

Doc Chat Episode Five Transcript

JULIE GOLIA: Hello Doc Chatters. Welcome to Doc Chat. I'm on Julie Golia. I'm the curator of History, Social Sciences and Government Information at the New York Public Library. For those of you who have not yet attended a Doc Chat, this is a weekly program series from NYPL Center for the Research in the Humanities, that digs deep into the stories behind the library's most interesting collections and highlights ways that teachers can incorporate them into the classroom. On this week's episode, Ian Fowler, who is the curator of maps and geospatial librarian here at NYPL, is joined by Mary Catherine Kinniburgh. Mary Catherine works at Granary Books, an independent publisher and rare books and archives dealer that specializes in 20th century avant garde materials. She recently completed her PhD at the Graduate Center, CUNY, and is currently writing a book on libraries collected by postwar American poets. So, Ian and Mary Catherine are going to be discussing the small press and mimeograph revolution that flourished in the United States in the 1960s. And they'll be highlighting digital resources and methods for contextualizing these materials. A little bit of housekeeping, our guests are going to talk for about 10 to 15 minutes before we open up the conversation as we always do. So during the program, as you always do, please feel free to use the chat function to share general comments, thoughts, etc. Though, make sure as I often make this mistake as well, that you change your chat mode to panelists and attendees so that everybody is included in the conversation. Now once Ian and Mary Catherine decide we're going to open it up to questions, I'm going to ask you to use the question and answer module in the question and answer segment. It's an easier way for us to keep track of your questions and also if you wish to remain anonymous, make sure to click on that option before submitting your question. Now, we'd also like to know a little bit more about you. And to that end, I'm going to launch a quick poll that I would love for you to fill out now. And for the first time in Doc Chat history, I get to give a language disclaimer. Please note that this episode will be containing discussions of adult themes and the use of adult language. So it may not be suitable for younger audiences. So please go ahead and take part in the poll that I just launched. And I am going to throw it over to Ian and Mary Catherine.

IAN FOWLER: Thank you so much, Julie. And thank you so much, Mary Catherine, always good to be in conversation with you. So today, we're going to be talking a lot about relationships. You and I obviously used to work together. That's our primary relationship. What is your relationship with materials we're going to see today?

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: Thanks, Ian. And hey, everyone. It's so exciting to have you all here digitally. And I'm very stoked to talk with Ian. He and I would always hang out in the hallways at NYPL and talk about DA Levi. So it's particularly nice, we kind of get to do that again. So I'm to share my relationship to these materials, I'll just sort of articulate the type of

ethos that underlies the work that I do, which is -- poetry is a meaningful structure in which you can house your life. And if you do that with fidelity to poetry, that is a revolutionary act, and in that it is political. And you'll probably get into trouble. So I learned that by working with Lost and Found, the CUNY poetics document initiative, which is run through the center for the Humanities, who's been a co-sponsor of this event. Thank you, Samson for helping promote this event. And Ammiel Alcalay is the general editor of that project. And it sends graduate students into Archives and Special Collections to do work on under researched 20th century poetry authors, essentially. And that was really transformative, it got me working at the New York Public Library, it got me thinking, maybe I should be on the other side of the reference desk. And then once I was in the Berg collection, I noticed there were all these incredible small press and mimeo magazines. And for those of you who have been to NYPL, you know, the Berg is known for having Charles Dickens desk, right? And a big collection of Dickens and [inaudible]. So I was like, What are all these badass materials doing here? And I looked into it. And there was an exhibition in 1998, by Steve Clay, and Rodney Phillips, that did a lot of collections development around what we would call the mimeograph revolution or small press, and I'll get into more specifically what that means. So finding out about this exhibition called A Secret Location. And there's also a book that became my Bible while I was doing my PhD. And now I helped maintain the website for this project. That was sort of, that was the network that put me into contact with poets and people who were really walking the walk of poetry being a structure for life itself. So that aspect seems really important to what we bring to the documents, because this era of history is still being materially placed, it is still so much in progress. So many poets, including ones we're going to talk about, are still doing work today. So I feel like centering that part really matters.

IAN FOWLER: I completely agree. And so where are we moving on to now?

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: I'm going to show you some stuff. And let me make sure I've got the slideshow working. I see someone has asked in the comments, what is that book, and it's called A Secret Location on the Lower East Side. And I can send a link to share more information about that after I do the chat. So this is Lost and Found and A Secret Location, the title's up there. And this was a counterculture exhibition that I got to work on at the New York Public Library in 2018, with Isaac [inaudible], which ties into the documents themselves. So if you search for counter culture, on the New York Public Library digital collections, you'll see 22 hits. And Ian, do you think that reflects the NYPL's holdings of countercultural materials?

IAN FOWLER: Having been to that fantastic counterculture exhibit and having gotten a chance to see all of our zeens and counterculture materials, I would say definitely not.

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: Ha, no. So I mean, with anything, and I say this from a teaching perspective, as well, this, your searches are only as good as the terms, you know, and I want to say just explicitly, that I know that this is a search term that is useful for these materials, because I hunted stocks at the Berg so, I think in this moment where we're all teaching digitally, we're all bringing the experiences we had in stacks or in reading rooms to our

teaching. And that's a really useful thing to remember too. So if we search for counterculture, and this is just a screenshot, I have links for all these two, but we're kind of doing this like, cooking show style. This is me pulling my search out of the oven. Here's one I made earlier. Yeah. So you can see the Oracle, which was the cover that Ian so thoughtfully put together for the slide deck of the beautiful woman, and the beautiful color techniques that went into this, and that is West Coast. I know we promised that we would talk about East Coast, but I want to kind of trouble that a little bit as we go through. And you'll also see some other fantastic stuff. You'll see this poster called Pow-Wow, A Gathering of the Tribes, which advertises the human being in 1967. And you'll see on this nice peachy paper, one of my favorite objects, and it's called Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts. And it is why we have this disclaimer, I suppose. And I actually kind of want to talk about that too, because I think it's part of its power. So this was produced in New York City from a secret location on the Lower East Side. That's what Ed Sanders, its creator said. And this is actually a pretty notorious page. Daniel Kane talks about it in his, I think I have this book or two. He talks about it in his book on poetry and the Lower East Side. But Ed Sanders in Fuck You was not only publishing friends and poetry, but was thinking through the mimeograph as a tool for political revolution in what is called the Flaming Cock issue, where obscenity and working through raw sex and sexual awakening, that was on the table. That was something to be discussed. And what I actually find most special about this issue of Fuck You, is not it's delightful obscenity, but it's the fact that it's got some Maximus poems in it. So, Ed Sanders, he was in the Fugs, he was part of the 60s counterculture in New York City. He lives up in Woodstock right now. And he's still doing these incredible poems, glyph projects. So he's, he's still keeping the faith alive for all of us. But the poet Charles Olson was a huge pivotal figure, in post war American poetics. He, he was Rector at Black Mountain College, he left the office of war information in the 40s to pursue a life of poetry. He, he knew poetry was a structure for housing your life. And he's well known for the Maximus poems, three of which are printed here in mimeograph. And here's what the whole published Maximus poems looks like. So I just kind of wanted to bring your attention to this aspect of mimeo and small press as part of its power, that this was a lightweight magazine that you'd have to go into, like, let's say, Peace Eye bookstore, you'd have to ask for it, because you could get arrested for distributing it. This was illicit stuff. But there is our regal Charles Olson, in its pages, and that meant the Maximus poems was circulating, reaching a wider audience than, you know, than this big book. I think we think of poetry as like, you know, here's this author and here's their work, right? But, seeing the networks that emerge from these smaller and more ephemeral publications is really my favorite.

IAN FOWLER: Yeah. And we really get some of those East Coast/West Coast connections within this set of poets, for sure.

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: Yeah. And to that end specifically, I also, I love that someone is chiming in the comments. Mimeograph machine, they have one and used it to print flyers, yes. That's how you do it.

IAN FOWLER: And a lot of the people that we'll talk about learned mimeograph thing from being

in the army in the 50s. So, there's a really interesting connection between war production and the anti-war movement, as the poet's go through their cultural lives.

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: There is and I noticed Ian Brandon in the comments is saying Olson was a denizen of the Lower East Side. And that's not an area he's primarily associated with. But that's my point precisely, that attempts to attempt to firmly tie anyone to one specific geography, I feel like we do that more to make sense to us when that's not really what the documents say. So if we keep looking, we've got this gathering of the tribes with its appropriative imagery, but interesting things going on here. Ian, could you read us some of these glorious, glorious names?

IAN FOWLER: Ah, well, you know, it's like a, it's like a fever dream, a fantasy. So Timothy Leary's here. Ousley was there, passing out the silver acid. Ginsburg's there. Ferlinghetti's there. So we have a real East Coast/West Coast connection there. City Lights, of course, putting out a lot of these mimeograph books. Laura Kendall is there who we'll talk about in a little bit. Jerry Rubin, the Vietnam day committee, the theater that happens. The committee hearings in Congress is there, the Buddha shows up and then pretty much every band you could think of that existed at the time from Jefferson Airplane to Big brother in the Holding Company to Country Joe and the Fish, it's all there.

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: Yeah, totally. All the San Francisco rock bands is what it says. And No Land is asking if this is related to Steve Cannon. That's a good question. I want to look into that. And so what else mentioned Angel Hair too, which is fantastic and Granary Books just put together a complete collection of Angel Hair. And I love that stuff. So yes, looking at all this, all the names that Ian said, that's a lot of dense connection going on there. That's a superstar list. And what sticks out to me is, there's one woman, and that's Lenore Kandel. So, if we think about her work, she did The Love Book. So like Sanders, she was invested in an erotic embodied project that put her in censorship, hot water, and in direct persecution, and she had a court, a huge court case that really kind of took hold of this question of how can you share, how can you distribute your work? And there she is on this amazing flyer. It was apparently her birthday. And Michael McCleary remembers, there was like 35,000 people singing her Happy Birthday, which is so special.

IAN FOWLER: On her 35th birthday, no less.

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: Yeah.

IAN FOWLER: And that's truly the only woman that spoke at the [inaudible].

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: Yeah. And I mean, when you think about the looking at flyers, reading flyers, it's one of my favorite things to do. Because it's totally who is in the same room. And and that that matters, who is meeting face to face, who's having conversations. And I think about the power of being able to look at a document like that and think through it. So as

I'm sort of formulating these documents for you all to think about with teaching and to think about with my own teaching, it's a question of who, which names are popping out? And how is that distinct because this is a small press format, where poets were in charge, you know, where people were creating these events for themselves. This was not some big curated from the top thing. So that's what we have on the New York Public Library. We have Pow-Wow, A Gathering of the Tribes, and we've got Fuck You, two great documents, among many that are available in person, the New York Public Library, and I will say that there are not as many of these types of materials available online for NYPL, even though there are a ton there, because of copyright considerations. So just something to consider. And that's helpful in a way because there are all sorts of people who are doing digitization and taking pictures of these types of small press and mimeograph materials. So, if you go outside of the New York Public Library, but still kind of keep those documents in mind, you can really do some rich work. So I wanted to share a project that I work on with Steve clay of Granary Books, and it's called From A Secret Location. And that plays off the A Secret Location, this is just the digital version of it. So you can really get into some trouble on this site. It's fantastic. And there's a search bar so you can search by name. So I went and I looked for Kandel, to see if our good friend Lenore would show up. And she does. She shows up in a number of small press, mimeograph, little journals, little magazines would be what we would call them. And I'm particularly excited by Beatitude because I love Bob Kaufman. So when you look, okay, here's a flyer. And then you can pair that with the publication you keep building out this network of names, which seems particularly powerful.

IAN FOWLER: If only we had a bigger network of names though.

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: I'm on it. So there's an entry for Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts on From A Secret Location, which I lovingly call facile. Because I talk about this project so much from a secret location, facile. And every Friday on Instagram, Stephen, I post something from a secret location, hashtag facile Fridays. So, if you look up, Fuck You on From a Secret Location, you get the incredible first cover, which has the Peace Eye and Crotch Lake really kind of putting Sanders's agenda there. And this is such a beautiful example of the creativity that could happen with mimeograph. So those of you who are chiming up in the comments or chiming in to say that you've worked with mimeograph, that it's a powerful tool because you can print a bunch but the stencils are kind of finicky, right? Maybe. So, Sanders really used it to great effect here. He, here's some of his signature glyphs. These little drawings, there's a scarab beetle, because Egyptian hieroglyphs were really important to him. There's an eye. Yeah, there's the correction fluid. David, so Sanders, really used this to beautiful, beautiful effect. And what kind of names do you see there, Ian?

IAN FOWLER: Everybody who's with anybody is on here including some imaginary people. Herbert Huncke, who was the mayor of Times Square and 42nd Street. We have Tuli Kufferberro who was the other part of the Fugs. Diane Wakowski, whose deep image of deep image was anything. Pretty much anyone who is anybody is back in this. It's a wonderful testament, and just a rabbit hole of names to look up and research and connect.

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: Completely. Yeah. And what I was struck by is that little sun, the San Francisco poetess and Our Lady of the songs and visions of the what is that word? shrieking, shrieking, joy cunts.

IAN FOWLER: I love it either way.

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: Me too. And that's Lenore Kandel.

IAN FOWLER: Yes.

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: So in terms of the little architecture I wanted to create for us today between that flyer and Fuck You, thinking on the NYPL platform, and also From A Secret Location, as an example of From A Secret Location being an example one of many other further field digital resources you can use. When you start following the names, that's when the magic happens. And that's another thing that I take directly from Lost and Found, because Ammiel will always tell you, follow the people and listen to the documents. So that would be my takeaway for how to work with these materials, is to think of them -- I mean, when they're digitized, it's like their page is all over the place, all over the internet. It's like folders of an archive that are just kind of dispersed. So thinking of the network of names and thinking of the network of people who make this research available, who make these pictures available, to me, that's really important. And it's also really important to just really sit with the documents and see what they say. As I was thinking of, okay, what's my main point and take away? The more I work with these materials, the less I feel compelled to argue anything at all. But just to say, look at this, this is a powerful document that has been created in our recent generation.

IAN FOWLER: Yeah, it is a testament to so many wonderful things. Speaking of arguing, should we open up the Q&A a little bit?

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: Yes. And before we do that, I just want to say I see Alison chiming in talking about the incredible resources Buffalo's contributed to a project called Independent Voices. There are so many places to do this. I just put a couple up on the slide, we'll be sharing all of them in the blog. But that ranges from Ubuweb and Penn sound, and then Naropa audio archive, to individual people, like, go follow Nick Sturm on Twitter, because you will see incredible things from Emory. So think about that research ecosystem would be what I would say, and let's, let's get some questions, let's talk.

IAN FOWLER: To the people asking, we do archive the chat as part of our archive. And if you have any links, or any institutions, or if you're making your own Twitter blogs or Zines, put them in the chat, and we will be producing a blog after this. And we'll put all those links in there so that everyone can see them and share them and be a part of this.

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: And this chat is incredible.

JULIE GOLIA I know, this is going to be an amazing follow up blog post, I have to tell you, we got to get it's going to be a, it's going to be like a, like a subject guide, like a research subjects guide. It's really exciting. So everybody, I just want to remind you, I, you know, hate to pull anybody away from this chat, which is rocking it out. But if you have specific questions for Mary Catherine and Ian, I'd like you to shift over to the Q&A, so that we can better keep track of questions that are that are coming in. And I actually have a question from the perspective of educators who are here and myself as well, because I'm really intrigued by the idea of teaching around profanity. And so for certain, even college students, you'll get the titters, and the you know, like the uncomfortableness or maybe. But also, I mean, I think that there are real, there are real lessons to teach, to think about in terms of ways, the really savvy ways that swear words are, you know, deployed here, and what it means to kind of play with different language around the body and sexualization. So I was wondering if you guys have thoughts on ways of incorporating that kind of approach into the way you would teach something like this?

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: I love that question. Yeah. And I mean, I thought about what example to use. You don't choose an example like Fuck You lightly because it does produce a certain feeling and that was part of the point. So, with Sanders, it was, it meant that he had to keep it under the counter, there were so many things going on with censorship in poetry that was outside of the mainstream context. So one of the things I try to do, when I teach something like Fuck You, is to let the students kind of have their response, let everyone have their response, you don't have to be a student to be like, ha ha, she said, fuck you, you know, like, that does something for a reason. And it happens in your body. Someone says, fuck yo, ah, you know, and to let everyone have that response, to let yourself have that response. And then place it in its political context. Because saying, fuck you is a political act. And that's what the sexual aspect came down to. Everything was in service of poetry, being part of this revolution, and I think Sanders just did it incredibly artfully with that title.

IAN FOWLER: Yeah, and I would just add that, you know, vulgarity is language, and it has its own lifespan, it has its own meanings. And if used well, it has the power that Mary Catherine is talking about, and if used poorly, then you can really do, is you can disassemble it, and especially from like a feminist perspective, or from a cultural perspective, say, this is the problems with the language that you're using. And this is not how it's actually proactive. And so I think there's a lot of ways to attack the vulgarity concept.

JULIE GOLIA: That's great. A lot to think about there. We have a question from Allison, who thanks you for this beautiful, inspiring talk. And I completely agree with those adjectives. And she'd like to hear more about folks learning mimeo in the army, and then making little magazines. That's a fascinating, a fascinating origin story.

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: Ian, I want you to take that one.

IAN FOWLER: Why, thank you.

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: Yeah.

IAN FOWLER: So for, you know, especially during the Korean War, and in the era between World War Two and the Korean War, which was very short, a lot of people who maybe were not keen on being frontline soldiers worked in the information core, they used a lot of mimeo machines there. A lot of radio technicians, a lot of what will come out of the army will be put in to the first publicly funded radio station in San Francisco, will be put into these mimeographed, chatbooks and Zines. A lot of organizing comes out of that as well. So a lot of the skills that people learn will come into this counterculture experience, which then, of course, will be used in the protest against the Vietnam War. Mary Catherine?

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: Yeah, I mean, a lot of my research has focused on folks like Diane di Prima, who chose to never participate in any mainstream institution, really, she dropped out of Swarthmore, but that was as far as she got after one year. And she talks about teaching herself letterpress and the importance of publishing. So I think, paying attention to help people gain their specific skills. There's no doubt in my mind that Olson doing his research for his PhD at Harvard, in the American Studies program, that he brought that intensity to poetry. Seeing the lives people live, as they take poetry as their master house, I think is really, it shows you the broader movements for sure.

IAN FOWLER: It's also the great area, the great era of American army surplus.

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: Oh, yeah. William Everson. Good one, Ammiel. Yeah.

JULIE GOLIA: Mary, Catherine, who do we know today, asks No Land, who is working specifically with mimeograph and continuing this lineage?

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: Wow. That's a beautiful question. I mean, we have the mimeograph at the Center for the Humanities, that Samson and I are trying to do something with that we got through Steve Clay. And we're still working on the provenance of it a bit, but I, can someone chime in in the chat? Does anyone know? I would love to know if someone who's doing a mimeograph scene right now. I mean, people are doing scenes and people are doing beautiful, beautiful publications in this type of vein, but it's it's spread out all over the place. I would love our 110 participants to crowdsource this answer.

JULIE GOLIA: Yes. So we've got somebody had mentioned Jim Pennington uses mimeograph in London, Aloes Books. And then somebody else mentioned that mimeo might have has shifted to Riso. I don't even know what that means. Forgive me. Riso?

IAN FOWLER: Risograph. Yeah, that is such a good point. All the cool kids are using risograph machines. There's tons in Brooklyn.

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: There's a lot of, I mean, letterpress, I've done mimeograph,

it's hard for the stencils are hard. And I definitely, I think that, you know, it's moved on to some other things, letterpress and offset.

JULIE GOLIA: Mary Catherine, what is your favorite Diane di Prima mimeo that you can recommend to people?

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: Who is asking this one? I got to know.

JULIE GOLIA: Alexandra.

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: Alexandra, you rock. The Floating Bear. It's mandatory reading. And it's a lot like Fuck You in that is a quick mode of publication that was designed to be distributed to people who knew it. And di Prima and Amiri Baraka, he was Leroy Jones at the time, they created this one. It is quintessential Lower East Side. They did over 30 issues, but it was 16 in the first year alone. And to me, I mean, she published some of her poems in it. Most of the things that she published as books are not necessarily mimeograph, with the exception of revolutionary letters, which is a close second to The Floating Bear. But I think Reality Studio has a complete run of Floating Bear just photographed on the blog. So that's a great thing to check out. If you're into the who's who and all the different names, Floating Bear will blow your mind about who is publishing.

JULIE GOLIA: And Mary Catherine, Ian, anything else? I just popped the links to the two digital collections documents that we looked at today. Anything else you want to say to our audience about finding documents?

IAN FOWLER: I would just, as a librarian I would just say, ask a librarian. If especially we have a question in the chat, then, of course, we don't have time to about amplifying non euro descended, feminist and queer and trans poets. Those do exist, we have them at NYPL. We're actively collecting Zines, we're actively collecting both current and archival. But for a lot of these things, if there can be a barrier with language, especially librarian language, so the best is ask NYPL or email the Berg collection. Email somebody at NYPL and we'll figure it out.

JULIE GOLIA: I will say also that, you know, it's not just special collections where these things live. And they you can actually find really remarkable small press materials in the general collections right there in the catalog, You just call them right up and here they come to you back when we open. So some of the library's hidden gems tend to be sort of hidden in plain sight and very easily accessible. Everybody, thank you so much for attending. Ian, Mary Catherine, great talk, so much to think about. We'll be sending out a blog in the next week or so with the video of this event, along with all the amazing resources that Ian and Mary Catherine recommended. Next week, we've got another great Doc Chat coming up. It's going to be about design and iconography around the 1939 New York City World's Fair. I'm putting the event in the chat right now. So you can go and register right now. And you can always go on nypl.org/docchat to check out all of our upcoming episodes. As always, you've been an amazing audience. Ian, Mary

Catherine, thank you so much.

MARY CATHERINE KINNIBURGH: Thank you. And seriously, everyone who showed up in the audience, y'all are incredible. I would love if there was a way to keep in touch and keep sharing knowledge and doing that work together. Because really, it's the people.

JULIE GOLIA: That's the beauty of Doc Chat. Thank you, everybody, and we'll see you next week.