Claude Pélieu: On All Frequencies at the library of University College Cork

j'ai composé ces textes sauvages pour conjurer la fantastique gueule de bois de ma génération — j'ai fait ceci & cela & j'ai eu raison & je me suis trompé — j'étais inabordable.

Claude Pélieu, Jukeboxes, 1972

Claude Pélieu (1934-2002) was a writer, poet, collage artist and translator. Often considered as the only French member of that most American of movements, the Beat Generation, Pélieu is perhaps best understood as a free agent, a poet in exile who set out to document a country and a counterculture that fascinated and at times horrified him.

He spent his youth in Paris, were he was a keen observer of and sometime participant in the capital's various postwar artistic and literary currents, from lettrism to sound poetry. Following his forced conscription into the army during the Algerian war, he was desperate to leave France, and in 1963, aged 28, he travelled to the United States where he would spend most of the rest of his life.

Living between San Francisco, in the years before the Summer of Love, and New York, where he set up shop in the Chelsea Hotel, Pélieu offered a tense and highly fragmented vision of his life in America. His extensive experimentation with William Burroughs’ cut-up techniques is reflected in his writing, which is characterized by an extreme urgency and a rapid alteration of words and images.

More than a mere observer of counterculture, Pélieu published and edited a number of magazines that brought together poetry, art and reportage by his friends and contacts, and which serve as snapshots of the turbulent years of the 1960s. His satirical collages crop up throughout the underground press, and were sent by the hundreds to his contacts across the world. Together with his American partner Mary Beach, Pélieu also completed the first French translations of texts by American writers from Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg to Bob Kaufman and Ed Sanders.

The exhibition Claude Pélieu: On All Frequencies at the library of University College Cork looks to offer an overview of the unique trajectory and diverse work of this renegade correspondent, who left a unique legacy in the form of his strange and electrifying texts, collages and translations that crisscrossed the Atlantic like so many dispatches.