

Mostly in Italy if you go under a bridge, you see swarms of colored graffiti and it's part of the Roman experience seeing they have such good shit there cause they invented graffiti, which isn't really true but they invented the word. And I mean who wouldn't want to write on one of the great cities of the world. WSo here's what I'm talking about. Shannon Ebner shot a number of "A"s and wheat-pasted them at the beginning of the month for a year in New York City, then she hired a photographer to take pictures of how it went. The letter "A" in weather, people with a head full of thoughts passing "A" on the street. When she first told me about the project I recalled I'd seen an "A" somewhere for a moment one day. What is that. So one day in June all the "experienced" "A"s (meaning ones shot in situ) were exhibited on the High Line and a crowd of us stood around while a musical composition was sung by a number of singers solo and in pairs simply strewn among us piping.¹ This gathering was so clearly the end. Though the public option of the end in light rain in this debatably beautiful new space, which is under a building on top of an elevated railway in New York, seemed like an unraveling rather than a happening. It wasn't *new*, but it was shared. It seemed like part of this new Mercury Retrograde thing I've been hearing about lately. Like you go back but not really. A HUDSON YARD (2014-15), which is the name of her and David Reinfurt's piece, staked no claims except that its finale was awkwardly perfect within each of

us—I think feeling "completist" in some lonesome 2015 way. Shannon Ebner makes that kind of work. Like the location often confers a kind of stability (within the location), but a sadness too.

But let me go large and general for a moment. Back to Italy. Because I'm thinking Shannon's work has an enormous relationship to graffiti. In its largeness, in its grossness. It isn't "it" but it has the same relationship to passing, i.e. me walking under the underpass in Italy or onto the High Line to witness the very public ending of she and Reinfurt's A HUDSON YARD. I hardly ever pass the word "she" in my writing without wondering if Shannon is okay being a she. I'm not always okay with it; why should she be? Like bodily letters (such as "A"), every pronoun is a kind of event. What's with all the "A"s, I definitely did kind of wonder in the present passing year. Little pregnant men? I mean I can't imagine anyone beginning an alphabet with a *woman*, especially a woman giving birth. The fullness of his belly, language just seems to predict the whole train so when Shannon wrote "a chronology" somewhere I thought she was making a joke since "A" winds up at the head of a list which sort of vanishes in air *while* joining *all* the things that begin. All the lists, which I still believe that's what language does compile. I keep saying language when I mean the letter "A," the opening act. I love how jazzy and vaudevillian the entire cast of "A"s are that Shannon has been working with in the past year. They tilt. They get crap on them, thrown from somewhere. They express faintly like a pencil does. The variety of

manifestations of what "A" can do is what's show biz about her work. On and on. "A" has a double, a white echo of hisself. "A" has panache, is pretty Asian, is mostly gone, is summoned up in 2½ bold strokes you've absolutely never seen before. A fat wintery, shivery "A" dully sits while an unhappy clenching man in his dark cap passes. In fact, on second glance it's a girl, a blond one I think, clutching her cigarette. A whole lot of the A HUDSON YARD for me is a timed yearning for language (maybe like "film"), for these "A"s to be in New York. I mean there's other aspects of Shannon Ebner's work where she's kind of waving at the reality of motorists ("Black Box Collision A" [2013-], the "Auto Body Collision" poem [2015]), but here the auto is you passing by. Her letters need a street, Ebner's a native New Jerseyan and she needs New York like language does. To live. There's a kind of infestation. Like an invasive wound. The various letters (and I don't mean they are anything other than "a." They are all "a"s. And I notice every time I think about you, "a," I have to put you on a shelf, surround you with something so you don't get all diffuse within the flow of sentences you find yourself in. To talk about you, we have a battery of tools ready to operate within the passing fleet that may freeze traffic and mean "this" not this. "A" not A. Because without " " you are required to do. In the Ebner/Reinfurt project I think you are *being* instead. I had not seen you like that since I was five, I think, and you were perched on the edge of the upper blackboard, large and small, and then the enterprise could begin and did.) were initially established in Shannon Ebner's

oeuvre having been materialized in her studio then dispersed, shipped out, presented to the world in galleries and black-box theaters, you know. And having become a thing they could be used to next effect. (I promise I will return to my notes and everything I know but is it so important to be really right or wrong here? I'm not some kind of crap journalist who needs objectively to hit "A" on the nose with informed import. / think I've been invited to dawdle.) Somewhere I have learned that language is linear. You are inclined to go along, getting what I'm saying and at the end know. It's not that slick, but that's the basic idea, seeing and going. And a picture gets seen quick and then you return and that recursiveness is what pictures mean. We don't go, and instead they do. They make us act like that, returning again and again till we know. But a picture of a letter is something else. The art world has summarily absorbed these letters as pictures and even in the dark laboratory of Shannon Ebner, instead of " " "A" got style and difference time and again, "A" got rendered purposefully and repeatedly till eventually we have footage of it, letters that stand out and move, letters that do. But "A" always did, I think that's part of the point. There is always something after it, here a whole city or a neighborhood a whole yard on a train. It begins. And I think, no that's just a fact, the posters holding all the appearances of "A" Shannon chose to work with are photographs. She says so. She called it "A Photography" in London at the first recitation of these letters, identifying what they are for. What are they for? Well I think they are actors. This piece is a performance beginning and end.

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It's language that has to get out of the house to exist. A page cannot hold this purpose. Unless the city is that. I don't know if there is a map of the locations of each of the twelve "A"s that anointed each month this year when they were pasted out there: all their vulnerable, stoic dancing selves and allowed to become part of the bridges and the snow and the furniture and the human faces standing over gazing at us like extras without knowing "A" is down there enduring. Walk one more block and you don't even see it as you're erasing it with your body and then it returns when you are gone. Someone else comes and it happens again. I suppose this clownish practice (of putting the first letter of the alphabet out there to be routinely erased by human bodies) is one of the only ways we can enact reading on a human scale. Shannon says repeatedly that the "A"s are *that size*. Human scale. It's so wrong since letters are *for* our eyes, not actors at all except in advertising, signs directing us in and out of structures, warning and protecting us, separating us into genders, into ordering our coffee and picking it up. Language gets big when it wants. Why am I insisting that letters began in books—did they? A road sign sends me home. I'm looking at the grass slightly moving in the breeze and I'm thinking of it as letters or talk. It's not but my desire to transfer the picture that surrounds me into "here" is just a delayal. Thoughts sluggishly falling back into my studio, then ready to spring!

You see, I do suspect that 'fore there were books there was shopping. What do you call what a trucker has

which indicates the content of his cargo, a captain his ship. I want to call it a manifest. Is it that. I think lists precede books.

Therefore "A":

Shannon's letters, her strewn list over lower Manhattan creates a great hole that covers everyone—*everything* too, but the notion that these letters are "human" scale suggests she's mainly about interpolating her flock of "A"s with us. If I had that map I could see the intended impact neighborhood or a real one. Fore and aft. A HUDSON YARD is the idea. A form of enclosure has been enforced—that feels too harsh—levied?—too economic. It has to engage all the spheres . . . a form of enclosure has been *proposed*. Fleeting, complete in its argument and not so weighty that it will stick around and become part of the permanent (ha, as if anything is) public furniture of New York. A HUDSON YARD's bid is so much softer and so more like language (than, say, sculpture or architecture) in the end. It was here. It told somehow. Or maybe it tolled. I am a little inclined to feel the mourning in this work. I don't need to tag it exclusively to 9/11 but to everything in this city that is lost. That is lost in our modern world. There's no building so strong and so tall that something can't eventually won't take it down. But how about restaurants we love and moments when there was beach behind the WTC where there was performance art, and there were little coves in Lower Manhattan at the water near dirty sloshing docks and piers where the grimy artist who lived outside all year mysteriously summoned us to

one of his occasional appearances proving that his performance was a fact and that we were too. But that meaning always turned in. I think so much of the significance of the old avant-garde was its specialness, its privacy. A HUDSON YARD is not that—which is the watery value, the soft monument of Shannon Ebner's communal work.

I used to walk to my job at St. Mark's Church in the '80s because you really almost need a job in order to really appreciate the streets in their utter daily utterance. You have to see language come and go. (Just as an aside: Shannon made a clock.) Marks on the wall, posters blaring and peeling and gone. I think of the '80s as the decade of the Missing Foundation, you know those upside-down cocktail glasses. The booze pouring out of the glass was like an equal sign with a slash. I stopped drinking that year and got a job, and the intimacy of those black spray-painted cups in the street had immediate purchase on my condition. I bought the wall every day. So Shannon and David's A HUDSON YARD is a momentary song for the exact people who don't see it somehow. (The artist community that shows up at the end are just kind of fucking redundant. Except for the act of pouring us *out* of the work.) As it colons us in its giant conceptual lasso around a site increasingly absent of hookers and gay men looking collectively for the most extreme sex in New York, full now increasingly of shiny buildings and baby carriages and fuck (shrug) the rich have to have kids too, have someplace to wheel them unfortunately around my friends' basically

Joe and Charley's apartment. This piece is kind of New York's last big, anonymous hug. And I willingly stand in that embrace. I still want to testify I saw one of the "A"s—I'm certain I did, but I'm also certain I met Gram Parsons in the brief moment he attended Harvard in about 1966 as I worked the register in my high-school uniform, and I'm also certain I had sex with Gordon Matta-Clark, or possibly his brother when I first moved to New York, and I think I shot dope with Arthur Russell, but point of fact it was Walter Steding. None of these things are true but I walk around.

"A"

I accuse Shannon Ebner of needing to write a big poem on the city. Her lariat composed a moment and that's that. And again here's how the end played. She pasted the "A"s all over the place for a year. Life tore them down, but her photographer made a record and on June 4, 2015, that flip-book of them filled the underpass. Her vaudevillian linguistic Jew project ended right there on the High Line. It's wonderful to remember how it once was an old industrial railroad within the city, an old rusty thing that haunted everyone for years. Everybody pointed at it at least once. Who will get this thing and what will they do with it.

My understanding of the nature of her collaboration with David Reinfurt is that they talked. Which is perfectly New York. They probably planned. I am definitely grateful I was in the city on June 4. I was supposed to be in Italy but the plan changed. Thank

god 'cause I was writing this. There was a light drizzle outside that day and a small crowd was gathered under the hood of the tunnel. Did you know the word hoodwink has to do with the fact that people wore hoods in the Middle Ages and the common way of mugging someone was to pull their hoodie over their face. Clomp! It was a photogenic day, all greys and what other colors there were had an opportunity to tingle. Said hi to Shannon. Her face lit. I was glad I'd come. The back and forth of New York. A face is a kind of letter. Shannon is more of a *q*. I'm simply an *e*. So there was a lot of moving around, everyone seeing who else was there. I looked at my phone. Stephen wrote:

U around? Killing some
time before I go see this
band performance artist in
Chinatown wanna come?
I'm in your hood.

In chelsea seeing a
performance on the high
line.

Cute. If that ends soon this
starts in an hour 291
Grand St.

Maybe.

Sadaf H Nava cute fem girl
& Joe bang on drums
she screams
and wrapped
in huge chains and
bangs them.

yes. I'll try & come.

Along the interior walls of the tunnel were Shannon's photos, the big "A"s but they were upstaged by us. Thinking of those events in the '70s and '80s what formed them was I think our secrecy. I didn't know. My friend did. Here, it was our formality. Our collective accident. Shannon wore a faded blue denim jacket. Her fashion is constant, which seemed right. As we formed a half-circle under the hood where books were sold slowly out from underneath, the rain stopped out we came, the light was now kind of pearly and then, relieved, a number of people among us who were mainly in pairs raised their scripts and began to sing. I'm in love with someone in LA and I tell her about everywhere I go so I began recording the huffing chanting of the singers and the lanky movements of the conductor. A man in a suit, a green one I think. Blond hair. Good, the lover said when I sent her the pic. Is it. How can this picture ever be enough and A HUDSON YARD dying pretty much in front of us and surviving in an act of friendship and voyeurism. The few delighted consumers. This must be an art event. The composition was called CLOUDS AND CROWDS which was nice in that it didn't do anything. The title I mean. The music gathered because the "A"s' work was done. Shannon's work was done. It was a little bit like being loved, then it was over. What was great was the geography. It ending above the city. And down there the linguistic river "Hudson" which I haven't even mentioned. So ordered, the photographs I mean. Buried publicly in a way. The music took us further 'cause after everyone saying hello where are you

living now the answer being largely New York and California we just needed to shut up. We had to look at each other in the big grey moment and become the sculpture out in front of the "A"s. Our status reversed. We were the things, the letters, the extras. Whitman was engaged of course. He's like the river. He is. I think they were singing phonemes from "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry." Whitman's gay so we like him being here. A HUDSON YARD ended in that full and quiet moment followed by an après confusion about where everyone was going to eat. Shannon looked glad. Kim Gordon has an opening. Rushing down the High Line trundling in. It was this aluminum stuff. I met Sofia Coppola who is producing that film about Steve Abbott. You knew him, she said. Oh yes. He was very sweet. But he could also be a prick. I texted my love I met Sofia Coppola. Cool, she said. Then the cab to Chinatown. I shared it w Aaron who was feeling low. I said, I'm in love. He said, do you know Sadie Benning. Yeah she's with my ex. I have work of hers here. I'm building her a bed. I know where. The femme girl was great. I'm effusing and she says I follow you on Instagram. I love your work. Omigod that's so great. I can't believe you don't know Vanessa's, said Stephen as we were chowing down. These dumplings are great. I've *heard* of it. I've definitely heard the name. I know the sign. So cheap! I pass it all the time when I walk my dog. And he smiled. How's Honey. Oh she's great. She misses you! Stephen smiled. That's *great*, he said looking out at the street.

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Alex Waterman, CLOUDS AND CROWDS
for 12 singers, 2015. Commissioned by
David Reinfurt and Shannon Ebner for High
Line Art