

**The History and Philosophy of the Postwar American Counterculture:  
Anarchy, the Beats and the Psychedelic Transformation of Consciousness**

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The postwar American counterculture was established by a small circle of so-called “beat” poets located primarily in New York and San Francisco in the late 1940s and 1950s. Were it not for the beats of the early postwar years there would have been no “hippies” in the 1960s. And in spite of the apparent differences between the hippies and the “punks,” were it not for the hippies and the beats, there would have been no punks in the 1970s or 80s, either. The beats not only anticipated nearly every aspect of hippy culture in the late 1940s and 1950s, but many of those who led the hippy movement in the 1960s such as Gary Snyder and Allen Ginsberg were themselves beat poets. By the 1970s Allen Ginsberg could be found with such icons of the early punk movement as Patty Smith and the Clash. The beat poet William Burroughs was a punk before there were “punks,” and was much loved by punks when there were. The beat poets, therefore, helped shape the culture of generations of Americans who grew up in the postwar years. But rarely if ever has the philosophy of the postwar American counterculture been seriously studied by philosophers. Certainly the challenges to doing such a study would appear to be formidable. The beats, after all, were not philosophers and did not write philosophy. They were poets. But the beats didn’t appear out of nowhere. They were the prophets of a bohemian culture that stretched back to the early nineteenth century and that was woven out of political, philosophical, and literary threads which we will attempt to trace in this essay. Beat philosophy is primarily a mystical, “religious” philosophy of psychedelic consciousness. But as a necessary consequence of their philosophy of consciousness, most of the beats were anarchists.

One reason academic philosophers have not studied the philosophy of the beats and the postwar American counterculture is that the philosophy of the beats was based on

a psychology of psychedelic consciousness. But since the late nineteenth century when all the modern schools of academic philosophy were established, philosophy has distanced itself from psychology. Since the late nineteenth century and through the Cold War, academic philosophers practiced philosophy as a meta-analysis of the words and concepts that we use to talk about and understand the world—not as a study of the world itself, which was left to the empirical sciences. So, for example, a philosopher might have been interested in analyzing the concepts and methods of psychology, but would not have performed, say, a first person study of her consciousness. This approach to philosophy has its roots in Kant, out of whom both the Anglo-American and Continental traditions developed. But it also arose out of the practical need to organize a modern university into separate fields of study. With the explosion in knowledge production it was no longer possible for everyone to know everything. Philosophers who dabble in psychology are entering a field where they have no formal qualifications or expertise.<sup>1</sup> Though one might have expected analytic philosophy to exclude psychology from its domain of study, the same is true for phenomenology. Though phenomenology is concerned with the “scientific” study of consciousness, it is primarily engaged in a logical analysis of the invariant structures of consciousness, not mere introspection or first person description.

According to Edward S. Reed, the main schools and methods of academic philosophy emerged late in the nineteenth century in relation to psychology, which established itself as an academic field earlier than philosophy. Throughout the nineteenth century psychology, understood as a reasoned account of the soul, was limited by

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<sup>1</sup> Thus, although W. V. O. Quine challenged the theoretical distinction between philosophy and the empirical sciences in the 1950s, in practice philosophy is still separate from the empirical sciences.

religion, which jealously guarded its authority over matters of the soul. By 1879 when Wundt established his experimental psychology laboratory in Leipzig, academic psychology defined itself in positivist terms as the science of mental phenomena, leaving questions about the soul to religion. Positivism enabled psychology to assume an agnostic position on religious matters and to abstain from metaphysical, moral and theological debates. Philosophers found positivism appealing for the same reasons and came to define philosophy in terms of logic and epistemology, the science of science. One group followed the psychologists in defining logic as the introspective study of how we think, and was absorbed into psychology. Another group emerging out of mathematics and logic distinguished philosophy from psychology by rejecting the psychological definition of logic. Frege, Russell, Peirce and Husserl all published critiques of “psychologism.” It is this group which founded academic philosophy and defined its methods.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the psychological study of consciousness, let alone the psychological study of psychedelic consciousness, became alien to academic philosophy.

Of course, opposition to psychologism was not the only reason philosophers did not study psychedelics. By the 1960s when they were popularized on a mass scale, psychedelics became embroiled in the divisive social controversies of the decade. By 1968 LSD was made illegal in the United States and legitimate scientific research slowly ground to a halt. It was certainly safer for academics to avoid the topic altogether, as the fate of the Harvard psychologist Timothy Leary demonstrated.

In the late nineteenth century the reduction of philosophical method to a meta-

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<sup>2</sup> Edward S. Reed, *From Soul to Mind: The Emergence of Psychology from Erasmus Darwin to William James* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 184-200.

analysis of words and concepts helped academic philosophers to avoid conflict with religious authorities. In the United States after World War II it protected them from charges of atheism and communism. For the same reason that after World War II the CIA funded abstract art, analytic philosophy became the dominant school of academic philosophy. The CIA funded abstract art because it thought that since abstract art is devoid of content it would render art politically neutral. Analytic philosophy became the dominant school of academic philosophy after World War II because in its obsession with logical form it was devoid of content and rendered philosophy politically neutral.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, its conception of rationality made it compatible with the government sponsored RAND Corporation's rational choice theory, and with game theory.<sup>4</sup> During the Cold War rational choice theory became the ideological basis for the social sciences in the United States; and game theory played an important role in John Rawls's neo-Kantian political philosophy of the postwar Keynesian welfare state.

In the early nineteenth century, before the rise of the modern schools of academic philosophy, British philosophers such as James Mill, John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham did not hold philosophy in opposition to psychology. In fact, their notion of philosophy was so broad that like most educated Englishmen of their day they recognized the philosophical value of poetry and counted poets among their closest intellectual friends.

Our story about the history and philosophy of the postwar American counterculture begins with the first anarchist philosopher, William Godwin. We will

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<sup>3</sup> John McCumber, *The Philosophy Scare: The Politics of Reason in the Early Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Paul Erickson, et al., *How Reason Almost Lost Its Mind: The Strange Career of Cold War Rationality* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2015).

trace the lines of intellectual influence, social connection, and even family genealogy that radiate out from him to a rich array of anarchist philosophers and romantic poets who in turn lead us to the beat poets of the postwar America counterculture.

William Godwin (1756-1836), the founder of philosophical anarchism, was a product of the Enlightenment faith in reason and progress. Like the communitarian socialist Robert Owen (1771-1858), whom he influenced, Godwin believed that vice was not an innate human quality but a product of the environment. By improving living and working conditions at the mill he purchased in New Lanark, with funds obtained from the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham and the Quaker William Allen, Robert Owen intended to improve the character of the workers. His business was a success and inspired social reforms in Europe and a number of similar communities in the United States beginning with the one he founded himself at New Harmony, Indiana in 1826. Both Owen and Godwin thought in terms derived from the English utilitarian tradition, but unlike Jeremy Bentham who sought to promote happiness and eradicate vice through a system of punishments and rewards, Owen and Godwin both believed that human character would best be improved through a non-coercive system of education that fostered an increased capacity to reason. Their ideal was a decentralized society of small, self-governing communities in which decisions would be made through common rational deliberation rather than by force or other means of coercion. Neither Godwin nor Owen were revolutionaries or utopians. Neither advocated the violent or immediate overthrow of the government. Godwin allowed for the continued existence of government so long as the capacity for rational deliberation was lacking. Progress was to be a peaceful, gradual process of enlightenment.

In addition to William Godwin, Robert Owen was closely associated with the philosophers Francis Place and James Mill, father of John Stuart Mill, whose libertarian philosophy was influenced by William Godwin. Although Godwin was primarily a philosopher who sought to promote social progress through the application of reason, he also recognized the educational role of imaginative literature. In 1794 Godwin published *Things as They Are, or the Adventures of Caleb Williams*, which was the first novel of crime and detection in the English language as well as the first attempt to use the literary imagination to expose injustice. An early advocate of “free love,” William Godwin opposed state sanctioned marriage. In spite of his philosophical opposition to marriage and Mary Wollstonecraft’s belief that marriage was legalized prostitution, the two were married in 1797 when she became pregnant with their daughter, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, in order to make her their legitimate child. Mary Wollstonecraft was the author of one of the earliest works of feminism, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), in which she argued that women have an equal capacity to reason—although this capacity is unrealized because of insufficient education—and are therefore entitled to equal rights.

William Godwin counted several prominent English romantic poets among his friends, including Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth, both of whom were inspired by the French Revolution and harbored radical political ideals. Godwin’s daughter Mary married Percy Shelley, a particularly important figure for our purposes because he not only adopted his father-in-law’s anarchism, but was acknowledged by the best poets as one of their key forebears. Mary Wollstonecraft was part of a circle that included Joseph Priestley, Thomas Paine, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor

Coleridge, and William Blake. Like Percy Shelley, William Blake was an anarchist romantic poet who deeply influenced the beat poets, particularly Allen Ginsberg. Although, as we have seen, William Godwin did not emphasize reason to the complete exclusion of imagination or passion, neither was he particularly concerned about the dangers of excessive rationalism. William Blake, on the other hand, like most romantics, warned about the dangers of a capacity to reason (“Urizen”) that might grow out of proportion with imagination (“Urthona”), passion or emotion (“Luvah”), and the body (“Tharmas”). As employed in the “dark satanic mills” of England’s industrial revolution, an excessive reason manifested itself as the cold, dispassionate calculations of the shopkeeper and factory trained engineer who reduced workers to accounting figures and machines. William Blake’s image of the dark satanic mills may be compared with Allen Ginsberg’s image from his poem *Howl* of “Moloch whose eyes are a thousand blind windows!”—which Ginsberg later realized was not merely a metaphor of industrial dehumanization but a literal description of the John Hancock building in Chicago. Ginsberg adopted Blake’s theory of the four components of human nature wholesale. Just as Blake warned about the dangers of a disproportionate capacity to reason during the industrial scientific revolution, Ginsberg warned that reason had become a “horrific tyrant” in Western civilization and “created the nuclear bomb which can destroy body, feeling, and imagination.”<sup>5</sup>

Mary Shelley was the author of the gothic novel *Frankenstein* (1818) in which she dramatically portrayed the dangers of scientific-technological reason. But there is another side to the story having to do with the metaphysical speculations of Shelley’s

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<sup>5</sup> Allen Ginsberg, *Allen Ginsberg Spontaneous Mind: Selected Interviews 1958-1996*, ed. David Carter (New York: Perennial, 2001), 431. See also Allen Ginsberg, *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays 1952-1995*,



circle of friends. The story was conceived in 1816 when Mary and Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, Claire Clairmont and John William Polidori were neighbors living near Lake Geneva in Switzerland. In the evening the group gathered in gothic settings to read or write ghost stories. Polidori wrote the first novel in the English language about vampires. Mary Shelley created her story about Frankenstein after the group discussed Erasmus Darwin's theory of fluid materialism, a topic of interest to both her and her husband Percy as well as William Blake. Darwin's theory is built upon early studies of electricity, including those of Galvani (1737-1798), which not only discovered the presence of electrical energy in living bodies, but showed how electricity could be used to generate movement in dead animals. This led Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802), the grandfather of Charles Darwin, to speculate that the soul is not a separate entity connected to human bodies by means of the pineal gland in the brain, as Descartes believed, but that the soul resides in electrical energy—or rather, that the soul *is* electrical energy. If this was the case, he reasoned, consciousness would not be limited to the brain or to a separate entity connected to the brain, but would be distributed throughout the entire nervous system. Consciousness, then, would not reside in an entity that was separate from the viscera or internal organs of the body but, on the contrary, would be grounded primarily in visceral feelings, including the emotions. Reason, in this view, is merely the most abstracted form of bodily feelings, not something that transcends them. Moreover, if electricity is the source of life—if electricity is the soul—then consciousness is not limited to humans, but is found in all animals. And humans share similar feelings with animals. Thus, Darwin's theory contradicted Descartes' claim that the mind reasons most clearly when it is not distracted or misled by emotions or other visceral sensations arising out of the

body, as well as his claim that since animals do not possess an immortal soul they are merely insentient machines. More importantly, Darwin's theory contradicted Christian metaphysics and morality in a way that Descartes' theory was specifically designed to avoid. This set Darwin's theory on a collision course with the nineteenth century state whose authority and legitimacy was based upon Christian metaphysics and morality.

Erasmus Darwin further supposed that erotic-sexual feelings embodied in electromagnetic energy have evolved in members of all sexually divided species—feelings that drive them to complete themselves in a greater whole by uniting with the opposite sex of their species. The Romantic poets extrapolated this principle of Darwin's biology into the Neoplatonic and Gnostic conception of eros as a metaphysical drive for unity. As Reed points out, the “Romantics equated the physical forces (fluids?) of electricity and magnetism with irrational urges and vague feelings, feelings such as those of unity with nature or longing for oneness and sexual satisfaction.”<sup>6</sup> In this respect the Romantics anticipated Wilhelm Reich's theory of cosmic orgone (orgasm) energy and, more generally, as Ellenberger has shown, the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious.<sup>7</sup> Like the Neoplatonists, the Romantics believed that human experience is fundamentally erotic and that we are driven to seek mystical union with a greater whole. Also like the Neoplatonists, and the Pythagoreans before them, they believed that the order of the cosmos is musical. But unlike the Neoplatonists, the Romantics believed that eros is material—not in Descartes' sense of inanimate matter, but in Darwin's sense of living, sentient matter—rather than spiritual in the Gnostic or Pythagorean sense of a separate soul. Hence, the Romantics believed that we are driven to seek mystical union

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<sup>6</sup> Reed, *From Soul to Mind*, 127.

with nature or the cosmos rather than with God or the Neoplatonic One. In this sense the philosophy of the Romantic poets may be understood as an inverted Neoplatonism.

It would not, however, be precisely correct to say that the Romantics were opposed to science. In fact, they were enthusiastic supporters of Erasmus Darwin's science. What they were opposed to was the Newtonian-Cartesian worldview. Nor were they opposed to reason, so long as it was properly balanced by imagination, emotion, and the body. Consistent with his metaphysics, which does not permit a radical separation of reason from emotion or imagination, Darwin expressed his scientific theories in poetry as well as prose. Similarly, Shelley's *Queen Mab* expressed in poetic form both Godwin's anarchism and Darwin's fluid materialism. According to Reed, after the Bourbon restoration in France and the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815, there was a conservative reaction and reassertion of religious authority, not only in France but across Europe and the United States. Atheism, pantheism and fluid materialism were excluded from official ecclesiastical and academic discourse. Using a network of informers and police spies, religious and state authorities censored and imprisoned advocates of these ideas. Shelley was forced into exile by what he viewed as a tyrannical state while *Queen Mab* was banned. But since so many pirated copies had already been disseminated prior to the ban it was impossible to completely censor it. Instead, it was driven underground and became the bible of the English working class Chartist movement.<sup>8</sup> Shelley died in a boating accident in 1822 and Mary Shelley published a highly edited version of his poems in the late 1830s.

Following Oswald Spengler's idea of a second religiosity that arises out of the

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<sup>7</sup> Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 199-227.

primitive elements (the “fellaheen”) of a declining civilization, the beats understood themselves to be religious prophets of a new form of liberated consciousness. Poetry was both a means to achieve this new form of consciousness and a means to express that consciousness once it was achieved by other means including travel, drugs, sex or meditation. The transformation of consciousness sought by the beats was therefore primarily religious in nature, not political or ideological. Kerouac was especially careful to distance himself from an aesthetics that might subordinate art to political ideology. But that does not mean that the beats believed that the transformation of consciousness they sought had no political or social implications. It merely means that, for them, political ideology follows consciousness, not the reverse.

In an author’s note he wrote shortly before his death in 1997 to a 1961 essay titled “When the Mode of the Music Changes, the Walls of the City Shake,” Ginsberg said that “it seemed to me the breakthroughs of new poetry were social breakthroughs, that is, political in the long run. I thought and still think that the bulwark of libertarian-anarchist-sexualized individual poems and prose created from that era to this day—under so much middle-class critical attack—were the mental bombs that would still explode in new kid generations even if censorship and authoritarian (moral majority) fundamentalist militarily-hierarchical ‘New Order’ neoconservative fascistoid creep Reaganomics-type philistinism took over the nation. Which it nearly has. Thus the title—Poetics and Politics, out of Plato out of Pythagoras—continuation of Gnostic—secret politically suppressed—liberty of consciousness and art—old bohemian—tradition. . .”<sup>9</sup>

In a 1976 essay titled “An Exposition of William Carlos Williams’ Poetic

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<sup>8</sup> Reed, *From Soul to Mind*, 43-49.

<sup>9</sup> Ginsberg, *Deliberate Prose*, 253.

Practice,” Ginsberg explained how writing poetry based on direct observation of what presents itself to consciousness can have political implications and cited “Impromptu: the Suckers” by William Carlos Williams as an example. Williams’ poem is about the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti, two Italian anarchists—*Galleanistas* to be precise—who were executed in 1927 by the state of Massachusetts on charges of committing murder during an armed robbery in Braintree, Massachusetts. Ginsberg applauds Williams’ poem as a Burroughsian breakthrough in consciousness that was prophetic of later police-state tendencies in the United States during the Cold War era. He concludes by stating that “it finally does come down to what Plato originally said—‘When the mode of music changes, the walls of the city shake.’”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, in a letter to President Carter, Allen Ginsberg asked the President to appoint a writer to the National Council on the Arts. In the letter, Ginsberg quoted Shelley on the role of poets in the body politic: “Because poetry is like the central nervous system of the body politic, poetic projection of image has a compelling role in the history of human actions. That’s why Shelley said, ‘Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World.’”<sup>11</sup>

The irony of the fact that Plato banished the poets from his ideal city is that Plato was himself a great poet. The *Republic* is a work of fiction written with poetic skill and replete with rhetorical devices including metaphor and allegory. Plato’s argument against the poets is that they are two steps removed from the absolute truth of the ideal forms. Perceptual objects are already mere shadows of the forms, but the images concocted by poets are mere shadows of perceptual objects meant to stir up the basest part of the soul, the appetites. Philosophers, Plato believes, should rely only on reason to apprehend the

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<sup>10</sup> Allen Ginsberg, *Composed on the Tongue*, ed. Donald Allen (Bollinas, CA: Grey Fox Press, 1980), 118.

truth. But yet, Plato recognizes that not everyone in his ideal city will be a philosopher. For those who are not capable of reason, it will be necessary to guide and persuade them with poetry and fiction—hence Plato’s notion of the “noble lie.” However, poetry is dangerous. Because it has the power to alter people’s beliefs, perceptions, and emotions, it has the potential to disrupt the state and make the “walls of the city shake.” Therefore, according to Plato, poetry must be controlled by the philosophers, who will craft fictions that maintain justice and harmony. Imagination serves a purpose, but it serves a just purpose only when controlled by reason.

Shelley and Ginsberg agree with Plato that poetry is politically potent but they invert Plato’s hierarchy of imagination and reason. Much like Nietzsche in his important early essay *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, they believe that it is not imagination that should be ruled by reason, but reason that is derived from imagination. According to Nietzsche, our abstract concepts are merely metaphorical images so worn from use that we forget that they are metaphors. Even our most abstract concepts such as being or identity—without which there could be no concept of ego—are mere imaginary constructions. Imagination in turn is the product of a creative process that is both terrible and joyful to behold. For reality is a process of becoming, not being; it is the perpetual process of death and rebirth; it is the hero’s night sea journey; the “dark night of the soul;” the beating before the beatitude. It is Dionysian ecstasy.

The transformation of consciousness sought by the beats was not a mere change in the ideas or ideology contained within consciousness, but a transformation of

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<sup>11</sup> Allen Ginsberg, *The Letters of Allen Ginsberg*, ed. Bill Morgan (Philadelphia, PA: DA CAPO PRESS, 2008), 402.

consciousness itself entailing the psychological death and rebirth of the ego.<sup>12</sup> Hence Ginsberg approved of the way that psychoanalyst Grete Berbering explained beat poetry at a 1960 symposium on the beat generation: “‘What zees es, ees a varry courageous and lovely poetry—for what we see is the disintegration of the ego and the public experience of the primary forces of the Id, which is a terrible and awesome theeng to experience in the human being, for the purpose of the better experiencing of the beauty of our nature, and a more healthy reintegration of the ego—no wander the conservative forces in these country experience such anxiety when in contact with these man—he is a great poet,’ or some such speech she made putting down all the sociologist amateurs who were hung up with concepts of adolescent rebellion, etc.”<sup>13</sup> Radical psychiatrist R. D. Laing and Jungian analyst John Weir Perry understood madness and mysticism in the same way, as a journey to the underworld where the ego—burdened by the outmoded norms of its society—was torn asunder and reassembled, as in the ancient Egyptian shamanic myth of Osiris, who is torn apart in the night sea and reassembled by the Goddess Isis, before rising again as Horus, the morning sun, which sets the measure, the law, the rhythm for a new day and a new social order. In this respect the beats were in tune with primal (and stateless) society, the original hunter-gatherer society, that was led, not by warriors, not by philosopher-kings, and certainly not by capital, but by the ecstatic shamans, whose tales of their journeys to the underworld were told in song and dance, poetry and chant.

It is in terms of the hero’s journey to the underworld that Ginsberg would like us to understand the apparent criminality, nihilism and madness of the beats. Ginsberg’s

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<sup>12</sup> See Gregory Stephenson, *The Daybreak Boys: Essays on the Literature of the Beat Generation* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder, *The Selected Letters of Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder*, ed. Bill Morgan (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2009), 32.

own journey to the underworld seems to have begun during the period 1944-1946 when he established contact with the founding members of the beat generation. He emerged from this period a different man, with a transformed sense of self and a new set of moral and aesthetic values.

Ginsberg met Lucien Carr in 1944 in the Union Theological Seminary dormitory, which was being used as a residence for Columbia students. Carr's friend Edie Parker introduced him to Jack Kerouac. Carr then introduced Kerouac to Ginsberg and both of them to his older friend from St. Louis, William Burroughs. By August 14, 1944 Carr had killed David Kammerer, a mutual friend of Carr's and Burroughs' from St. Louis, creating the first of many media spectacles that portrayed members of the beat generation as criminals, nihilists and madmen.

Prior to this period Ginsberg's letters reveal naïve idealism. For example, in a May 17, 1943 letter, Ginsberg argued that man is a superior animal because he is self-conscious and capable of a purpose and meaning in life, which Ginsberg supposed was a perpetual evolution towards greater freedom and democracy. In letters he wrote during this period Ginsberg argued that the Americans entered World War II in the service of these lofty ideals.<sup>14</sup> His older brother, Eugene, had a different perspective after he was drafted, and denied Allen's idealistic vision of the war. In a letter dated December 17, 1943 to his brother Eugene, Allen told his brother that if he couldn't write good poetry, "why, then, go out and end the war or at least have your head shot off trying." Allen was angered and perhaps threatened by his dear brother's doubts about the war and about political idealism in general. In the name of progress and the ideal political state, Allen shot back at his brother, "If ideals are 'projections of ego,' that doesn't bother me at all.



They are ideals . . .”<sup>15</sup>

Lucien Carr was at the center of Ginsberg’s new circle of friends. As Ginsberg said, “Lou was the glue.”<sup>16</sup> But Carr had a particular affinity for the grimmer side of New York life and liked to shock those with middle class values. It was also Carr who first introduced Ginsberg to the French symbolist poet, Arthur Rimbaud, another *enfant terrible* whose decadent style of life and poetry shocked the middle class.<sup>17</sup> By late 1945 Ginsberg had changed his tune. In a letter dated September 4, 1945 to Lionel Trilling, Ginsberg applauded Rimbaud,<sup>18</sup> and in a letter dated January 7, 1946 Ginsberg shocked Trilling with tales of hipsters, drug addicts and pornography.<sup>19</sup> In the first letter, Ginsberg said that Rimbaud is interested in “the sharp-eyed gambler, the dead-pan cardsharp, the tense-tendoned gambler, the ‘hood’—the types which are coming into prominence in the movies . . . There is an interest in the psychopath who moves in his pattern unaffected by moral compunction, by allegiance to the confused standards of a declining age.” But realizing that even the life of an artist living beyond the bounds of an outmoded morality was not sufficient, Rimbaud, Ginsberg told Trilling, went to Africa to seek salvation “in the land of the primitive, unrestricted, uninhibited,” to live the life of a “gun-runner and slave trader.” It was during this time that William Burroughs introduced Ginsberg and Kerouac to Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West*. Ginsberg’s reference to Spengler in this letter and to Rimbaud’s journey to the “land of the primitive, unrestricted, uninhibited” tips us off that the source of Ginsberg’s rejection of morality

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<sup>14</sup> Ginsberg, *Letters of Allen Ginsberg*, 4-6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-10.

<sup>16</sup> Wilborn Hampton, “Lucien Carr, a Founder and a Muse of the Beat Generation, Dies at 79,” *New York Times*, January 30, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/30/obituaries/30carr.html>.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Ginsberg, *Letters of Allen Ginsberg*, 10-14.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-16.

here is not the nineteenth century aestheticism of the Symbolists and Decadents, which rejected morality in order to privilege aesthetic values and to claim art for art's sake, but Spengler's notion of a new age arising out of the primitive elements of the old.

Neal Cassady arrived in New York City in December of 1946 and established friendships with Kerouac and Ginsberg, for whom Cassady was an authentic fellaheen of the American West. As Ferlinghetti said in his Editor's Note to the 1981 printing of Neal Cassady's autobiography, *The First Third*, Cassady was "an early prototype of the urban cowboy who a hundred years before might have been an outlaw on the range. (And as such Kerouac saw him in *On the Road*.)"<sup>20</sup> Cassady was a hustler, a car thief, a womanizer, and a small time drug dealer. But it was Cassady's fast paced, free associative, run-on sentences—in addition to Bebop jazz, the music of the African American fellaheen—that inspired Kerouac's and Ginsberg's notion of spontaneous prose.

In 1948 during a time of quiet meditation and simple living Ginsberg heard Blake's voice in his Harlem apartment, "Ah, sunflower . . ." Then in 1949 Ginsberg was arrested for helping Herbert Huncke store stolen goods in his apartment. He subsequently spent eight months at Columbia Psychiatric Institute where he met Carl Solomon, to whom he dedicated *Howl*. The tabloids covered the story and added to the emerging image of the beats as criminals, nihilists and madmen. According to Ginsberg, fellow beat writer John Clellon Holmes' 1952 *New York Times* article, "This is the Beat Generation," reinforced the earlier media image of the beats with an "overtone in terms

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<sup>20</sup> Neal Cassady, *The First Third & Other Writings*, ed. Lawrence Ferlinghetti (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1981), vi.

of violence and juvenile delinquency, i.e., mindless protest.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, his novel *Go* was originally titled *The Daybreak Boys*, after a river gang from the 1840s. In an interview with John Tytell, Holmes explained that “our attraction to criminality, mostly crimes without a victim like drugs, fit with our feeling that the definition of man’s nature was inadequate. And we were interested in excessive experiences, in the extreme, because a man who puts himself outside the law is a man who is putting himself into himself. . .”<sup>22</sup>

After Ginsberg’s 1955 reading of *Howl* at the Six Gallery, poetry readings became popular at cafes and nightspots in San Francisco and Greenwich Village. By the late 1950s the beat generation had been transformed from a small circle of bohemian writers to a popular social movement among alienated and rebellious young people. In 1958 following the successful launch of Sputnik, the Soviet spaceship, San Francisco columnist Herb Caen dubbed the new rebels “beatniks,” adding the suffix “-nik” to “beat” from “Sput-nik,” thereby associating the beats with communism. Caen’s appellation was also intended to allude to derogatory Yiddish words that end in “-nik,” such as ‘nudnik,’ meaning “someone who is a boring pest.”<sup>23</sup> That’s why Ginsberg refers to ‘beatnik’ as a “foul word” constructed by “industries of mass communication which continue to brainwash Man and insult nobility.”<sup>24</sup>

On the right end of the political spectrum, Norman Podheretz turned the popular image of the beats against them in his 1958 essay “The Know-Nothing Bohemians,” arguing that the “spirit of hipsterism and the beat Generation strikes me as the same spirit

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<sup>21</sup> Ginsberg, *Allen Ginsberg Spontaneous Mind*, 514.

<sup>22</sup> John Tytell, “An Interview with John Clellon Holmes,” in *The Beats: A Literary Reference*, ed. Matt Theado (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2001), 409.

<sup>23</sup> Bent Sorensen, *An On & Off Beat: Kerouac’s Beat Eymologies*, [http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/publications/philament/issue3\\_Critique\\_Sorensen.htm](http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/publications/philament/issue3_Critique_Sorensen.htm).

<sup>24</sup> Ginsberg, *Letters of Allen Ginsberg*, 222-223.

which animates the young savages in leather jackets who have been running amuck in the last few years with their switch-blades and zip guns.”<sup>25</sup> On the left end of the political spectrum, former Trotskyite Norman Mailer became interested in the new “hip” culture as a potentially oppositional force in modern society and declared that the difference between hip and square culture would be the major problem facing Americans for the next twenty five years. In his 1959 essay “The White Negro,” Mailer repeated the popular image of hipsters as criminals and psychopaths but turned it around by arguing that in a society verging on totalitarianism only criminals and psychopaths have the courage to act with existential authenticity. Mailer—like Paul Goodman and William Burroughs—sensed that the bureaucratic workplace and the suburban nuclear family threatened the nineteenth century ideal of American manhood represented at its extreme by the image of the western outlaw. In 1981 Mailer helped win the release of writer Jack Abbott from prison. Abbott’s fatal stabbing of Richard Adan shortly after his release from prison seemed to confirm Podheretz’s worst fears about Mailer’s notions of literary genius just as American society was taking a sharp turn to the right in reaction against the beat-inspired counterculture of the 1960s and ‘70s.

But Ginsberg and Kerouac saw things differently than either Mailer or Podheretz. Although Ginsberg acknowledged in a 1989 interview that Mailer had a good grasp of the “goof that middle-class white culture was making” and that he had a sense of a “transcendent change of consciousness,” he and Kerouac rejected Mailer’s macho and violent notion of hipsterism. Kerouac, Ginsberg said, didn’t like Mailer’s essay because he “saw beat as Christ-like; the Lamb, the emergence of the lamb, not the emergence of

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<sup>25</sup> Norman Podheretz, “The Know Nothing Bohemians,” in *The Beats*, ed. Seymour Krim (Greenwich, CT: Gold Medal Books, 1960), 123.

the grand criminal savants.” Ginsberg, who described himself as a “delicate artistic fairy,” agreed with Kerouac that Mailer’s notion of beat was too violent and macho.<sup>26</sup>

Nor did they believe that the beats could be understood in sociological or ideological terms. “That’s some hangover from class war. Kerouac’s whole point was that ‘beat’ went beyond the old Marxist ideological battle of class warfare and into some *practical* attitude of transcendence. Practical had to do with, I mean, like dropping LSD or learning meditation techniques. It’s like the bomb, you know. It’s not cleansing yourself of the middle class, it’s cleansing the doors of perception themselves; in which case middle-class notions and ego notions and everything else gets cleansed. . . .”<sup>27</sup> The underworld that Ginsberg and Kerouac descended into was not the criminal underworld, but the unconscious, which also exists beyond the social rules and conventions of ordinary waking consciousness. The beats, in this respect, resemble shamans or mystics who transgress the bounds of social rules and conventions in their lonely journey beyond the walls of the city, into the forest, up the mountain, and into the belly of the beast. When they return to the city, they may be condemned as criminals, or they may be welcomed as prophets of a new law.

Clearly, the change sought by the beats ran deeper than political ideology, deeper even than ideas in the mind. The change sought by the beats, Ginsberg explained in the same 1989 interview, involved “an alteration of perception, a basic turning about at the root of consciousness.” It involved a return to personal experience from the mechanical abstractions of mass communications and the modern bureaucratic state, whether capitalist or communist: “It’s a natural experience: the deconditioning from hyper-

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<sup>26</sup> Ginsberg, *Allen Ginsberg Spontaneous Mind*, 514.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 515.

rationalistic, hypertechnologic monotheistic heavy-metal bureaucratic homogenized hierarchical aggression in thought processes—unnatural to begin with—that create planetary ecological chaos, totalitarian monopoly of power, over-rigid centralized authority, and police state conditions . . .”<sup>28</sup>

In Ginsberg’s poem *Howl* it is Moloch who represents the bureaucratic state. In a letter to Richard Eberhart dated May 18, 1956 Ginsberg explained that, “Moloch is the vision of the mechanical feelingless inhuman world we live in and accept—and the key line finally is ‘Moloch whom I abandon.’”<sup>29</sup> In this context it is Whitman above all to whom Ginsberg turns for an alternative vision, for Whitman was “the first great American poet to take action in recognizing his individuality, forgiving and accepting *Him Self*, and automatically extending that recognition and acceptance to all—and defining his Democracy as that. He was unique and lonely in his glory—the truth of his feelings—without which no society can long exist. Without this truth there is only the impersonal Moloch . . .”<sup>30</sup> Ginsberg’s entire theory of poetry is built upon this imperative to express personal feeling. For according to Ginsberg, poetry is a transcription of the natural flow of emotional rhythms expressed in words and images: “We think and speak rhythmically all the time, each phrasing, piece of speech, metrically equivalent to what we have to say emotionally.”<sup>31</sup>

In a May 1965 interview with Tom Clark, Ginsberg objected to poetry that is written according to a preconceived metrical pattern. Instead, Ginsberg believed that

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 516.

<sup>29</sup> Ginsberg, *Letters of Allen Ginsberg*, 132.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 137-138.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

poetry should be an expression of the poet's own physiological rhythms.<sup>32</sup> When Tom Clark asked Ginsberg if he ever wanted to extend this rhythmic feeling as far as Artaud or fellow beat poet Michael McClure did by writing poetic lines that are actually animal noises, Ginsberg replied, the "rhythm of the long line is also an animal cry," and continued by saying that his poetry is generally "like a rhythmic articulation of feeling. The feeling is like an impulse that rises within—just like sexual impulses, say; it's almost as definite as that. It's a feeling that begins somewhere in the pit of the stomach and rises up forward in the breast and then comes out through the mouth and ears . . ."<sup>33</sup> For Descartes, these bodily feelings are a source of error. The rational mind can make clear judgments only when it is not distracted by visceral or emotional sensations. In fact, for Descartes, visceral sensations do not even give us epistemologically privileged access to our own body, because they are only *representations* residing in our minds *of* our bodies, not our bodies *themselves*. As such they can *mis*-represent. But bodily feeling for Ginsberg, like the will for Schopenhauer, is not representational. Bodily feeling is the thing itself—it is *noumenal*. If he is able to spontaneously transcribe his bodily feelings, without imposing upon them some preconceived mental pattern, then, Ginsberg says, "I start crying. Because I realize I'm hitting some area which is absolutely true. And in that sense applicable universally, or understandable universally. In that sense able to survive through time . . . In that sense prophecy . . ."<sup>34</sup>

Ginsberg sometimes explained his theory of emotional expression in poetry using terms that are identical with those of Darwin's theory of fluid materialism or with those of mesmerism, a related scientific theory that explained hypnotism in terms of magnetic

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<sup>32</sup> Ginsberg, *Allen Ginsberg Spontaneous Mind*, 19.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

rather than electrical field energy. In the following passage from his interview with Tom Clark, Ginsberg explains how poetry and indeed art in general is not only an expression of the artist's bodily feelings but can induce the same feelings in those who appreciate the artist's work: ". . . the interesting thing would be to know if certain combinations of words and rhythms actually had an electrochemical reaction on the body, which could catalyze specific states of consciousness. I think that's probably what happened to me with Blake. I'm sure it's what happened on a perhaps lower level with Poe's 'Bells' or 'Raven,' or even Vachel Lindsay's 'Congo': that there is a hypnotic rhythm there, which when you introduce it into your nervous system, causes all sorts of electronic changes—permanently alters it. There's a statement by Artaud on that subject, that certain music when introduced into the nervous system changes the molecular composition of the nerve cells . . . so there is actually an electrochemical effect caused by art."<sup>35</sup>

According to the Manichean logic of the Cold War era, you were either a good American or an evil communist. There was little recognition of any third alternative or middle ground. Since the beats were not considered to be "good Americans," they were often accused by their critics of being communists. In fact, even the name "beatnik" was coined to suggest that they were communists. But the beats were not communists—at least not in the sense that America's Cold War enemies were communists. Ginsberg not only denied that he was a communist, but clashed with communist authorities in Cuba and Prague over the civil liberties of homosexuals, marijuana users, and hippies. In a December 22, 1970 letter Ginsberg declared that he was not a member of the communist party or dedicated to the violent overthrow of the government, because he was a pacifist.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 31-32.



He went on to explain that he saw little difference between capitalist or communist governments because they both rely on violent police bureaucracies to enforce their will both domestically and internationally. So little do they contradict one another, according to Ginsberg, that they could not exist without each other: “they need each other, feed on each other, and often make their living from each other’s mythical existence.”<sup>36</sup>

The political philosophy of the beats contradicts orthodox Marxism in at least three respects. First, the beats do not believe that the working class or the industrial proletariat is the historical agent of change that will bring about a communist society. Second, they are not materialists. They do not believe that consciousness is a superficial structure built upon the social relations of the means of production. Third, they do not believe that history is a dialectical process that proceeds by way of negation. As a consequence of these points, they do not believe in class struggle. As pacifists they are especially opposed to class warfare or any other type of violent social action.

The typical Marxist view of bohemians—and of anarchists—is that they are petty bourgeois. Malcolm Cowley edited Kerouac’s bestselling novel *On the Road*, but during the heyday of American communism in the 1930s he condemned bohemians as petty bourgeois. In *Exile’s Return*, published in 1934, Cowley distinguished between “Grub Street” and bohemia. Grub Street is any neighborhood where poor writers and artists congregate. It is as old as Alexandria or Rome. Bohemia, Cowley says, is “a revolt against certain features of industrial capitalism and can only exist in a capitalist society.”<sup>37</sup> The first community of artists and writers to be designated bohemians resided in 1830 in a neighborhood of Paris populated largely by Gypsies, who were believed to

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<sup>36</sup> Ginsberg, *Letters of Allen Ginsberg*, 359-361.

originate from the Czech province of Bohemia. The Paris bohemians, Cowley said, followed the rise of industry in France after the Napoleonic Wars and developed in reaction against middle class society.

A bohemian community began to develop in Greenwich Village as early as the 1860s when Henry Clapp founded *The Saturday Press*, which published Walt Whitman, Mark Twain and Walter Dean Howells. Members of the literary magazine congregated at Pfaff's basement tavern at 653 Broadway. Throughout the late nineteenth century as more Italian, Irish, and German immigrants arrived in Greenwich Village, the bohemians followed, attracted by cheap rents and their fellow bohemians.<sup>38</sup> The golden age of Greenwich Village bohemia occurred between the fin de siècle and World War I, when modernist art combined with anarchism in what historian John Patrick Diggins called the "Lyrical Left."<sup>39</sup> After World War I, Greenwich Village underwent a period of gentrification. The bohemian community became a popular tourist attraction which, like Coney Island, provided a temporary escape from the increasingly mechanical routine of the bureaucratic workplace. Although a circle of Greenwich Village bohemian anarchists survived the period between the world wars, most leftists abandoned anarchism for communism following the apparent success of the Russian Revolution. In 1934 the Marxist Cowley looked back at the Greenwich Village bohemians of 1919 with contempt: "The New York bohemians, the Greenwich Villagers, came from exactly the same social class as the readers of the *Saturday Evening Post*. Their political opinions

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<sup>37</sup> June Skinner Sawyers, ed., *Greenwich Village Reader: Fiction, Poetry, and Reminiscences, 1872-2002* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2001), 283.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, xxvii.

<sup>39</sup> John Patrick Diggins, *The Rise and Fall of the American Left* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992). See also Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

were vague and by no means dangerous to Ford Motors or General Electric: the war had destroyed their belief in political action. They were trying to get ahead, and the proletariat be damned. Their economic standards were those of the small American businessman.”<sup>40</sup>

Cowley argued that the bohemians were revolting against the puritanical, production-oriented values of an earlier, accumulative phase of industrial capitalism. Their values—which resemble the values of the post-World War II beats—included the romantic belief that children naturally possess special potentialities which are crushed by a repressive society, and that liberated children can save the world; the idea of free and unhindered self-expression; the idea of paganism, that the body is a temple of love; the idea of living for the moment; the idea of female equality; the idea that we can be happy by psychological rather than political means; and the idea of travel or a change of place. But World War I increased productive capacity so much that when the war ended it became necessary to stimulate consumer demand. Bohemian values, Cowley argued, became useful for the new consumer capitalism: self-expression and paganism stimulated consumer demand, living for the moment meant buying on the installment plan, and female equality doubled demand. Socialist Michael Harrington made a similar argument about the hippies of the 1960s in his 1973 book *The Death of Bohemia*. Ginsberg, he said, had literary standards and political commitments comparable to the pre-World War I bohemians, but the mass counterculture of the post-Beatles era was “a reflection of the very hyped and videotaped world it professed to despise.”<sup>41</sup>

But are bohemian values really so easily co-opted by the capitalist system? The

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<sup>40</sup> Sawyers, *Greenwich Village Reader*, 286.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 475.

history of the United States after 1973 would suggest not, because the system found it necessary to crush those values. Daniel Bell, for example, agreed with the Marxists that the counterculture was a product of consumer capitalism, but in his 1976 book *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* he warned that the counterculture could undo the productive capacity that made consumer capitalism possible in the first place.

Anarchists have always had a better relationship with bohemians and with art in general than Marxists. In the years before World War I a bohemian community similar to the one in Greenwich Village appeared in the Montmartre neighborhood of Paris, in the Schwabing district of Munich, and in Friedrichshagen, Berlin. Anarchists lived and worked closely with artists, many of whom were anarchists themselves, in all of these bohemian communities. Anarchists have an affinity for bohemians who value personal liberty and unhindered self-expression because they are not only opposed to the state but to all forms of interpersonal power. Marxist materialism on the other hand subordinates art to politics and politics to economics. And the history of the treatment of artists and writers in communist regimes is marked by atrocities. For example, in the years 1917-1919 the Russian avant-garde embraced Max Stirner's radical anarchist individualism. Following the suppression of the anarchist Kronstadt rebellion in 1918, the Bolsheviks led by "proletarian poet" Alexei Gastev reshaped Russian art to reflect the world of industry by imposing scientific management techniques on it.<sup>42</sup> Thus art was conceived as a disciplined training ground for the factory floor and anarchist individualism was replaced by a mechanical industrial collectivism. By the early 1930s, however, Soviet ideology had shifted again. Constructivism, as the earlier ideology was called, was

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<sup>42</sup> Allan Antliff, *Anarchy and Art: From the Paris Commune to the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007), 71-108.

replaced by social realism. Countless constructivist artists including Gaster himself were purged, imprisoned or shot.

The accusation that anarchists are petty bourgeois dates to Marx's 1847 book *The Poverty of Philosophy*, in which Marx accused the anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865) of being a petty bourgeois. Indeed, Proudhon's anarchism is the anarchism of the small farmer and artisan class who envision a world not of communism but of an equal exchange of labor. Proudhon's mutualist economics was already anticipated by Josiah Warren (1798-1874) in the United States. Warren was a member of Robert Owen's communist community at New Harmony, Indiana. When New Harmony failed, Warren concluded that all property must be individually owned. Cooperative and egalitarian relationships could still be achieved, however, so long as the products of labor were exchanged on an equal basis, according to the amount of labor required to produce them. Towards this end, Warren invented the Time Store, where workers received vouchers for the products of their labor equal to the amount of labor required for their production. Vouchers could then be used to purchase products produced by other workers. In 1851 Warren and Stephen Pearl Andrews founded the Modern Times anarchist community in what is now Brentwood, Long Island, where they successfully operated a Time Store according to Warren's principles. Individualist anarchists believe that great inequalities of wealth would not develop in such a system because credit would also be available at a cost (interest rate) equal to the quantity of labor required to provide it. They believe, as did the poet Ezra Pound, that it is government interference in the banking system and money supply that yields bankers undue profit. The elimination of the state and the implementation of a free market based on the equal exchange of labor

would eliminate great concentrations of wealth and insure that labor was equally rewarded. Marx argued, however, that the free market would not achieve the economic justice that the individualists desired because the labor theory of value—the theory that the equilibrium price of a product traded in a free market is equal to the amount of labor required to produce it—was flawed. The equilibrium price in a free market is not equal to the amount of labor required to produce it.

The Marxist accusation that bohemians are petty bourgeois is similar. Marxists accuse bohemians of being petty bourgeois because they are individualistic and do not seek social change through collective or political means.

There is another thread of anarchist thought, however, that does not yield to this particular line of Marxist criticism. Like other young Russian aristocrats of his generation Michael Bakunin (1814-1876) became disenchanted with the Tsar's regime, especially after serving in the Tsar's army, and sought answers in romanticism and German Idealism. Because the study of philosophy was banned in Russian universities, radical young people formed their own study groups. The two most important were those headed by Nicholas Stankevich and another headed by the socialists Alexander Herzen and Nicholas Ogarev. Bakunin joined both and soon thereafter became Russia's leading Hegelian. However, Bakunin radicalized Hegel. Whereas Hegel's dialectic retains and conserves the past as it negates and supersedes it, Bakunin's dialectic was a revolutionary force that negates the past without conserving it, thus creating an entirely new future. In his immortal words, "the passion for destruction is a creative passion."<sup>43</sup>

In 1844 Bakunin went to Paris where he met Proudhon and Marx. Bakunin's collectivist anarchism combined Proudhon's rejection of centralized authority with

Marx's class analysis and critique of capitalism. Bakunin envisioned a society without a state in which workers would collectively own and operate the means of production. In 1848 Bakunin's revolutionary passion was devoted to the cause of Slavic nationalism. In 1849 he fought on the barricades alongside the romantics Richard Wagner and Wilhelm Heine against Prussian troops. In 1868 Bakunin joined the First International and led the anarchist faction until the anarchists were expelled by Marx in 1872. Thus began the longstanding feud between Marxists and anarchists. Bakunin warned that the state was antithetical to socialism and predicted that a communist state would turn workers into herd animals. A later generation of communist anarchists including Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman and Peter Kropotkin were among the first to recognize the failure of the Russian Revolution.

Communist anarchism gradually replaced Bakunin's collectivism in the European anarchist movement of the late nineteenth century. Communist anarchism was first proposed by the Italian anarchist section of the First International but the Russian scientist Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) later became its leading theoretician. Like Bakunin, the communist anarchists were revolutionaries engaged in class warfare. But whereas Bakunin, following Proudhon, believed that the product of labor should be distributed to workers according to the amount of labor they expended, the communists believed that the product of labor should be distributed according to need. The communists argued that the unequal distribution of wealth to workers would ultimately produce a class stratified society and a state to defend the interests of the wealthy.

Kropotkin envisioned a decentralized society of cooperative farms and workshops, as well as neighborhood and village councils, each operating on the principle

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<sup>43</sup> Mark Leier, *Bakunin: The Creative Passion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006).

of mutual aid and voluntary cooperation. He argued that humans had evolved to voluntarily cooperate with one another in small, face-to-face communities. He decried large urban factories that produced for export or trade rather than for local use because they created economic inequality and degraded the quality of work. His model was instead the medieval village commune in which skilled artisans and small farmers produced for utility rather than exchange value and derived aesthetic enjoyment from their work. Kropotkin lived in England from 1886 until 1917 when he returned to Russia. During his time in England he befriended the romantic socialist William Morris who, like Kropotkin, envisioned a decentralized society of cooperative labor and drew on medieval models for inspiration.

Anarcho-syndicalism developed in the early twentieth century out of syndicalism, which organized workers into large industry-based unions. But unlike fascism, which also developed out of syndicalism, the anarcho-syndicalists rejected both union bureaucracies and political parties. Their unions were run directly by the rank and file. They eschewed political action and advocated direct action instead, including wildcat strikes and sabotage.

A small subset of communist anarchists engaged in “propaganda by the deed,” where the “deed” generally referred to bombing agents of the state, the Church, or capitalism. The purpose of propaganda by the deed was to inspire the working class to rise up and overthrow their rulers. Such incidents increased both in Europe and the United States after the wrongful execution of the Chicago Haymarket anarchists in 1887 and must be understood in the context of the desperate condition of workers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1914 followers of Luigi Galleani (1861-



1931) launched a bombing campaign in the United States. In 1917 Mario Buda exploded a bomb intended for a right wing clergyman that killed nine policemen and a civilian. In 1918 Congress passed the Anarchist Exclusion Act aimed at deporting resident aliens belonging to revolutionary organizations. In response, Galleani and his followers declared war on the United States government. In 1919 Galleanistas exploded dozens of bombs across the United States but killed few of their targets. One bomb planted by Carlo Valdinocci in front of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer's home exploded prematurely, sending parts of Valdinocci's body over a two block area. Thus began the Palmer Raids that helped stamp out anarchism and revolutionary politics in the United States and set a precedent for McCarthy's investigations three decades later. But the bombings did not cease. In response to deportations and the indictment of Sacco and Vanzetti for murder, the Galleanistas set off a bomb on Wall Street in 1920 that killed 33 people, and continued to set off bombs until the 1930s.

Although most of the beats envisioned a decentralized society of cooperative communities similar to that envisioned by the communist anarchists, they did not believe that workers were the agents of change who would usher in such a society. Nor were they interested in waging class warfare. In fact the bohemians of the postwar years had an uneasy relationship with the American working class. In Greenwich Village, bohemians were violently assaulted by Italian and Irish American workers because they were black or gay or were believed to be communists. Anarchist beat poets Diane di Prima and Tuli Kupferberg both reported such incidents.<sup>44</sup> Michael Harrington reported that Jimmy Baldwin was beaten for sitting with a white woman.<sup>45</sup> Michael Harrington

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<sup>44</sup> Sawyers, *Greenwich Village Reader*, 436-437 and 529.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 472.

discussed socialist politics with his friends at the White Horse Tavern where he says they were frequently raided by fist and chair swinging Irish kids who accused them of being communists and faggots. One night the owner of the Tavern asked Harrington and his friends to sing their songs of solidarity with the workers in a foreign language so the workers attending the Tavern wouldn't understand what they were saying and start a fight.<sup>46</sup> Beat writer Seymour Krim said that when he moved to the Village he was “scared of the Italian street-threat that used to psychically de-ball all us violin-souled Jewish boys.”<sup>47</sup> According to Ronald Sukenick, the Italian hoods in Greenwich Village represented a leitmotif of fear for bohemians in Chandler Brossard's *Who Walk in Darkness* (1952). “This accurately reproduces the feel of the streets at the time,” Sukenick wrote, “and in retrospect I see it corresponds to the situation of the cultural underground in the forties and fifties, with its hostility toward the middle class and its ideological divorce from the working class in consequence of the failed socialist movements of the thirties.”<sup>48</sup>

In a 1960 letter to Peter Orlovsky, Ginsberg complained that the communists had taken over a conference he attended in Santiago, Chile and that most everybody was unpoetic. Everybody “got up and made fiery speeches about the workers. Everybody wanted revolutions.” He expected Peter to be in a labyrinth of worries, but said that he was in “a labyrinth of communists which is just as bad.”<sup>49</sup> In a 1960 letter to Ginsberg, Gary Snyder said that there was “no longer a problem of helping out American workers, but of giving up national comfort for whole world welfare” and added that communism

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 472 and 605.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 605.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 529.

<sup>49</sup> Ginsberg, *Letters of Allen Ginsberg*, 226.

“confuses the cures of economic suffering with the cures of illusion-bound ego.” Snyder felt that American workers had been bought out with “bread and circuses.”<sup>50</sup>

In a January 22, 1968 letter to Snyder, Ginsberg reported that he had sang a tribute of Guthrie folksongs and was pleased to see a return of that anti-authoritarian tradition, adding that it was “nice to see all the hippies in bells at concert applauding ‘Union Maid,’ union this time the community (in my head) rather than UAW NMU.”<sup>51</sup> Thus Ginsberg placed more hope in hippies than in workers and their large industrial unions. Gary Snyder agreed with him in spite of the fact that one of the sources of Snyder’s own anarchism was his early exposure to the anarcho-syndicalist Wobblies in the Pacific Northwest. In an interview with *Playboy* after the 1968 Chicago DNC, Ginsberg complained about “two different versions of communism: the Russian and American police states.” Again he placed hope in the new hip consciousness, which realized that “authoritarianism of any nature is a usurpation of human consciousness,” and warned that the problem now would “be how to transform the ‘greasers’—the blue-collar class which is always in favor of a strong police force and the persecution of minorities.” He hoped that rock ‘n roll and psychedelics might transform their consciousness. In the same letter, however, he mentioned with approval Thomas Parkinson and Kenneth Rexroth, two San Francisco bohemian anarchists more to his liking.<sup>52</sup>

One of the sources of the beats’ rejection of Marxism was its materialism. In a 1972 interview Ginsberg said that Kerouac “was very overtly communistic for several years, from ’39 to ’41, ’42,” and read some *Das Kapital*, *Communist Manifesto*, and the

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<sup>50</sup> Ginsberg and Snyder, *Selected Letters of Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder*, 31.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

*Daily Worker*. But Kerouac came to dislike Marxism because “at the time there was a large attack by the left against the idea of revolution of consciousness, sexual revolution particularly, and psychedelic revolution . . .” By the 1940s the beats had already read Artaud and Huxley’s *Doors of Perception*. By 1952 they had experimented with peyote. Kerouac objected to the fact that the Marxists’ rejected his bohemianism as “petit bourgeois angelism” and attempted to make the cultural revolution the beats “were involved in, which was a purely personal thing, into a lesser political, mere revolt against the temporary politicians, and to lead the energy away from a transformation of consciousness to the materialistic level of political rationalism.” Ginsberg felt that it would have been premature to speak about politics at that time. Before political issues could be adequately addressed it was necessary to “get back to Person, from public to person. Before determining a new public, you had to find out who you are, who is your person. Which meant finding out different modalities of consciousness . . .”<sup>53</sup>

In 1963 Ginsberg flew to Saigon and questioned journalists about the American role there. Deeply disturbed by what he found, he participated in his first political demonstration upon his return to San Francisco, a demonstration against Madame Nhu, the wife of Vietnam’s chief of secret police. In an interview that took place during the demonstration, Ginsberg said that he attended the demonstration to be tender to Madame Nhu. He explained that hostilities would end only when everyone’s blocked-up feelings of tenderness for one another were released from their bodies. He said that tenderness is a normal instinct and that it was Whitman who first exposed tenderness as the unconscious basis of American democracy. He supposed that “some form of community

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<sup>52</sup> Ginsberg, *Allen Ginsberg Spontaneous Mind*, 186.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 285-287.

sharing or communism is appropriate to the future State of Man.” But he didn’t see how that could work “without first a sharing of feelings. Then material arrangements will fall into place.”<sup>54</sup>

Ginsberg’s rejection of the State was based in a personalist metaphysics which held that only persons are real. Since the State is not a person it is not real. Whitman had said all along “that the State doesn’t exist (as a living Person), only people exist through their own private consciousness. So we realized we were in the midst of a vast American hallucination” constructed by the mass media and paid for by the CIA.<sup>55</sup> The State appears to be necessary only when our natural feelings of tenderness for one another are blocked and we are separated from one another in a competitive struggle for wealth (Locke) or honor (Hobbes). Therefore the State may be overcome through a revolution in consciousness which liberates our feelings of tenderness.

Personalism was an important philosophical thread running through the postwar period.<sup>56</sup> Borden Parker Bowne founded a school of personalism at Boston University in the early twentieth century and Martin Luther King, Jr. was deeply influenced by it during his studies there. In France during the 1930s Emmanuel Mounier founded a personalist movement as a third alternative to both liberal capitalism and Marxism. The French personalists were influenced by Proudhon and favored decentralization. Peter Maurin brought French personalism to the United States and together with Dorothy Day founded the anarchist Catholic Worker movement in 1933. The Catholic Workers were highly active in the peace movement during the first two decades after World War II.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>56</sup> See James J. Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties: The Making of Postwar Radicalism* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

The Catholic Workers collaborated with the secular radical pacifists and both overlapped with anarchists and bohemians. Thus the beats emerged in the context of these overlapping social circles which together shaped the early postwar left. In a 1982 interview Ginsberg identified the beats as part of an old bohemian tradition “of people working by themselves secretly on sex, dope, art, strange ideas, or anarchism. They thought politics was shit, which every working man does also. They didn’t believe in the authority of the state.” He charted the history of the beats starting with the circle of friends around Lucien Carr at Columbia to their encounter with the West Coast beats around 1955 and “with Philip Lamantia, who was a member of Kenneth Rexroth’s anarchist surrealist circle. So there were these interconnecting bohemian circles: anarchists, Catholic pacifists-worker groups.”<sup>57</sup>

One individual who participated in or collaborated with all of these intersecting social circles was Judith Malina, cofounder with her husband Julian Beck of the Living Theatre. On January 31, 2009 following a talk she gave with Osha Neumann on the 1960s street activists the Motherfuckers, I asked her whether the beats were anarchists. Her response was an emphatic yes, they were fellow travelers.

In the 1950s Malina collaborated with Catholic Workers and radical pacifists in protests against nuclear air raid drills. She spent time in prison for civil disobedience with Dorothy Day. She frequented the San Remo bar, popular also with the beats, and celebrated New Years Day 1953 with John Clellon Holmes, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg,<sup>58</sup> who was supportive of the Living Theatre throughout his life.<sup>59</sup> Other beats

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<sup>57</sup> Ginsberg, *Allen Ginsberg Spontaneous Mind*, 440.

<sup>58</sup> Judith Malina, *The Diaries of Judith Malina 1947-1957* (New York: Grove Press, 1984), 263.

<sup>59</sup> Ginsberg, *Deliberate Prose*, 491-493.

associated with the Living Theatre include Ray Bremser and Diane di Prima.<sup>60</sup> Malina had a particularly close relationship with anarchist and Gestalt therapist Paul Goodman, with whom she underwent analysis and whose plays she performed. A diary entry dated June 1, 1948 indicates that she had been on the subscription list for the anarchist magazine *Resistance* since earlier in the 1940s when it was called *Why?*<sup>61</sup> She was already committed to pacifism but at that time she was skeptical about anarchism, even though her mentor Paul Goodman wrote for *Resistance*. Another entry dated October 20, 1949 states that her friend Harold Norse, author of *The Beat Hotel*, was an anarchist, and debates the relative merits of anarchism. She says that some of her poet friends associate anarchism with chaos, disorder, violence and destruction, but she asks, “Can ‘anarchism’ apply to a cooperative, moneyless, self-determining society?”<sup>62</sup> Malina was in the process of integrating her pacifist beliefs with communist anarchism. A diary entry dated April 1, 1950 records her attendance at a meeting of the *Resistance* group, at which the first to arrive was its editor, anarchist philosopher David Thoreau Wieck (1921-1997). She still states that she does not “approve of the word ‘anarchist’ because it smacks of violence,” but returns to future meetings.<sup>63</sup> Although not all of the *Resistance* people were pacifists, many were. Wieck was a World War II conscientious objector who spent three years in Danbury Federal Prison where he established lifelong friendships with other radical pacifists including David Dellinger, Jim Peck and Lowell Naeve. Another friend of Malina’s, Jackson MacLow, was the poetry editor of *Resistance*.

MacLow explored the liberatory potential of aleatory and cut-up techniques just

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 425. See also Sawyers, *Greenwich Village Reader*, 432.

<sup>61</sup> Malina, *Diaries of Judith Malina 1947-1957*, 42.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 105.

as his friend John Cage and William Burroughs did. In an interview just three weeks before his death, Cage said that he was introduced to anarchism in the late 1940s while living at Gatehill Coop, which had been formed in connection with Black Mountain College.<sup>64</sup> There was a strong anarchist presence at Black Mountain College—Paul Goodman was there when Cage was—and in the surrounding community. According to MacLow, both he and Cage understood aleatory art techniques in Buddhist and anarchist terms as a means of producing art without a controlling ego/ruler.<sup>65</sup> Similarly for Burroughs, aleatory techniques are meant to disrupt compulsive, conditioned responses inherent in language as virus or cancer.

The bohemian anarchist community in the United States may be traced back to European romanticism. As a movement, romanticism climaxed with the revolutions of 1848. The defeat of those revolutions caused romantic youth to flee to America where they founded rural communes and urban bohemian communities.

Henry Clapp, Jr., an advocate of free love, translated the writings of the romantic communitarian Charles Fourier for Alfred Brisbane, who was crowned the first “King of Bohemia” in New York and presided over Pfaff’s beer cellar on Broadway. “Among his closest friends and admirers,” according to Guarneri, “was Walt Whitman, whose works Clapp hailed for their sensual candor.”<sup>66</sup> Brisbane was responsible for introducing Horace Greeley and the *Tribune* to Fourier and New York bohemia. According to Reynolds, Whitman was influenced by Fourier’s theory of passionate attraction, which

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<sup>64</sup> Max Blechman, “Last Words on Anarchy: An Interview with John Cage,” in *Drunken Boat #2*, ed. Max Blechman (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia and Seattle, WA: Left Bank Books, 1994), 221-225.

<sup>65</sup> Jackson MacLow, “John Cage: A Celebration,” in *Drunken Boat #2*, ed. Max Blechman (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia and Seattle, WA: Left Bank Books, 1994), 216-220.

<sup>66</sup> Carl Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 361.



resembled Darwin's fluid materialism.<sup>67</sup> For instance, in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," Whitman asks:

*What is more subtle than this which ties me to the woman or man that looks in my face?*

*Which fuses me into you now, and pours my meaning into you?*

*O to attract by more than attraction!*

*How it is I know not—yet behold! the something which obeys none of the rest,*

*It is offensive, never defensive—yet how magnetic it draws.*

*Does the earth gravitate? does not all matter, aching, attract all matter?*

*So the body of me to all I meet or know.*

Although Whitman was not an anarchist nor an advocate of free love, his work was published by anarchists, starting with free love anarchist Ezra Heywood, who was jailed on charges of obscenity for doing so, and Benjamin Tucker. In England the anarchist Edward Carpenter, a close associate of William Morris and a pioneer advocate of homosexual liberation, was a keen admirer of Whitman's poetry. Following the conviction of Oscar Wilde for sodomy in 1895 anarchists alone in the United States rallied to the cause of homosexual liberation. Wilde was a particularly sympathetic figure because he had already argued in *The Soul of Man under Socialism* (1891) that individualism and art would flourish in an anarchist socialist society. But Wilde's conviction for sodomy also caused anarchists to better appreciate Whitman's poems of

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<sup>67</sup> David Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 112.

free and comradely love. The original title in 1905 of Emma Goldman's journal, *Open Road*, was inspired by Whitman; and in an article titled "On the Road" Goldman urged her readers to follow Whitman.<sup>68</sup> Two of Goldman's associates at the anarchist Ferrer Center in New York, John William Lloyd and Leonard Abbot, did just that, and published their magazine *Free Comrade*, devoted to the "manly love of comrades." As late as 1926 Abbot wrote "The Anarchist Side of Walt Whitman" for *The Road to Freedom* (vol. 2 no. 5, pp. 2-3). In addition to Whitman, Lloyd and Abbot aggressively promoted the work of Edward Carpenter, who advocated a cosmic sexual-love. It was Carpenter who coined the term "cosmic consciousness" that became so popular in the beat-inspired 1960s.

Ginsberg traced his own gay genealogy back to Whitman through Edward Carpenter. In a 1972 interview Ginsberg said that he had slept with Neal Cassady, who slept with Gavin Arthur, a grandson of President Chester Arthur, who slept with Edward Carpenter, who slept with Walt Whitman. "So this is in a sense a line of transmission . . . that's an interesting thing to have as part of the mythology. Kerouac's heterosexual hero who also slept with somebody who slept with somebody who slept with Whitman, and received the Whispered Transmission, capital W, capital T, of that love." The older person, he said, absorbed "the younger person's electric, vital magnetism (according to a charming, theosophical nineteenth-century theory)," while the younger person receives "wisdoms, knowledges and teachings."<sup>69</sup>

After World War I anarchism in the United States was reduced to relatively small scattered groups. In 1908 Benjamin Tucker's anarchist bookstore in New York burned to

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<sup>68</sup> Terence Kissack, *Free Comrades: Anarchism and Homosexuality in the United States, 1895-1917* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2008), 69.

the ground. It was the final straw for Tucker who sensed that individualist anarchism was declining. He left for France never to return. Individualist anarchism was most popular among native-born Americans in the nineteenth century when it was still possible to imagine a local free market of small farmers, artists and craftsmen. In the twentieth century it seemed to become ineffectual if not irrelevant in a world dominated by increasingly large governmental and corporate institutions. Working class European immigrants were drawn instead to communist or syndicalist anarchism. But these met with decline, too, during and after the war.

Government persecution began when anarchists opposed President Wilson's patriotic war campaign. Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman were arrested on June 15, 1917 and, along with hundreds of other radicals, deported to Russia on December 21, 1919. After their deportation some five thousand radicals were arrested in the Palmer Raids and the offices of Emma Goldman's *Mother Earth* were ransacked by J. Edgar Hoover. Anarcho-syndicalists began their decline after being expelled from the Socialist Party in 1912 and also fell victim to government persecution during and after the war. However, according to Antliff, the 10,000 member anarcho-syndicalist Union of Russian Workers of the United States and Canada was pivotal in the success of the Russian Revolution. Anarcho-syndicalists proved useful to Lenin during the revolution and supported their actions by calling for all power to the soviets (decentralized worker's councils). In Petrograd, Shatov and Komroff commanded the storming of the Winter Palace. Shatov and Komroff were Russian American anarcho-syndicalists and neighbors of the bohemian anarchist Man Ray in Ridgefield, New Jersey. But after the revolution the Bolsheviks centralized power in the Party. Lenin repudiated anarchism as an

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<sup>69</sup> Ginsberg, *Allen Ginsberg Spontaneous Mind*, 317.

“infantile disorder” and rounded up anarchists. And yet many Russian anarcho-syndicalists both in Russia and the United States continued to believe that Lenin’s goals were the same as theirs and switched their allegiance to the Bolshevik Party. In the United States tens of thousands of members of the Socialist Party did the same. The anarchist artist Robert Minor published an interview with Lenin in which he criticized Lenin’s centralized, hierarchical plan for a communist society. Minor was attacked by Max Eastman as counter-revolutionary and, in spite of Emma Goldman’s attempts to defend him from her prison cell, eventually recanted and became a leading member of the American Communist Party.<sup>70</sup> Anarchist Elizabeth Gurley Flynn also defected to the Communist Party.

Through the twenties and thirties only a handful of anarchist organizations and publications survived in the United States, including those in foreign languages. After the 1924 Immigration Act reduced immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, the ranks of foreign language anarchist organizations began to naturally decline. The ranks of Yiddish speaking anarchists further declined during World War II as some Jewish anarchists left the movement to support the war. During the twenties one of the most important English language anarchist publications was *The Road to Freedom*, edited by the bohemian anarchist Hyppolyte Havel in Greenwich Village. *The Road to Freedom* carried on the pre-war tradition of bohemian anarchism, combining art with anarchism, individualism with communism. Like Whitman and Ginsberg for whom democracy rested upon fellowship, the editors of *The Road to Freedom* believed that “it is the friend and companion that the people need” (vol. 4, no. 6, p. 4). From 1932 to 1939 the anarcho-syndicalist Sam Dolgoff and other young anarchists published *Vanguard* in an

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<sup>70</sup> Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 183-213.

attempt to revive the anarchist movement and focus attention on labor. Among the members of *Vanguard* were David Wieck and his friend David Koven. In 1943 Dolgoff founded *Why?* After the war *Why?* became *Resistance* and Wieck became editor. The result was a magazine more akin to *The Road to Freedom* than *Vanguard*. In 1955 Dolgoff founded the Libertarian League, which published *Views and Comments*. In a 1971 interview with historian Paul Avrich, Dolgoff described the *Why?/Resistance* group as “Greenwich Village bohemian types” and complained that he was “sick and tired of these half-assed artists and poets who only want to play with their belly buttons.” According to Dolgoff, many in the group were interested in Wilhelm Reich, as well as Buddhism and mysticism. Most were pacifists opposed to the war. When the anarcho-syndicalist Rudolf Rocker came out in support of the war, Dolgoff says, he was heckled by members of the *Why?/Resistance* group, causing Dolgoff to split from them.<sup>71</sup>

Although Dolgoff’s accusations of bourgeois bohemianism were exaggerated, members of the *Why?/Resistance* group did have an affinity for bohemians. Besides Judith Malina, the beat poet Tuli Kupferberg attended meetings of the *Resistance* group,<sup>72</sup> which published articles by Kenneth Rexroth. In 1948 David Koven and his wife Audrey Goodfriend moved to the Bay area. In 1956 Koven founded the anarchist humor magazine *The Needle*, which published original poems by Kenneth Patchen, Gary Snyder, Robert Duncan and Allen Ginsberg (July and April 1956), as well as art work by anarchist pacifist Lowell Naeve (November 1956). The first issue of the *Needle* (April, 1956) explained that this is not an age for “political broadside addressed to a revolutionary mass,” because “the revolutionary masses seem to have dwindled to a

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<sup>71</sup> Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America, Abridged Edition* (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 1996), 229.

handful of individuals like ourselves.” Instead, the *Needle* hoped to “reach into those circles of youths and individuals whose rebellious spirit is unexpressed except for outburst of anger and sullen non-participation,” to puncture their illusions and mend their lives with “acts of love, community, peace and freedom.” In the 1960s Koven organized the Vietnam Day Committee, to which Ginsberg and Jerry Rubin also contributed. On September 29, 2005 Koven spoke at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Six Gallery Reading at the San Francisco Public Library.

In 1947 David Wieck and his wife Diva Agostinelli read Mildred Brady’s article in *Harper’s*, “The New Cult of Sex and Anarchy,” about a burgeoning anarchist community on the West Coast, and the following year traveled out to San Francisco. Brady’s article was a sneering account of the “new bohemia” that appeared along the northern California coast in the years immediately following World War II. The new bohemia was fueled by a large number of conscientious objectors who had been stationed on the West Coast during the war. Their anarchism was pacifist and many were artists or writers with an interest in mysticism and the occult. One circle of bohemian anarchists revolved around Henry Miller in Big Sur; another around Kenneth Rexroth in San Francisco. Perhaps for the sake of her middle class audience, Brady signaled that the new bohemians should not be taken seriously by assuming a sarcastic tone and by claiming that their art, politics and mysticism could all be reduced to the sexual urges of young people. This caused much consternation especially in Rexroth’s circle. In a letter to *Resistance* (vol. 6, no. 2, June 1947, p. 15), Philip Lamantia refers to Brady’s remarks on Rexroth as libelous and tries to assure the readers of *Resistance* that northern California anarchists are serious revolutionaries and not members of any sex cult.

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<sup>72</sup> Sawyers, *Greenwich Village Reader*, 531.

However, although Brady exaggerated the role of Wilhelm Reich's psychology in the new bohemia, she was correct that Reich was an important figure for them. One of the most frequent stories that I heard Diva Agostinelli tell was that the first time she met Paul Goodman he was demonstrating a Reichian orgasm.<sup>73</sup> The *Resistance* group disliked Brady's article as much as Rexroth's circle did, but in September of 1947 they published an article by Alexander Lowen, Reich's best known student. Even Burroughs, who became wary of sex as a potential source of addiction and bondage, was interested in Reich's orgonomic cancer research.

According to Reich, emotional repression in the patriarchal family causes the fascia around muscles to harden, forming a "body armor" which blocks the flow of "orgone" energy needed for open-hearted love and full-bodied orgasms. The result is a range of pathologies from sado-masochism and the authoritarian personality to fascism and cancer. Reichian body work softens the body armor by massaging the rigid fascia. Reich's orgone energy box was designed to focus the healing powers of cosmic orgone energy onto the individual who occupied the box. In 1954 the United States government issued an injunction to stop Reich from publishing his work about the healing properties of orgone energy. When an orgone energy box was shipped across state lines, Reich was arrested and sentenced to two years in prison. After serving six months he was found dead in his prison cell on November 3, 1957.

In 1948 Rexroth traveled to New York City where he met Paul Goodman of the *Resistance* group and Dwight Macdonald, whose magazine *politics* (1944-1949) was an important voice of anarchist pacifism. When *Resistance* members Michael and Sally

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<sup>73</sup> See also, Rebecca DeWitt, "79 Year old Woman Who Bowls: An Interview with Diva Agostinelli, Anarchist," *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory* 5, no. 1 (Spring, 2001).

Grieg, David Koven, and Audrey Goodfriend, arrived in San Francisco, however, Rexroth received them with suspicion. He accused Koven of having an affair with his wife, who had been enormously impressed by the four visitors from New York for their efforts to revive meetings of Rexroth's anarchist group, the Libertarian Circle, and "described them as a bunch of New York Stalinists who presumed to rescue the Libertarian Circle by running it as if it were a Communist cell."<sup>74</sup> According to notes for an unpublished essay written by Wieck titled "Musings on Rexroth," when Wieck and his wife were the only two to appear for a dinner discussion in San Francisco, Rexroth commented, "It looks like you won't find any cadres here." Rexroth, Wieck said, knew full well the "offensiveness of that Stalinist term," but Wieck refused to take the bait by explaining that he was not interested in creating disciplined revolutionary cells and simply answered "no." Rexroth was an intensely jealous man with a troubled sexual history but he was politically aligned with the visitors from New York who, like him, were anarchist pacifists, and the evening proceeded amicably.

Robert Duncan formed one important bridge between the East Coast anarchist pacifists and Rexroth's circle. In the 1940s Duncan participated in the *Resistance* group<sup>75</sup> and lived for a time in Woodstock with James and Blanche Cooney.<sup>76</sup> There, Duncan collaborated with Sanders Russell on an experimental literary magazine.<sup>77</sup> The Cooneys' political outlook was characteristic of Woodstock, which had been established early in the twentieth century as a William Morris style arts-and-crafts socialist-anarchist community of artists and writers. The Cooneys were opposed to industrial society in all

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<sup>74</sup> Linda Hamalian, *A Life of Kenneth Rexroth* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991), 181.

<sup>75</sup> DeWitt, "79 Year old Woman Who Bowls."

<sup>76</sup> Antliff, *Anarchy and Art*, 118-121.

<sup>77</sup> Hamalian, *Life of Kenneth Rexroth*, 153.



its manifestations, whether capitalist, communist or fascist, and wanted to break up society into small communities of refuge, sustained by agriculture and handicrafts, that they likened to *arks*. Also living in the Woodstock area at that time was another anarchist pacifist couple, Holley Cantine and Dachine Rainer, who published *Retort* (1942-1951), a magazine that shared a common political outlook with its city counterpart, *Resistance*, and published many of the same authors, including Rexroth, Goodman, Kenneth Patchen, British anarchist George Woodcock, Alex Comfort, Jackson MacLow, and Catholic Worker Ammon Hennacy. Cantine rejected both Marxist attempts to bring about a free society by political or violent means and anarcho-syndicalist attempts to radicalize industrial unions. Instead he proposed that anarchists immediately live the way they would in a free society by establishing small cooperative communities that would serve as examples to others, inspiring them to follow without coercing them to do so. Thus when Duncan returned to San Francisco in 1946 he and Lamantia proposed to Rexroth that they start the Libertarian Circle in collaboration with local Italian anarchists.<sup>78</sup> And in 1947 Duncan and Russell named the anarchist pacifist magazine that they produced with Philip Lamantia, the *Ark*.<sup>79</sup> Published by the Libertarian Circle, it included works by Thomas Parkinson, Woodcock, Patchen, William Carlos Williams, Rexroth, and Goodman.<sup>80</sup> *The Ark* had a decidedly personalist bent. Its opening editorial stated: “In direct opposition to the debasement of human values made flauntingly evident by the war, there is rising among writers in America, as elsewhere, a social consciousness which recognizes the integrity of the personality. . .” While he was living in Woodstock Duncan commuted to New York to visit Macdonald, who in 1944 published Duncan’s

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<sup>78</sup> Antliff, *Anarchy and Art*, 117.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 120. See also Frank, “San Francisco 1952,” 142.

article, "The Homosexual in Society," in *politics*.<sup>81</sup>

Macdonald was a pivotal figure in the transition of American leftists from Stalinism to anarchist pacifism. The appeal of Stalinism began to fade as early as 1933 when, in *Artists in Uniform*, Max Eastman described the repression of artists and writers in the Soviet Union.<sup>82</sup> In 1935 when the Kremlin made divorce and birth control less available, Eastman could no longer follow Trotsky's advice to support the Soviet system but not Stalin. Then, perhaps to appease the West, the Soviets betrayed the revolution during the Spanish Civil War. The communist Abraham Lincoln Brigade was instructed to save the Spanish republic even at the cost of putting down a popular uprising in Barcelona and murdering anarchist leaders. The Moscow Trials further alienated American leftists from Stalin, especially after Trotsky's counter-trial with John Dewey in 1937 cleared him of charges. Macdonald, however, reminded leftists that as leader of the Red Army, Trotsky had presided over the suppression of anarchist sailors in the 1921 Kronstadt rebellion, and that he might not after all be so different than Stalin.<sup>83</sup> The communist Popular Front finally split apart after Stalin signed a non-aggression pact with Hitler in 1939.

The ruthless nature of Stalin's dictatorship of the proletariat, and its failure to wither away as Marx predicted it would, caused Trotskyites to search for an explanation. In 1941 James Burnham provided them with one in *The Managerial Revolution*. Burnham argued that if it is true that a ruling class of elite managers inevitably develops in any bureaucratic organization, as the elite theorists had argued, and if it is true that all

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<sup>80</sup> Hamalian, *Life of Kenneth Rexroth*, 153.

<sup>81</sup> Antliff, *Anarchy and Art*, 121.

<sup>82</sup> Diggins, *Rise and Fall of the American Left*, 162.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

modern societies are bureaucratic, as Max Weber had argued, then all modern societies are inevitably ruled by a class of elite managers. The best that could be hoped for under this theory by those who fear an excessive concentration of power would be a corporate liberal system in which elite managers and the competing interest groups they represent check and balance one another's power. Burnham himself, joined by fellow Trotskyites Max Schachtman and Max Eastman, followed this path and became neoconservative Cold Warriors in the 1950s.

Macdonald took a different path out of Trotskyism. He rejected the thesis that a ruling class of elite managers was inevitable or desirable. Instead, he embraced communitarian anarchist pacifism and was the first to publish C. Wright Mills. In his 1946 *politics* article "The Root of Man," Macdonald argued that bureaucratic collectivism called for a new personalism that went beyond the politics of both the left and the right. He believed that the left as much as the right was captive to a dehumanizing scientific rationalism that validated bureaucratic collectivism. Instead of the abstract rationalism of bureaucratic organization, Macdonald appealed to the warm affects of face-to-face interpersonal relationships. What was needed, he believed, was a new culture based on the ethical aspects of social relationships at the level of the individual. But for individuals to relate to one another with authentic feeling it would first be necessary to free both affect and imagination from ideological constraints.

In 1938 Macdonald translated a manifesto written by Trotsky and André Breton that indicated their revolt against Stalin's repression of artistic freedom. They demanded the complete freedom of art from ends foreign to itself, including commercial motives or "reasons of state." Artistic imagination must, they wrote, "escape from all constraint," by

marshalling “all those powers of the interior world,” common to all men, “against the unbearable present reality.” Then, in 1940, a group of abstract expressionists split from the American Artist’s Congress when it refused to condemn Stalin’s invasion of Finland, and formed the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors in conjunction with a group founded by Macdonald called the League for Cultural Freedom and Socialism.<sup>84</sup> By aligning themselves with Macdonald’s League they not only denounced Stalin’s subordination of culture to the state, but more broadly they inverted Marxist materialism and freed art to serve as an agent of social change by placing the social relations of production on a cultural foundation. Writing in *Dyn* magazine, which had been published with help from Robert Motherwell, Dutch surrealist Wolfgang Paalen declared: “Engels was in error when he wrote: ‘Men must eat, drink, be clothed and sheltered before they are able to concern themselves with politics, art, science or religion . . .’ But, in their very beginnings politics, art, science, and religion, were among the chief means of acquiring food and clothing.”<sup>85</sup> By emphasizing the cultural basis of the social order, the artists who aligned themselves with Macdonald’s League “made it possible to argue for the social significance of abstract art. Since it was through artistic production that a culture was continually recreated, it might be possible to precipitate a change in the social structure through a change in consciousness, arrived at through experimental art.”<sup>86</sup> In particular, they believed that the use of automatic techniques derived from surrealism made radical social change possible by circumventing social controls mediated by the conscious ego. No wonder, then, that Breton claimed in a 1952 letter to the French

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<sup>84</sup> See Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 17-21.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Belgrad, *Culture of Spontaneity*, 20.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

anarchist paper *Le Libertaire* that in spite of their unfortunate detour into Soviet communism the surrealists had always been fundamentally libertarian.<sup>87</sup>

According to Belgrad the American avant-garde of the 1940s built upon the automatic techniques of the surrealists to create a new “culture of spontaneity” that was intended to undermine the abstract rationalism of the new bureaucratic order. Charles Olson’s “projective verse” offers an example that is particularly relevant to the beats. Olson began the Second World War as a liberal supporter of Roosevelt’s New Deal and served in Roosevelt’s Office of War Information (OWI). However, as the federal government came to depend more on corporate industry during the war, the OWI abandoned personal standards of truth and honesty and adopted corporate marketing techniques to sell the war to the public. Consequently, in 1944 Olson resigned from the OWI and, like Macdonald, came to believe that a new personalism that went beyond the politics of both left and right was necessary to overcome the dehumanizing effects of modern bureaucratic organization. Following Carl Jung, Olson believed that social repression is mediated by the ego operating at the level of consciousness. Direct access to the unconscious through spontaneous expression therefore offered a means of liberation: “By offering unmediated access to unconscious thought processes, spontaneity provided a vantage point from which to question the culture’s authority and created the potential for authentic communications exploring new forms of human relatedness.”<sup>88</sup> Charles Olson taught his theory of spontaneous projective verse at Black Mountain College where he influenced an entire generation of American poets including Robert Duncan and the beats.

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<sup>87</sup> André Breton, “The Lighthouse,” in *Drunken Boat #2*, ed. Max Blechman (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1994 and Seattle, WA: Left Bank Books, 1994), 159-161.

Yet another source of the idea that society could be changed by cultural means was the circle of radical pacifists around Dave Dellinger. Radical pacifists in the War Resisters League gradually moved towards an anarchist position during and after World War II as they adopted methods of non-violent direct action inspired by Gandhi and Thoreau. Anarchists had long promoted direct action as a non-political means of changing society. The radical pacifists developed non-violent techniques of direct action consistent with their pacifist principles that proved useful in a range of social causes beyond peace. For example, it was the radical pacifists who spearheaded non-violent direct action in the civil rights struggle, founding the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in 1942 and embarking on the first Freedom Ride—then called the “Journey of Reconciliation”—in the South in 1947. Jim Peck was the only individual who participated in both the 1947 Journey and the 1961 Freedom Ride.<sup>89</sup> Wieck met Dellinger at Danbury Prison when they were both serving time for their resistance to the war. Together they protested Jim Crow rules in the prison and developed a lifelong friendship.

After the war and his release from prison, Dellinger and fellow COs established a magazine, *Direct Action*, with the belief that America was ripe for radical change. Lewis Hill wrote a “Call to a Conference” in the first issue of *Direct Action* that led to a meeting of radical pacifists in Chicago in 1946. “Internal CNVR politics,” during this time, “echoed debate between, on the one hand, the orthodox Marxist preoccupation with political economy and with the working class as the historic agent for radical social change and, on the other, the new postwar social movements that emphasized culture and

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<sup>88</sup> Belgrad, *Culture of Spontaneity*, 29.

community and that preferred anarchist, nonviolent direct action and civil disobedience outside electoral politics.” However, both sides in the debate “rejected institutional socialism and the bureaucratic state (socialist and capitalist) and supported direct action and some form of decentralized and egalitarian ‘socialism.’”<sup>90</sup> At a steering committee held in New York to prepare for the conference Dellinger took the position of the anarchists and said that “instead of capturing political power, we must do away with it.”<sup>91</sup> At the end of the conference the participants organized themselves as the Committee for Non-Violent Revolution. Wieck’s *Resistance* group in New York collaborated with the CNVR throughout its short life.

By 1947, however, the mood of the country became more conservative. World War II accelerated the trend toward efficient bureaucratic organization and scientific management of work. When the war ended the trend continued, “but with mass consumption—‘a higher standard of living’—replacing wartime urgency as its primary justification.”<sup>92</sup> The working class accepted the new bureaucratic order in return for a consumer lifestyle. As CNVR member Lewis Hill commented regarding the Marxist preoccupation with the proletariat, “When one is looking for the proletariat one looks for chains; but in the industrial class in America what one sees is bathtubs and credit-plan refrigerators, with a heavy sprinkling of life-insurance investments.”<sup>93</sup> Hill concluded that the cultural basis for a non-violent social revolution did not yet exist in the United

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<sup>89</sup> James Tracy, *Direct Action: Radical Pacifism From the Union Eight to the Chicago Seven* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 118.

<sup>90</sup> Scott H. Bennett, *Radical Pacifism: The War Resisters League and Gandhian Nonviolence in America, 1915-1963* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 147.

<sup>91</sup> Tracy, *Direct Action*, 49.

<sup>92</sup> Daniel Belgrad, “The Transnational Counterculture: Beat-Mexican Intersections,” in *Reconstructing the Beats*, ed. Jennie Skerl (New York: Pallgrave Macmillan, 2004), 31.

<sup>93</sup> Quoted in Bennett, *Radical Pacifism*, 148.

States.<sup>94</sup> He detached himself from the CNVR to pursue his dream of an FM radio station in Berkeley that could contribute to the needed cultural transformation. Pacifica station KPFA was finally established in 1949 and became an important platform for beat and anarchist voices in the early postwar period. Meanwhile the radical pacifists who gathered at the CNVR's 1947 conference came to a similar conclusion. "CNVR's Bulletin noted that conference participants in 1947 'moved away from the Marxist attitude of dealing with large masses of people, which was felt to be unrealistic in the world today, and toward the concept of working in terms of total life patterns with a few people.' One participant commented that 'every time someone stops going to the movies it is a gain for the revolution.'"<sup>95</sup> By 1948 CNVR had been absorbed into a new group, Peacemakers, which sought to replace capitalism and hierarchy but "argued that the 'transformation of individuals' must precede social and political revolution, since imposed revolutions were usually tyrannical and tenuous."<sup>96</sup> They organized themselves into a loose federation of communal cells practicing participatory decision-making and consensus that was at the same time a means to achieve the society they desired and an example of that society already lived now. Dellinger lived in a commune at Glen Gardner where he later printed the New Left magazine *Liberation* (1956-1977).

In the 1960s the possibility of a mass movement reappeared, although it was no longer organized around the working class or labor issues. Dellinger served as Chairman of the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (MOBE), a coalition of groups including the emerging counterculture, which staged mass protests between 1966 and 1970. It was Dellinger who asked Jerry Rubin to be project director for the

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<sup>94</sup> Tracy, *Direct Action*, 51-52.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.



October 21, 1967 march on the Pentagon at which Abbie Hoffman led a chant to levitate and exorcise the building. In a similar vein Ginsberg led a chant to calm police and protesters in Lincoln Park at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. Ginsberg corresponded with Dellinger throughout the 1960s and testified on his behalf at the trial of the Chicago Seven. Thus, during the 1960s anarchist pacifists collaborated more effectively with the bohemian counterculture than with workers.

In his unpublished essay “Musings on Rexroth” Wieck provides an important clue regarding what type of anarchism appealed to postwar bohemians. During a discussion in the Libertarian Circle that Wieck attended on the philosophy of anarchism, Rexroth became impatient and complained that there is such a thing as being too profound. “Kenneth thought that Berkman had set down the basics of anarchism in his ABC of Anarchist Communism—to which Kenneth appended Landauer’s ideas on community, source of Buber’s.” And Rexroth was willing to let it go with that. “I’m not sure I have him right about this,” Wieck wrote, “but I feel that the only philosophy he trusted was the poets’ and the mystics’.”

If so, Rexroth couldn’t have picked a more suitable anarchist philosopher than Gustav Landauer (1870-1919), because Landauer was both a poet and a mystic. He was also a pacifist and a communitarian, and like the postwar anarchist pacifists, pursued social change through literature, art and ethical personal relationships. Landauer resided most of his life in Schwabing and Friedrichshagen, where he attracted the interest of bohemian anarchists, and was brutally murdered by Freikorps troops during the November Revolution.

In 1911 elite theorist Robert Michels concluded from his study of the German

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<sup>96</sup> Bennett, *Radical Pacifism*, 148-149.

Social Democratic Party (SPD) that all modern social organizations no matter how democratic they may be at their inception inevitably develop into oligarchies. The reason for this is that bureaucracy is the most efficient form of modern social organization. But once a bureaucracy develops, its managers consolidate their power and establish an oligarchy. Landauer's first exposure to socialism was with the SPD. His disappointment with its oligarchic and bureaucratic structure led him to conclude that an authentic socialism could never develop out of any political organization or labor union.

Nor did Landauer believe that violence is an ethical or effective means of social change. It is not *ethical* because Landauer believed with Kant that persons should always be treated as ends in themselves, not as means to another end. It is not *effective* because the oppressed are complicit in their oppression. Landauer believed with Etienne de la Boetie that servitude is voluntary, made possible only by the consent of the servants. The State is not based on external coercion, but on the consent of the governed. Tyranny is therefore abolished when and only when the oppressed withdraw their consent. As his close friend Martin Buber later explained, Landauer believed that the State is not, as Kropotkin believed, an institution that could be swept away by force. "The State is a condition," Landauer wrote, "a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behavior; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently."<sup>97</sup>

The root of the problem, Landauer believed, was cultural. The people had become spiritually impoverished. Only poets acting as revolutionary prophets could reinvigorate their spirit (*Geist*) and transform society. "The consequence of poetry is

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<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Eugene Lunn, *Prophet of Community: The Romantic Socialism of Gustav Landauer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 224.

revolution, the revolution that is building and regeneration—for him who does not know that, the poets have never really lived.”<sup>98</sup>

Landauer was a romantic idealist opposed to the positivism of Engel’s *Anti-Dühring* as well as Kropotkin’s *Mutual Aid*. Socialist society would not come about by scientific necessity but by a spontaneous act of the will. Landauer’s conception of the will, however, was emotive, romantic, and libidinal—not rational. Our communal spirit, Landauer wrote, is ultimately derived from sexual love, which “will then be carried over step by step from the family into the Gemeinde [community], the Volk [people], and humanity.”<sup>99</sup>

A nation, a tribe, a community of families, can lose its spirit. Then only poetry can save it from an artificial and impersonal form of social organization, the State. Landauer believed that Walt Whitman was the poet who could save the Americans. “Love was the basis of Whitman’s philosophy, Landauer wrote, and the love Whitman expressed for individuals was symbolic of the force the poet felt should bind men together into a new *Volk*. This *Volk* was, of course, the American people—as a people, not as a political organization. In Americans Landauer saw a ‘rested people,’ barbarians in his sense of the word, people ready to start on the path to a new era of cultural grandeur. And in Whitman he saw their prophet.”<sup>100</sup>

In 1952 Ginsberg asked Philip Lamantia, whom he had already met in New York in 1948, to show some of his poems to Rexroth in the hope that Rexroth would

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<sup>98</sup> Quoted in Charles B. Maurer, *Call to Revolution: The Mystical Anarchism of Gustav Landauer* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1971), 188. See also Lunn, *Prophet of Community*, 169.

<sup>99</sup> Lunn, *Prophet of Community*, 279.

<sup>100</sup> Maurer, *Call to Revolution*, 98. See also Lunn, *Prophet of Community*, 283.

recommend them for publication.<sup>101</sup> In 1953 Ginsberg met Rexroth on a visit to San Francisco with the help of a letter of recommendation from William Carlos Williams. In 1954 Ginsberg moved to San Francisco and began attending Rexroth's Friday night gatherings. He and Rexroth got along well. Rexroth introduced Ginsberg to the major figures in the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance, including Robert Duncan and Jack Spicer. It was Duncan who introduced Ginsberg to beat writer Michael McClure.

In December 1952 Duncan and his partner Jess Collins opened the King Ubu art gallery for only one year to eliminate the risk of it becoming co-opted for commercial purposes.<sup>102</sup> The King Ubu was named after an absurdist play by French satirist Alfred Jarry (1873-1907) whose theme was the repression of individual expression by the state. Jarry was an anarchist who carried a pistol on his hip and offended the French government by speaking the forbidden Breton dialect. Rexroth, Spicer and Lamantia all read poetry at the King Ubu.

In mid-1954 the King Ubu was reopened under the name the Six Gallery by a cooperative of artists including Spicer and Wally Hedricks. It was Hedricks who in 1955 proposed to Rexroth that they set up a group poetry reading at the Six Gallery.<sup>103</sup> Rexroth passed the idea on to Ginsberg and referred him to Gary Snyder, who recruited Philip Whalen for the reading. Ginsberg recruited Lamantia and McClure. Rexroth served as the master of ceremonies.

And thus the beat movement was born in the context of Rexroth's circle of anarchist poets when on October 13, 1955 Ginsberg performed his famous reading of *Howl* at the Six Gallery. As Rexroth said, Ginsberg "inhaled the libertarian atmosphere

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<sup>101</sup> See Hamalian, *Life of Kenneth Rexroth*, 241-246.

<sup>102</sup> See Antliff, *Anarchy and Art*, 128. See also Frank, "San Francisco 1952," 146-152.

and exploded.”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Hamalian, *Life of Kenneth Rexroth*, 242.

<sup>104</sup> Quoted in Frank, “San Francisco 1952,” 152.

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