I believe that discrete historic moments are what give birth to lasting projects, literary as well as others. The Sixties was a very particular time: angry, exuberant, courageous, wild in many ways. Leaps in collective consciousness were taking place in the arts and elsewhere. Discourse was shifting from the officiallysanctioned to the alternative. And gradually the alternative came to occupy a place that could not be silenced. To my mind, the era has mostly been mischaracterized by those who have written about it. Memory is fickle and often distorted. I am so tired of reading about a Sixties I don't recognize. Only the Sixties I experienced could have given birth to *El Corno Emplumado*. Subsequent and current projects respond to their own times, just as future projects will respond to theirs.

[December 2017]

AMONG THE NEIGHBORS SERIES

1 Poetry in the Making: A Bibliography of Publications by Graduate Students in the Poetics Program, University at Buffalo, 1991-2016 by James Maynard

2 In Search of Blew: An Eventual Index of *Blewointment* Magazine, 1963-1977 by Gregory Betts

3 *TISH*— Another "Sense of Things" by Derek Beaulieu

4 *Skanky Possum* Press: A (Personal) Genealogy By Dale Smith

5 Remembering *El Corno Emplumado/The Plumed Horn*
by Sergio Mondragón
translated with additional commentary
by Margaret Randall

This new pamphlet series seeks non-academic and academic submissions of 10-30 pages on the subject of little magazines, generally or on specific magazines, published from 1940 onward.

We invite subjects along the lines of:

- case studies of a single little magazine;
- publishing networks in and among little magazines;
- studies of the materiality of small press publications; - contexts of association and sociability upon the pages of magazines; and,
- bibliographies, including bibliographies of poets or groups of poets or “schools” among little magazines.

Illustrative content most welcome!

Please send proposals to the series editor at esmesmer@buffalo.edu

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This consciousness within her uncurled
itself upon the rollers of objective
experience
printing impressions
vaguely and variedly
upon Ova
in place of the more formulate education
coming naturally
to the units of a national instigation

—Mina Loy
from "Ova, Among the Neighbors"