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THIS IS NOT A DISSERTATION. (NEO)NEO-BOHEMIAN CONNECTIONS

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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9/19/2015

Date

THIS IS NOT A DISSERTATION. (NEO)NEO-BOHEMIAN CONNECTIONS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

of

Purdue University

by

Walter Moore

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

of

Doctor of Philosophy

December 2015

Purdue University

West Lafayette, Indiana

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Lance, my advisor for this dissertation, for challenging me to do better; to work better—to be a stronger student. For always asking interesting, difficult questions that helped push me along. Your written comments on my chapters/sections were especially helpful. We had our battles during this process, but I am a better man for it. Much better. Thanks to Ryan, Dan, and Rachel for your kindness, your patience. As a committee for this dissertation, you have been supportive and understanding of my strange, unlikely attempts—all misses, failures, and modest successes in route in what I consider a twisted (call it) postmodern scholarly-like maze of confusion and occasional clarity. I am thankful to have had such open-minded people on board and behind me during this thresher and voyage of pain and beauty—of pleasure and drudgery in bittersweet Hoosier land.

Thanks/thanks/thanks to Erica. For the love, the laughs amid the madnesses/crazies. We have survived Lafayette/Purdue together like (mostly) pacifist lion tamers. I am grateful for you, for you being there (body/mind), your smiles/hugs/casual-appropriate offerings, and for our mad future attempts/mishaps/celebrations in the Pacific Northwest and beyond. To us.

Further, I would like to somewhat dedicate this dissertation to my best friend Hank who died in a car wreck outside of Denver on June 6, 2015. I write “somewhat”

because college wasn't exactly his bag, and the free-spirited good time-living Hank kept asking me when this damn thing would write itself, get finished so I could have a bit more time to get back to what Hank and I loved the most: walking our dogs in the Colorado mountains, riding motorcycles, taking road-trips to music venues west and south, smoking cigarettes and mumbling/grumbling on wayward porches. Mourning the death of a good friend does not present the best mind space for writing/editing a dissertation, but I will say this: I don't exactly dedicate this dissertation to Hank, but I do dedicate its completion to him. He would have wanted that. Hank wanted me to move on with my life, get back to living my life how I prefer it. So, Hank, thank you for reminding me of how I should live my life. I miss you; unforgettable you are.

Last/last/finally, I wrote this dissertation while mostly listening to the bands/musicians Lucero, the Drive-By Truckers, Jason Isbell, Patti Smith, Willie Nelson, and Townes Van Zandt. I suggest you read this manuscript while listening to this music. The music could well make better sense for this peculiar perhaps at times somewhat ridiculous reading experience. I also wrote the bulk of this dissertation while drinking cheap beer and coffee and smoking cigarettes, but I don't recommend you all need to do all that. Thanks.

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## ABSTRACT

Moore, Walter. Ph.D., Purdue University, December 2015. *This is Not a Dissertation: (Neo)Neo-Bohemian Connections*. Major Professor: Lance Duerfahrd.

This dissertation uses/packages selected post-World War II literature, film, and photography to identify and analyze various aspects/nuances and influences/connections of/on/to Neo-Bohemia in the contemporary United States, and aims to show how these textual associations and analyses interconnect with particular American cities and (neo)bohemian neighborhoods along with these spaces'/places' related residents and players.

These interconnections shed light on a particular kind of gentrification process: the tendency of struggling artists/bohemians to bring attention and investment to their chosen U.S. urban neighborhoods. These dynamics then fit on an arc-of-transformation—of a lower-class/working-class and/or abandoned place into a neo-bohemian zone of art and entertainment—but these dynamics also (inter)connect with a gentrification-of-the-imaginary among participants and onlookers/certain consumers of a (neo)bohemian fantasy who physically and mentally buy/“buy” into the myth of the struggling/starving artist (and her habitus) and thus seek out an alternate location of art, creativity, and what many consider as outside of society; for, my given texts both materially and fantastically speak to the pre-gentrification-to-neo-bohemian-gentrification plot points of this arc.

In this writing—while highlighting the texts of Allen Ginsberg, Nelson Algren, Otto Preminger, Art Shay, S.E. Hinton, Francis Ford Coppola, Larry Clark, and a few

others—I interweave incorporation and analyses of *beat* members, post-WWII working-class hipster characters, and the 1950s-based teenage rebel to show how these “early gentrifiers” have inspired the conditions of contemporary postmodern U.S. neo-bohemia.

As the gentrification plot sails, as middle and upper class consumers buy into these *conditions*, I incorporate elements of the 1960s counterculture, aspects of pop-cultural and experimental film and photography, along with postmodern hipster modes of *being*, among a few other related representations and rhizomes that relate to and inspire parts of this process. My spotlighted neighborhoods for these applications/ connections/ *arc(s)* include New York’s the Lower East Side, Chicago’s Wicker Park, and Tulsa’s Blue Dome Zone.

This dissertation begins with Bohemia and ends with Neo-Bohemia, but the arc remains a gritty one with an appropriate amount of stops, detours, and backtracking/overlapping—along with, of course, a requisite supply of fantasy and consumption. Bohemians and neo-bohemians alike—via stories, images, and the flesh—have historically and continually inspired and attracted consumers to particular U.S. urban neighborhoods in particular.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION/CHAPTER(S) OUTLINE

Section 1 (Chapters 2-3) of this dissertation, “The Transition from Bohemia to Neo-Bohemia. The *Tent* of Possibilities,” presents definitions and relevant elements of both Bohemia and Neo-Bohemia. As I indicate in the title of this section, these conditional labels contain a mammoth tent of possibilities. The history of *bohemia* is there to read, as is Richard Lloyd’s sociological theory he has termed *neo-bohemia*. I present the claim in these two chapters that I hopefully support in the subsequent chapters that an arc of both the material-aesthetic and fantastical-ideational exists with the transformation from historical Bohemia to contemporary Neo-Bohemia—an arc that includes and often mirrors the generally understood process of *gentrification* (a.k.a. “urban renewal”): the commonly controversial idea that a socioeconomically lower-class sometimes real and/or imagined blighted, abandoned, and/or poverty-stricken and crime-ridden urban neighborhood gets changed due to middle class and/or upper class material, financial, and ideational/fantastical investment.<sup>1</sup> This process of gentrification, for the purposes of this manuscript, most notably includes congregations of artistic bohemians—struggling artists and unconventional eccentric types—who live in soon-to-be neo-bohemian neighborhoods as “early gentrifiers,” but it also contains consumers, patrons, speculators, landlords, and investors (i.e. “typical gentrifiers”) whom have been inspired

by the representations and fantasies of gritty bohemian rebels/starving artists-eccentrics and their associated historical and contemporary places/congregations.

Also, this process and these fantasies/representations interconnect with sociological notions of subculture and counterculture, especially as they relate to space/places and urban economies of aestheticized *grit*. It is my hope that the incorporation and analysis of my selected American literature, film, and photography—works by Allen Ginsberg, Nelson Algren, Otto Preminger, Art Shay, S.E. Hinton, Francis Ford Coppola, Larry Clark, among a few others—help illuminate this mentioned bohemia-to-neo-bohemia transformation, this distinctive process of gentrification, and *arc*, along with this arc's accompanying elements and fantasies/representations of the artistic, rebellious, gritty, and (yes) marketable-commercial.

Section 2 (Chapters 4-6), “The Grit is in the Pudding—Packed, Repackaged, and Branded. Allen Ginsberg and Neo-Bohemia: The Complexities of an Evolving Marketable Post-Poet Rebel” takes as its crux the following question: Was the bohemian-poet-activist-celebrity Allen Ginsberg *gentrified* in the same way a bohemian neighborhood can get gentrified? Simply, does a man get gentrified in the same ways a place does? My short answer is *yes*: Ginsberg caught the attention of middle class/upper class investors/consumers due to his *authentic* presence as a struggling poet/artist and bohemian; and, during/after this celebrity-fame/attention/gentrification, he then existed as neo-bohemian, as a celebrity poet who combined his bohemianism with commercialism and fame. As *is* this dissertation, this section is also about space and time. Space as in the bohemian loft space that Ginsberg and his friends inhabit and play with in the Robert Frank and Albert Leslie film *Pull My Daisy* (1959)—as in Ginsberg's poetic and

material/familial connections to his proclaimed home neighborhood of the Lower East Side: New York's (in)famously factual and fantastical locale of (neo)bohemianism and grit. But, this section is also about Time—Ginsberg's time as an all-but-innocent unknown bohemian, and then as a (neo)bohemian/countercultural celebrity guru and myth, and finally as Ginsberg's time in later life and after death as a paradox of a man with self-doubts and as an immortal simulacra (neo)bohemian hero/catalyst and *brand*. This chapter aims to combine an analysis of the genuine spectacle of Allen Ginsberg—as understood by his images and public announcements—with the essence of his earnest poetic words of Inclusion. That is, Ginsberg increasingly became *included* beginning with the emergence of a mass-associated 1960s counterculture, and, in turn/in *exchange*, he became more accepting of others in his contemporary climate, which, as I explain, presents a duality for Neo-Bohemia's spaces, objects, and co-optation. The high meets the low. The poor shakes hands with the affluent. The *alternative* high fives the mass. The outsider goes inside. Ginsberg is, as I argue, the most famous bohemian of the second half of the twentieth century, and, given this celebrity/notoriety, I ironically use lesser known texts to support Ginsberg's neo-bohemian *Change*: the mentioned Leslie/Frank experimental film *Daisy* along with his later poems after the publication of *Howl* (1956) and *Kaddish* (1961). I do not analyze Ginsberg's most famous and most canonized/anthologized poems for good reason; for, I hope to show that Ginsberg's manifestations/ representations of shift/bridge (and *Change*) from a bohemian to a neo-bohemian, as supported by these less scrutinized later poems and visual representations of the man, are *at least as* relevant to an understanding of this famous poet as his *Beat* moniker is and as his most famous works are.

I do, however, investigate the significance of the 2010 film *Howl* (inspired by his most famous poem) along with a Ginsberg MTV commercial and Ginsberg GAP corporate clothing company advertisement within this discussion as texts that illuminate Ginsberg's role in the mentioned neo-bohemian spheres (i.e., times/places). As I state, Ginsberg's myth was in the bohemian pudding ("pudding" being a weirdly packaged product for tasty consumption): a myth that includes factual biography—for, biographical information becomes especially important in this case because Ginsberg played himself on film, he wrote poems primarily about himself/his life, and films made after he died depict the biographical details of the man—along with fantasies of the bohemian alternative and ideal, intertwined with *confessions* of Time/Space-Art/Profit. An examination of his alleged/imagined and/or actual *gentrification* beckons.

The foundation of Section 3 (Chapters 7-8), "Nelson Algren, *The Man with the Golden Arm* (novel and film) and Wicker Park: Precursor and Prototype of the Neo-Bohemian Hipster" originally began with the question: How did the bohemian Nelson Algren and, particularly, his most famous novel, *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1949) inspire the current hipster haven/neo-bohemian neighborhood of Wicker Park in Chicago? Beginning with a report of the neo-bohemian spectacle that was a recent Nelson Algren Birthday Celebration in a rundown church in Wicker Park, I then segue into an examination of how Algren arrived at his bohemian status in a cold-water flat in Wicker Park in the 1940s. An analysis of Art Shay's photographs of Algren around Wicker Park during this time becomes important as a touchstone for Algren's influence on his future neo-bohemian neighborhood. From there, I examine how Algren's *The Man with the Golden Arm*, a novel that depicts down-on-their-luck working class hipster



characters in a post-industrial neighborhood (present day Wicker Park), presented the inspiration of gentrification of this now neo-bohemian neighborhood. The grit, the grime, the toughness and coolness of this neighborhood and its characters during Algren's time is still celebrated, still glamourized. Even though contemporary Wicker Park is an expensive place to live now, which most struggling artists can't afford to live in, the gritty post-industrial realm that Algren depicted is still a driver for the neighborhood's current ethos and mythos of Hip Grit. I use Richard Lloyd's ethnography of the neighborhood as the foundational ending point of these influences and inspirations. Additionally, I look to the 1955 film by Otto Preminger, *The Man with the Golden Arm* to tail-end this arc of gentrification. For, Shay's photographs speak to Algren as the patron saint of this pre-gentrification Wicker Park zone, Algren's novel set the tone for the future neighborhood, and Preminger's film then speaks to the glamorization and commodification of Algren's material and imagined gritty milieu. As I explain, neo-bohemia is as much about the fantasy/reality/fetish of struggle and violence and working-class hardship as it is about appearances and Hollywood and pop-culture; a dramatic 1950s film about a heroin addict played by Frank Sinatra speaks volumes about the marketable neo-bohemian fantasy and superficiality of things.

Section 4 (Chapters 9-14), "*TULSA CONNECTIONS*. Speaking of GENTRIFICATION: the dirt ain't the only thing that's read" begins with an analysis of S.E. Hinton's novel, *The Outsiders*. On the gentrification arc-of-the-imaginary, Hinton's 1950s-inspired rebel greaser characters who take pride in their rundown Tulsa neighborhood set the stage for an early (pre)gentrification fantasy. As I flesh out, the socio-economic culture clash presented in this text—the greasers versus the Socs—is too

*easy* for the categorization of Neo-Bohemia with its constant flux and fragmentation of styles and identities. In this first section about *The Outsiders*, I show how the novel's depicted subcultures fit with modernist tendencies incorporated by theorist-sociologist Dick Hebdige, that these greasers/Socs have distinctive styles, aesthetics, and attitudes/mores that construct a rigid construction of identity. As I then analyze Coppola's films *The Outsiders* (1983) and *Rumble Fish* (1983) along with Larry Clark's collection of photographs *Tulsa* (1971), these easier/stricter binary opposites/cultural clashes of *The Outsiders* then get broken down/confused/transcended as we enter into a postmodern neo-bohemian *condition*—one of flux, fragmentation, and plurality. As I argue, this transformation from the sociologically modern to the postmodern—as paralleled with the transformation from the bohemian to the neo-bohemian—correlates, connects with, and sheds light on current aesthetics and conditions in a neo-bohemian neighborhood called the Blue Dome Zone in downtown Tulsa—a forty block or so neighborhood/zone that is currently in the height of a neo-bohemian *moment*. This *zone* then presents the end-point (for now) of the gentrification arc; as I delve into it, the Blue Dome Zone carries tendencies and tenets of both the modernist and postmodernist subcultural distinctions, and these distinctions have been inspired by my selected texts. All of this then, these influences and associations, fit into a tent I've labeled Tulsa Cool, a catchphrase that alludes to the subcultures and styles/attitudes of these mentioned texts but also speaks to the current consumption practices and fantasies of Blue Dome Zone residents, business owners, and patrons. That is, the myths of these texts contribute to the contemporary fantasies/myths *and* facts of this particular neighborhood—which is a

dynamic, as I mention, that connects with and contributes to Richard Lloyd's theories involving Neo-Bohemia and Wicker Park.

**SECTION 1: THE TRANSITION FROM BOHEMIA TO NEO-BOHEMIA. THE  
*TENT OF POSSIBILITIES***

## SECTION 1: THE TRANSITION FROM BOHEMIA TO NEO-BOHEMIA. THE *TENT* OF POSSIBILITIES

“We often think of hip as marking geographic space. Every city has a hip neighborhood, and every hip neighborhood has a hot spot or two: maybe a bar or a shooting gallery or congenial apartment. These spaces are essential to bohemia, allowing people to exchange ideas, hook up or just validate their existence outside the mainstream.” – John Leland, *Hip: The History*<sup>2</sup>

“Do you understand, gentlemen, that all the horror is in just this—that there is no horror!”  
— Aleksandre Ivanovich Kuprin<sup>3</sup>

**artist: 1.** One, such as a painter, sculptor, or writer, who is able by virtue of imagination and talent or skill to create works of aesthetic value.**2.** A person whose work shows exceptional creative ability or skill.**3.** One, such as an actor or singer, who works in the performing arts.

**bohemian:** A person with artistic or literary interests who disregards conventional standards of behavior.

**progressive: 1.** promoting or favoring progress toward better conditions or new policies, ideas, or methods.**2.** a person who advocates progress, as in education, politics, etc.

**hipster (contemporary subculture):** *hipster* refers to a subculture of young, urban middle-class adults and older teenagers that appeared in the 1990s. The subculture is associated with independent music, a non-mainstream fashion sensibility, progressive or independent political views, alternative spirituality or atheism/agnosticism, alternative lifestyles. Interests in media include independent film, magazines such as *Clash* and websites like Pitchfork Media. Hipster culture has been described as a "mutating, trans-Atlantic melting pot of styles, tastes and behavior[s]". Christian Lorentzen of *Time Out New York* argues that "hipsterism fetishizes the authentic" elements of all of the "fringe movements of the postwar era—beat, hippie, punk, even grunge", and draws on the "cultural stores of every unmelted ethnicity", and "regurgitates it with a winking inauthenticity."<sup>4</sup>

**neo-bohemian:** a person, as an artist or writer, who acts free of conventional regard for rules and practices in the context of a contemporary world that includes a culture industry, creative class, and post-industrial localized urban areas for creative labor.<sup>5</sup>

\*please also see **subculture**, **counterculture**, **creative class**, **bobo**, **outsider**, **radical**, and **the weird** or *fringe*.

CHAPTER 2: *BOHEMIA AND COMPANY*

The nineteenth-century Parisian elements and fantasies of *Bohemia* relocated to the early twentieth-century United States, in New York in particular. For, bohemians in major American cities, especially in Greenwich Village in Manhattan, had started to gain ground and notice. Elizabeth Wilson, in *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts*, writes that “At this time [between 1910 and 1918] the Village was a utopian alternative community, its radicals attempting ‘a cultural revolution in which no aspect of life was to be exempt from revolutionary change.’”<sup>6</sup> “Nowhere did the instinct for the new flourish more extravagantly than in New York City,” writes Christine Stansell, in *Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century*: “where a group of writers who collected in Greenwich Village between 1890 and 1920 transformed an unexceptional shabby neighborhood into a place glowing with a sense of the contemporary.” A fantasy ensues where “[e]veryone is always dancing wildly, discoursing eloquently, flirting, making friends or making love; rents are low, apartments charming, and restaurants cheap.”<sup>7</sup> Stansell continues: “[I]t was the bohemians who made modernity local and concrete, tangible to a popular American audience. Their innovations reached would-be moderns elsewhere through their published stories, plays, essays, and reportage, through lecture tours (and even through a few silent films). They created the first full-bodied alternative

to an established cultural elite, a milieu that brought outsiders and their energies into the very heart of the American intelligentsia.”<sup>8</sup>

The Village of the 1920s especially with its cheap rents and artistic, *alternative* lifestyles started to create a market for the “fantasy of Bohemia.”<sup>9</sup> “As the new ideas gained ground,” Virginian Nicholson, author of *Among the Bohemians*, mentions, “a growing number of fugitives from conventionality sought refuge in Bohemia. In this country of the mind, such artistic refugees found acceptance, absolved by their ‘genius’ from the rules of normal behavior.” This “wave,” Nicholson states, “swelled with ideas of suffrage, feminism, pacifism, vegetarianism, spiritualism, independence, and free thought of all kinds. Artists and writers of all colors were rebelling against their precursors, staking out a new territory where honesty and experimentation in intellectual, artistic and sexual matters became the priorities.”<sup>10</sup>

This Market of Fantasy, as put forth by Wilson and others, includes a spectrum of artistic, rebellious, progressive, and eccentric characters within a range of challenges to the “conventional.” The Fantasy entails a nostalgia for other times but also nostalgia for past bohemians and previous bohemian locales, and, perhaps most importantly, the Fantasy includes the transformation of spaces—of neighborhoods, homes, and places of “business” (i.e., production and consumption). As Stansell mentions, these places start off as “shabby,” but then, via material and fantastical bohemian applications, they are transformed into spheres for art, creativity, and unconventional dreams of the contemporary more progressive *Now*. Wilson alludes to this process of transformation, calling Bohemia “both a destination and the journey to that destination.”<sup>11</sup> Bohemia, along with these mentioned transformations, has been and remains a quest, and Wilson



explains the themes of this quest: “the bohemian use of dress . . . the place of erotic love . . . the search for transgressive and extreme experiences . . . the intransigent politics of Bohemia.”<sup>12</sup>

“Bohemia was both a destination and the journey to that destination,” Wilson writes of American bohemians in the twentieth century and of bohemians a century before. “Bohemia was a stage. It was also a mythical country. ‘Bohemia,’ wrote Henry Murger, ‘leads either to the Academy, the Hospital or the Morgue.’ For the journalist, Alphonse de Calonne, it was ‘bordered on the north by need, on the south by misery, on the east by illusion and on the west by the infirmary.’ For another, more optimistic writer, its frontiers were ‘cold, hunger, love and hope.’”<sup>13</sup>

*Bohemia* then refers to the physical and material: to cities and urban neighborhoods—their buildings, cafes, pubs, garrets, outfits, and objects. To the bohemians themselves in human flesh and bones with their chosen often eccentric/unconventional attires and accompaniments. But Bohemia also refers to the associated fantasies, ideas, and images and representations. Romantic notions of the artist’s sacrifice of money and health, of the (counter)cultural rebel, of the beautifully exciting and eccentric/unlikely party or *happening*. To representations of Henri Murger’s *La Vie de Boheme* starving artists in their grimy garrets, to the novel *Trilby*’s romantic bohemian love-making, to the countless other stories and rumors of unorthodox/wayward struggling/starving artist-types who shunned the expected materials and conventions of the bourgeoisie.

Both Elizabeth Wilson and Christine Stansell explain that the nineteenth century and Paris, in the Montparnasse and Montmartre neighborhoods in particular, serve as the

first “official” space and time (i.e. epoch) of this publicized, influential, well-known/generally understood, even *imagined* Bohemia. Stansell writes: “When they imagined bohemia, turn-of-the century Americans called up an imagery of art, hedonism, and dissent from bourgeois life that originated in Paris in the 1830s.”<sup>14</sup>

Ken Gelder, however, mentions in *Subcultures* that aspects of bohemian subcultures have existed at least since the Elizabethan period in the 1500s: “The best place to begin a cultural history of subcultures (although medievalists may disagree) is in mid-sixteenth-century London, with the emergence here of an ‘Elizabethan underworld’ and the popularization of a genre of pamphlet-writing loosely referred to as ‘rogue literature’, devoted to the chronicling of criminal types and criminal activities in and around the city.”<sup>15</sup> Ken Goffman in *Counter Culture Through the Ages* claims Abraham as the first countercultural bohemian and even theorizes the Prometheus myth as the original symbolic representation of bohemianism: “In Prometheus and Abraham, we have two of the West’s most resonantly countercultural myths.”<sup>16</sup> “Prometheus has been seen as an inspiration to some counterculturalists and artists since the Romantics lionized him in the nineteenth century.” He presents a tale “of the heights, a dizzy rhapsody offered to flight and the transcendence of all limits.”<sup>17</sup> Likewise, other scholars reference subsequent examples of bohemia throughout history (the Romantic Movement in England as one of the most notable examples); Virginia Nicholson states: “The idea of *Bohemia* is immensely powerful. It has attached to individuals as disparate as Jesus Christ, Shakespeare and Sherlock Holmes, and everybody has a mental pigeonhole into which the imaginary Bohemian more or less fits.”<sup>18</sup>

These discussions and debates over Bohemia's/bohemianism's earliest examples and representations, with their subcultural and countercultural associations, remain worthy ones that raise valuable questions about what exactly constitutes the *bohemian* and *bohemianism*—but, regardless, scholars almost unanimously agree that the term *bohemia* originated in France in the 1800s, and thus it is this epoch that primarily has influenced the facts and myths/fantasies and neighborhoods (foremost) of contemporary bohemianism in the United States. Stansell writes:

Bohemia was originally the name of a Central European kingdom (today a region of the Czech Republic) from whence the Gypsies supposedly came, and thus it conveyed a loose and vagabond nature that flourished outside society, and antibourgeois resolve. By midcentury the word had acquired a wider meaning, as an enclave of rebels and impoverished artists, following the popular success of Henri Murger's melodrama *La Vie de Boheme*, staged in Paris in 1849 and an edition of Murger's sketches of bohemian life published shortly thereafter [in 1851] . . . In France, England, and the United States, bohemia proved to have enduring fascination. As a lived experience it was never quite separate from its celebration (and condemnation) in print and on stage.<sup>19</sup>

The term “bohemia” was originally a reference to the gypsies who had moved to France from Bohemia, and with this initial categorization, a definition and idea/fantasy of Bohemia took shape from there. Wilson mentions Henry Murger's “Scenes de la vie de Boheme” (1851), fictional sketches (which would be duplicated many times, the most recent being the Broadway musical *Rent*) about the Parisian bohemian artists' lifestyles

that first sparked bohemianism into the public consciousness. In these neighborhoods, Montparnasse and Montmartre, Wilson illustrates a social milieu that was created against a dominant culture, claiming these “wayward” Parisians fell into an actual subculture that consisted of groups of artists that lived the Bohemian Myth, romantics who went against the status quo, typically resulting in “transgression, excess, sexual outrage, eccentric behavior, outrageous appearance, nostalgia and poverty.”<sup>20</sup> Wilson mentions the mutual attraction-repulsion, love/hate relationship between the bohemian and the bourgeoisie, and Stansell writes of Bohemia’s growing appeal and cultural influence: “In the 1890s bohemia was on everyone’s minds because of the English and American publication of the runaway best-seller *Trilby* (1894), a novel about a love triangle of English art students in Paris that updated the Murger prototype. These popular renditions of bohemia were pitched to respectable audiences charmed by themes of thwarted male genius, impoverished creativity, doomed love affairs, and perpetual bonhomie.”<sup>21</sup> Further, Stansell writes, “For nineteenth-century audiences, bohemia readily fit into this mental landscape. It was peopled by its own ‘types,’ youthful libertines who despised bourgeois respectability and material success.”<sup>22</sup>

A common dictionary definition of *bohemian* includes “a person, as an artist or writer, who acts free of conventional regard for rules and practices” and *bohemia* as “a district inhabited by persons, typically artists, writers, and intellectuals, whose way of life, dress, etc. are generally unconventional or avant-garde.” It is also notable that “gypsy” and “vagabond” are listed in some version of the secondary meanings of these terms.<sup>23</sup> Conversely, though most people one asks who live in the United States have heard of the term or label “bohemia” or “bohemian,” similar to when one asks a person

what “cool” or “hipster” means, not all people are in agreement over what bohemia/bohemian actually means. After reading the works of Wilson, Stansell, Nicholson, and many others, however, I have found that some definitional commonalities and repeated tenets of Bohemia do exist.

Here’s my expanded definition\*:

\**Bohemia* first involves and relates to *ART* (art), along with artists and the artistic-creative, which then includes auxiliary patrons of the creative arts—mediums and pursuits that consist of the expected categories: writing, painting, music, theatre, et al. The bohemian, foremost, then by extension idealistically sometimes radically celebrates art and the artistic/creative more than traditional work, money/pay and the financially lucrative. The bohemian may care about earning a living, but s/he cares more about the integrity and quality/beauty of his/her art-creation. Second, Bohemia contains and celebrates the *unconventional* and the often associated distinctions of the countercultural, nonconformist, rebel, rogue, weird, outsider, independent, anarchic, revolutionary, and the overall questioning of heteronormative bourgeoisie/middle class/mass society’s expectations and establishments (from marriage to hygiene to government to places of employment, et al). These modes of the artistic/unconventional then also often apply to ideas surrounding *progress* and *excess*. The bohemian often fantasizes a better world and romantically looks *forward* towards the *Ideal* of a life-place of Art-Beauty-Truth-Love, or at least strives to remake the past while living in the existential and/or

romantic *now*. She is often *accepting*—of/about diversity/heterogeneity and diverse viewpoints. She regularly maintains an ideological openness while she simultaneously prides herself on her progressive values and the notion that she marches to the beat of a different drum. Within this acceptance then is a nonjudgmental sometimes celebratory realm for hedonism and vice and crime and deviance, for excessive behavior but also for excessive consumption: of drugs, alcohol, sex and even (secondhand) clothes when/wherein s/he can afford them. Regarding this last tenet, the bohemian often displays an eccentric and/or gritty (i.e. rundown and unkempt) appearance, which alludes to the downtrodden, the anti-material, grungy, edgy, and, in turn, physically rebellious—all crucial elements of celebrated bohemian aesthetics/style. These tenets, finally, collectively/generally refer to Bohemia's *alternative* ways of living, modes of thinking, and habits of consumption—which, then both inform and set the parameters for a fantasy of *being*, a mindset of the soulful existential *moment*.

This section begins with definitions of the words *artist*, *bohemian*, *progressive*, *hipster*, and *neo-bohemian*, but it just as easily could include definitions of the terms *rebel*, *outsider*, *radical*, *subculture*, and *counterculture*, among a few others. All of these words and concepts interweave and bleed into one another, for my purposes, as I try to uncover the connections, associations, and inspirations of/between *Bohemia* and *Neo-Bohemia*. Likewise, documented characteristics/tenets of *subcultures*, *countercultures*, and contemporary *hipsters* are worthy of listing here:

Ken Gelder writes, “This book identifies six key ways in which subcultures have generally been understood”:

- through their own negative relation to work (as ‘idle’, ‘parasitical’, hedonistic, criminal, etc.)
- their negative or ambivalent relation to class
- their association with territory (the ‘street’, the ‘hood’, the club, etc.) rather than property
- their movement away from home into non-domestic forms of belonging
- their ties to excess and exaggeration (as opposed to restraint and moderation)
- their refusal of the banalities of ordinary life and in particular, of massification.<sup>24</sup>

Ken Goffman states, “The primary characteristics of counterculture are threefold”:

- Countercultures assign primacy to individuality at the expense of social conventions and governmental constraints.
- Countercultures challenge authoritarianism in both obvious and subtle forms.
- Countercultures embrace individual and social change.<sup>25</sup>

Subsequently, Goffman remarks, “These nearly universal features of countercultures are”:

- Breakthroughs and radical innovations in art, science, spirituality, philosophy, and living.
- Diversity.
- Authentic, open communication and profound interpersonal contact. Also, generosity and the democratic sharing of tools.

- Persecution by mainstream culture of contemporaneous subcultures.
- Exile or dropping out.<sup>26</sup>

In *The Hipster Handbook*, Robert Lanham hilariously puts forth his “11 Clues You Are a Hipster”:

1. You graduated from a liberal arts school whose football team hasn’t won a game since the Reagan administration.
2. You frequently use the term “postmodern” (or its commonly used variation “PoMo”) as an adjective, noun, and verb.
3. You carry a shoulder-strap messenger bag and have at one time or another worn a pair of horn-rimmed or Elvis Costello-style glasses.
4. You have refined taste and consider yourself exceptionally cultured, but have one pop vice (*ElimiDATE*, *Quiet Riot*, and *Entertainment Weekly* are popular ones) that helps to define you as well-rounded.
5. You have kissed someone of the same gender and often bring this up in casual conversation.
6. You spend much of your leisure time in bars and restaurants with monosyllabic names like Plant, Bound, and Shine.
7. You bought your dishes and a checkered tablecloth at a thrift shop to be kitschy, and often throw vegetarian dinner parties.
8. You have one Republican friend whom you always describe as being your “one Republican friend.”
9. You enjoy complaining about gentrification even though you are responsible for it yourself.



10. Your hair looks best unwashed and you position your head on your pillow at night in a way that will really maximize your cowlicks.

11. You own records put out by Matador, DFA, Definitive Jux, Dischord, Warp, Thrill Jockey, Smells Like Records, and Drag City.<sup>27</sup>

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*\*subculture, counterculture, hipster, bohemian, neo-bohemian* (et al): These terms, amid a large tent of mentioned artists/artistry/creativity and pivotal flux/time-space arrangements, will become increasingly important as this dissertation teases out the/their webs of connections as these webs relate to work/leisure, class, territory/place/space, the young/young-at-heart, the home, excess, a rejection of the banal, individuality, authority (rejection of), social change, innovation, diversity, mainstream (persecution by), exile/isolation, alternative consumption, massification, physical aesthetics, and even the contemporary hip/cool pop-cultural hipster.

And, as I will elaborate on in the next chapter, the idea that these terms (and their tenets) interconnect with each other speaks to the larger theory that is Neo-Bohemia—a theory that includes our bohemians (past and present), their fantasies, in conjunction with contemporary artists/eccentrics/patrons/fans and places/locales of note. And, yes, these considerations and impending questions/claims are postmodern (PoMo!) in nature.<sup>28</sup>

Most importantly, these terms and their meanings combine to highlight Bohemia as an escape zone. People, bohemians and not, escape into bohemian realms through the pages of literature; through still and moving photographs on walls, pages, and screens; and these participants also escape to bohemian spaces and places of physical/material steel and brick/wood (et al). Escape. The (neo)bohemian escape, both privately and publicly, is

what drives this investigation. This tent of interrelated texts, images, materials, and human flesh fuel this historical and contemporary escape.

### CHAPTER 3: *NEO-BOHEMIAN* CONNECTIONS – AIMS, QUESTINOS, AND THESES

I have some personal motivations for writing this dissertation. Ten years ago I taught tenth-grade and eleventh-grade English at a private high school in Oklahoma City for one year, and while there a colleague one day explained to me: “The headmaster says he didn’t initially realize you are a bohemian.” I was a bit startled by this categorization. *Bohemian? Do those even exist these days?* Until that moment, in my rube-like existence, I had never openly been called this before. I then began to seriously think about this term for the first time.

After leaving Oklahoma City, I increasingly (and more openly) became interested and immersed in what I assume that OKC headmaster would consider bohemia and bohemianism in my 20’s while living in Austin, Texas; Brooklyn, New York; and Providence, Rhode Island (among a few other places as a self-proclaimed vagabond with only a couple of bags full of squib) and surrounding myself with progressive, creative and artistic types who were involved in independent music, creative writing, visual art, theatre, and the like, while talking about creative/strange ideas/plans with these people in mostly dive bars and rundown dwelling and performance spaces. These people and I were living, in various manifestations in regards to the home/private and public (leisure, entertainment and/or work) spheres of socialization and performance, what we would consider relatively unconventional lifestyles, but I still wasn’t sure this was all *bohemian*.

It was not until I read Richard Lloyd's *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City* that I began to more fully and reasonably understand the traditions of bohemia (as in the mentioned Paris in the 1800s and Greenwich Village, New York, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century), the ways I had been living and thinking in these mentioned places, along with the sociological criteria of *neo-bohemia*: Lloyd's concept that contemporary United States postmodern bohemia has become "neo" as a result of urban post-industrialism after WWII, an increase in the number of artists in the U.S. per capita, the infusion of subculture(s) and counterculture(s) styles and mores into mass culture and mainstream society (in spheres such as art, entertainment, the home, the workplace, etc.), alongside the evidence that contemporary U.S. bohemians and neo-bohemians alike have a tendency to congregate predominately in major American cities, and, in particular, in select neighborhoods of these chosen cities.

Richard Lloyd writes, "[T]here is significant continuity between the artistic congregation in Wicker Park and past districts in the modernist metropolis that have worn the mantle of bohemia. . . . [T]he new bohemia of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries plays a necessarily novel role in enhancing the interests of postindustrial capitalist enterprises, especially property speculation of various sorts, entertainment provision, and new media production."<sup>29</sup> I agree with the precepts that Richard Lloyd proscribes for neo-bohemia, that neo-bohemia remains partially a continuation of past bohemian districts and that *most notably* neo-bohemia now takes place in urban pockets such as Wicker Park—a post-industrial city neighborhood that has gone through a transformation that included both a lower socio-economic and/or blighted city landscape that attracted artistic residents *and* a gentrification process that has included investors in

the neighborhood's aura of grit-as-glamour, a struggling artist milieu, and as a potential site for creative class cultural production.

Neo-bohemia then also refers to the connections, both ideological and economic, between struggling artists and sociologist/economist Richard Florida's "creative class." Florida writes, "The economic need for creativity has registered itself in the rise of a new class, which I call the Creative Class. Some 38 *million* Americans, 30 percent of all employed people, belong to this new class. I define the core of the Creative Class to include people in science and engineering, architecture and design, education, arts, music and entertainment, whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or creative content."<sup>30</sup> Bohemians, neo-bohemians, and creative class members in varying degrees gravitate towards both the grit and blight of a space/place as a zone for actual and imagined creative/artistic production and for the consumption of what they often consider more authentic creative and artistic habitus and modes of living.

As Lloyd mentions, in a place such as Wicker Park (for example), according to U.S. Census Bureau data, even though the numbers of artists have fluctuated there over the years, per capita more than an average number of artists have lived and created there for the past forty years. In this case the term "artist" refers to creative people who are financially and habitually involved in creating music, writing creatively, producing visual art, and acting in the theatre and/or behind a camera (or any variation of these forms). An "edgy" artist then consists of an artist who interconnects with the various urban post-industrial grit of a place such as Wicker Park. S/he lives in the rundown urban landscape with ideas of *converting* it into a bohemian realm. The creative class participants that Florida describes then desire to be a part of this realm by attending the various events of

the place: the loft parties, the makeshift art gallery exhibits, the poetry readings at dive bars, the viewing of graffiti murals on the sides of abandoned buildings, the buying of secondhand clothes from vintage stores, et al—the overall *investment* in art and creativity of a place/space. The distinctions remain in the level of financial and cultural (money, time, and space) investment of such places; that is, does an artist live in a loft and struggle only to produce her art, to paint and put her canvases on the walls of bars, restaurants, coffee shops, on sides of buildings? Does a graphic designer who paints in his spare time do the same when he has time? Or, does that lawyer or banker who is a patron of the arts frequent a place such as Wicker Park so he can feel part of a scene? Does he buy his own loft space in the neighborhood to feel even more immersed in the scene? As these mentioned artists, the “art for art’s sake” artists/patrons, along with the more profit-driven (perhaps more superficial) artists/creatives/patrons/dabblers/hangers-on, engage in unconventional practices—in regards to their domestic/household arrangements, their styles of dress, their sexual orientations and relations; their personal politics regarding gender, race, religion, the natural environment, and the American government; their unorthodox consumption practices involving materials/forms such as food, drink, entertainment, and art/performance—they then enter a bohemian realm in varying degrees, which then holistically comprises/constructs, ultimately, our neo-bohemian condition(s).

As Wicker Park increasingly gained notice via the mass media and word-of-mouth as a cultural site of production/consumption, investors increasingly started to throw money into the neighborhood, rent and overall prices have drastically increased, and many of the original lower class/working class and/or artists/eccentric residents have

had to move out of the neighborhood because they could not afford it and/or they believed the neighborhood was “played out”/ “sold out,” thus moving to other Chicago neighborhoods such as Pilsen that are more affordable and likewise have a more emergent and what participants consider a more *authentic* scene. This neo-bohemian process, again, involves Florida’s Creative Class—the substantial number of creative people who work for web design firms, in digital music spheres, animation companies, et al—who have largely taken the place of the less profitable art-for-art’s sake Artistic Class residents of a Wicker Park of yore. Neo-bohemia in this case also combines with notions of the counterculture and subculture in that we have a significant number of people congregating in an urban neighborhood who have particular yet/or varying ethos (i.e. liberalism, progressivism, art for art’s sake, a sympathy for the arts, an investment in a scene, a want of the alternative, a desire to be hip and/or cool) and mythos (i.e. the understanding of and belief in the myths of the starving artist/ bohemian/ rebel/ progressive, whether they individually identify with these labels or not) in constructing their chosen habitus (Wicker Park in this case). They have moved into (or out of) their neighborhood with an agenda for the aesthetics of the place, with an investment (or disinvestment) in the bohemian fantasy of art, excess, and alternative modes of living and working, even consuming. These mentioned participants, in fluctuating degrees, want to be a part of the scene. They want to contribute, even as their contributions lend themselves to the material, financial, and ideational transformations (and *gentrification*) of the place.

I mention *transformation* here as it applies to actual prices of amenities but also to how a place is perceived by its participants and detractors. For example, Wicker Park is

now different from a place such as the newly (neo)bohemian Pilsen (just a few miles south) because of its prices and because of the differences in artistic production for profit and not—in the differences in the types of artists and consumers, but more importantly in the differing perceptions of these neighborhoods as authentic zones. As Lloyd mentions, some Chicago artists view Wicker Park as “played out” and “sold out,” stating there are now not enough authentic artists in Wicker Park. However, Lloyd notes, “But even as the neighborhood became more popular and more expensive, the local aesthetic continued to display the image as grit as glamour. This image connoted an authentic bohemianism appealing not only to committed participants but also to sporadic consumers.”<sup>31</sup> Lloyd mentions that the neighborhood still touts an image/ethos of “grit as glamour,” yet now, despite (or because of) Wicker Park’s image, the debate over Wicker Park’s authenticity can be had, as this agenda for particular localized aesthetics then falls (depending on the perspective) inside and/or outside of the mainstream/middle class and *suburbs*—and associations of heteronormativity, the 1950s Gray Flannel Suit mindset, the hive mentality of normal living and consumption practices, stereotypical American conformity of all types—as it had in traditional bohemian realms (such as in the Montparnasse and Montmartre neighborhoods of late 1800s Paris, and in Greenwich Village in the early 1900s), but this countercultural agenda/debate also now falls into a neo-bohemian realm as it influences the working Creative Class, artists, and the consumption habits ultimately at least partially of the public at large (the national and global mainstream and mass populations).

This process of bohemia as subculture and then as counterculture and then as local/national/global culture-as-commodity is uniquely contemporary and postmodern in



that it is happening in every major U.S. city along with many minor U.S. cities and towns—from Wicker Park, Chicago, to (arguably) Lafayette, Indiana. As a result, the lines between the once coined bohemian and bourgeoisie are not as easily decipherable because of the now more fluid combinations of artists, creative class participants, and the mass public's consumption of various countercultural/alternative/creative objects and ways of thinking and living. As a result, the *exact* differences between a Pilsen and a Wicker Park are not easily decipherable either.

Floyd Dell remarks that even as early as the 1920s, “cultural tourists” interested in bohemianism started to frequent Greenwich Village to see what the craze was all about, thus facilitating this bohemia-bourgeoisie more fluid connection that Elizabeth Wilson and others have made reference to. According to Dell, Greenwich Village during this time had already become a parody of itself, a phenomenon of the artist lifestyle-as-commodity motif that would become so prominent in years to come. Wilson writes, “By the 1920s the established Villagers were horrified and disillusioned by its commercial atmosphere during Prohibition, when it became an illicit drinking haven. Floyd Dell had sniped at the ‘genuine’ villagers of the earlier years, but he much preferred them to loathsome uptown tourists, who were now turning the Village into ‘a sideshow for tourists, a peepshow for vulgarians, a commercial exhibit of tawdry bohemianism’.

Greenwich Village had, he felt, become a parody of itself.”<sup>32</sup> However, it remains important to point out that this phenomenon in 1920s Greenwich Village was anomalous, a rare spectacle; today, however, most major contemporary U.S. cities have at least one neighborhood such as this in a similar parodic, bohemia-as-commodity/spectacle circumstance.

In Richard Lloyd's mentioned post-WWII history and transformation of Wicker Park, artists-bohemians have often *chosen* to live alternative/unconventional lifestyles, and subsequently many of these people fall into a contemporary "hipster" category (as John Leland explains the term in *Hip: The History*). In many contexts, hipsters are synonymous with neo-bohemians—*hipster* as defined by the *urban dictionary* as "a person who is unusually aware of and interested in new and unconventional patterns. [Those who] value independent thinking, counterculture, progressive politics, an appreciation of art and indie-rock, creativity, intelligence, and witty banter."<sup>33</sup> Within and related to this designation of the neo-bohemian/hipster rests issues of nostalgia/retro, kitsch/irony, grit/edginess/grunge, the lumpenproletariat/the underbelly (a fascination with), forced AND chosen poverty/penury, status as alternative/cool/hip/as a rebel or outsider, and of the progressive. I expect to address and weave all of these issues and designations, especially as they relate to my selected contemporary literature, film, photography, and urban neighborhoods.

For example(s), I expect to ask and (attempt to) answer questions such as the following: What makes the Lower East Side loft space of the 1959 *Pull My Daisy* bohemian? Is the younger Allen Ginsberg in this loft space *more* bohemian than the older 1990s Allen Ginsberg? How does Allen Ginsberg's "vow of penury" contribute to his distinction as a bohemian or neo-bohemian? What do Ginsberg's later poems of Inclusion and his appearances in a GAP clothing advertisement and an MTV music video convey about Ginsberg's involvement in Neo-Bohemia? Does a film such as the 2010 *Howl*, which depicts a young bohemian Ginsberg, carry valuable neo-bohemian weight for contemporary consumers? Has the bohemian Ginsberg been gentrified as say the 1920s

Greenwich Village was gentrified? Who changed more: the bohemian Ginsberg or the mass American audience(s)/consumer(s)? Can a celebrity even be a bohemian? Once a bohemian such as Ginsberg becomes a myth, is he now *something else*? Is grit still *gritty* when it turns a profit?

Why did Nelson Algren live a bohemian lifestyle? Do Art Shay's edgy photographs of Algren on the streets of late 1940s and 1950s Wicker Park detract from Algren's bohemianism? Specifically, how have the characters and spaces of Algren's *The Man with the Golden Arm* inspired current Wicker Park neo-bohemian hipsters and participants? What's the difference between grit and grit-as-glamour? If edginess is expensive can it still be edgy? Why is Otto Preminger's *Man with the Golden Arm* less gritty than Algren's novel? Is it a better depiction/inspiration of/for neo-bohemia than bohemia? Is a hipster still a hipster on film?

How do the styles-aesthetics and attitudes of S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* connect with former and contemporary ideas of bohemianism? How do rebels and outsiders form a backdrop for Tulsa subcultural (neo)bohemianism? What are the ramifications of Tulsa's modern-day rockabilly hipsters (or punks or greasers or suburban creative class members) as they nostalgically look to the rebel characters of S.E. Hinton's young adult novels? What do Coppola's films of the same names add to or detract from these distinctions? How are the multifarious grit, myths, and deviance of bohemia different from that of neo-bohemia? What does Coppola's neo-bohemian film *Rumble Fish* (1983) explicate about postmodern bohemianism? How do these texts connect with and inspire the modern-day neo-bohemian Tulsa neighborhood of the Blue Dome Zone? What are the revelations of Tulsa Cool? What is authentic about kitsch and vintage and retro? Can

the ironic be authentic? Are Larry Clark's photographs *Tulsa* (1971) too cool for neo-bohemia and the Blue Dome? Can a text be too gritty? Too authentic? Too deviant? What is the difference between an artist and a patron of the Blue Dome Zone?

Finally: Has the Blue Dome Zone and/or Wicker Park been gentrified as the celebrity bohemian poet Allen Ginsberg has been gentrified? What are the various dreams and fantasies of (neo)bohemia? How do these texts contribute to these dreams?

Furthermore, while I do take Richard Lloyd's observations on neo-bohemia at face value and agree with them mostly, I also expect—through the added analysis of the mentioned literature, film, photography, and urban neighborhoods—to ideationally weave these elements/analyses to hopefully inform and add to/refine Lloyd's concept of neo-bohemia. In my mind, neo-bohemia is about place, as it is about the post-industrial and gentrified Wicker Park and the Blue Dome Zone, but it's also about space: a loft space in the Lower East Side, a coffee shop in the Blue Dome Zone, a dive bar in Lafayette, Indiana—a basement in a house in small-town Hays, Kansas, that has been converted into an art studio and realm for band practice. It's also about the merger between artists and the creative class *and* the people who want to be part of an artistic and creative scene. Neo-bohemia in this way is about representations and associations—through patronage of the arts and involvement in the alternative to consumption of associated factual *and* fictional styles, objects, symbols, and spectacles. This merger at times includes particular bricolage(s) of clothes bought at the Salvation Army, the purchase of a vintage couch for a punk rock show, and/or the display of a poster of Allen Ginsberg or Mickey Rourke as the Motorcycle Boy on a dorm room wall; and/yet, it also includes a rundown café, Larry Clark's amphetamine addicts, an independent music

venue, a rundown loft space, and stories about Nelson Algren. And, then, through these objects and connections and stories, neo-bohemia is also about a fantasy: the fantasy of being a rebellious starving artist or at least getting close to a starving artist or pretending to be one. The fantasy of the flexible accumulation and postmodern *labor/leisure* of art, creativity, and an authentic experience. Certain texts—in this case those related to Ginsberg, Leslie/Frank, Algren, Hinton, Coppola, Clark, among a few others—bring us closer to this experience. Closer to the places and spaces. Closer to their accompanying fantasies.

Additionally, each of my chosen literary figures (Ginsberg, Algren, and Hinton) has been repeatedly censored over the years—censorship of Ginsberg’s poems as depicted in the famous 1957 *Howl* obscenity trial and the FCC’s censorship of his poems on the radio airwaves in the 1990s, the censorship of Algren’s works by the Chicago Public Library and in Chicago public schools, and S.E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders* infamous designation as one of the most widely censored contemporary books of modern-day public school classrooms—and I take this as no coincidence. The ideas and messages of these people/texts have continually been viewed as subversive, as “off”: as potentially obscene, offensive, and unfit. This repeated censorship adds to the bohemian and neo-bohemian natures of these works—outsider/“outsider” and/or hip/“hip” works that have been celebrated substantially/ironically by American youth especially (teenagers and college students alike). These books, and their accompanying films, photographs, and neighborhoods, have played crucial roles in the various facts and feelings of neo-bohemia.

Richard Lloyd scientifically localizes his theory, and I accept it and yet choose to broaden it—to analyze its extensions and inspirations. As a theory, of both fact and fiction, my understanding of Neo-Bohemia merges and transcends the gritty corners and minds of a vast terrain of peoples and places. It's a condition (for me) that jets inward and outward, from urban centers to rural settings, from turns of thought to a message on a t-shirt. It's localized and massively generated. It's both a state of mind and a place for flux and plurality of the physical intertwined with the fantastical. Here lies a crucial difference between my thinking and Lloyd's: I think neo-bohemia (in varying degrees) exists *everywhere*, as it's in the very fabric of our national culture and objects and images/representations, not just in certain hip neighborhoods. Neo-bohemia is most noticeable/notable in select U.S. city neighborhoods, but the theory is not limited to these places.

In summation, what am I offering that is *new* in reference to scholarship on traditional bohemia and contemporary neo-bohemia? My thinking is less rigid and localized than Lloyd's. As I've mentioned, I am interested in the connections and inspirations of (neo)bohemia, of these rhizomes that sail back and forth from people and places; I am interested in an arc of fantasy. I often see a fluid relationship between modes of bohemianism and neo-bohemianism, between the Artist Class (my term) and Richard Florida's Creative Class. This fluidity carries with it a spectrum of artistic production alongside material, fantastical conceptions about art and creativity. Partly this has to do with career designations (i.e. painter, musician, actor, writer, lawyer, banker, scientist, graphic designer, waitress) but it also pertains to a person's time spent creating, consuming, and celebrating art. A painter, for instance, who only paints each and every

day with no form of secondary income nicely falls into the artist class. A scientist, who paints sporadically and attends art galleries on the weekends, is more closely tied to the creative class. A waitress who works part-time and paints fairly regularly falls somewhere in between these two. These distinctions have increasingly become more difficult to make, however; now, in our contemporary condition, these differences more often these days have become merged and blended, even collaborated because of the associations and (inter)connections; in a neighborhood such as Wicker Park or the Blue Dome Zone, I see a visual artist who paints in her studio and who has no other form of employment as living *alongside* the writer who waits tables and the musician who works at a graphic design firm or science research lab in together creating the holistic aesthetics and messages (i.e. as an alternative hipster sphere, as a scene for cultural production/duplication of grit and the underbelly). This does not mean that traditional bohemia is “extinct,” but that bohemia and neo-bohemia have merged and been placed alongside each other in postmodern ways, because of the associations and mass acceptance, and thus this hybrid has influenced the rest of society in telling fashions as well. That band who practices in the basement in Hays, Kansas, might go see a show in Wicker Park. That scientist might play bass guitar in that band. Some of the “tourists” of Floyd Dell’s 1920s Greenwich Village now live in the neighborhoods themselves. At times, with our neo-bohemian condition, the tourist is also a resident. Also a patron. This flux is important.

At other rarer times bohemia still functions as a subculture and counterculture in a neighborhood such as Wicker Park and in a city such as Chicago, and Wicker Park neo-bohemian hipsters at times do form a distinctive subculture and counterculture in

Chicago, even though this subculture and counterculture resemble similar trends and groups in other urban neighborhoods and/or among mainstream Americans in a postmodern, globalized condition. Depending on the context, bohemians and neo-bohemians both set themselves apart and fit in with American pop cultural and majority-based conventions and opinions. This is where the life of Allen Ginsberg becomes relevant. Where the Blue Dome Zone becomes worthy of our attention. The distinctions are blurry and often overlapping, sometimes frustratingly so, which contributes to the mentioned fluidity and merging. A *confusion* exists. In many cases, these cultural players and places/spaces have set the trends and molds for popular belief and action—from fashion to political beliefs. Again, I look to the mentioned literature, film, and photography that inform these complicated distinctions and transitions; elements/issues of kitsch, nostalgia, grit, et al, fit into these discussions and analyses. To my knowledge—while it's true that relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to Ginsberg's later poems after *Howl* and *Kaddish*, the works of Nelson Algren had been largely forgotten in academia until fairly recently, and very little scholarship has been conducted concerning Hinton's young adult novels—what's important to note here is that the application and connection of neo-bohemia to literature, film, and photography has not been done, in a scholarly sense or otherwise. Last, all of these mentioned all-but-forgotten texts in various facets utilize the notion of “grit as glamour” as it relates to the appeal of fictional characters and settings but also as it relates to actual neighborhoods/spaces in contemporary American cities *and* elsewhere.

The common definition of “grit” refers to “abrasive particles or granules” and “firmness of character; pluck” alongside related elements such as “grunge,” “grime,” and



“blight.” True, my usage of grit or “gritty” does relate to these connotations and associations, but my usage of the term(s) also goes beyond these, especially as they relate to “glamour.” For, *grit* in the senses of my usage relates to a rebellious cultural celebration of the beatdown, downtrodden, lowly, and even criminal and *deviant*. Grit carries over to a rundown building, to a bar that utilizes its original urban aesthetic that is nearly to the point of dilapidation, to clothes bought from the Salvation Army that are faded, ripped, and filled with holes—to a musical sound that has begged to be stripped down. Grit refers to Ginsberg’s and Algren’s cheap cold-water flats, their junkie friends, and to their associations with actual starving artists. One finds gritty characters amid gritty conditions in the works of Ginsberg, Algren, and Hinton. In the latter’s novels, we see the gritty, “tough” (“tuff”) lower class predominately white males who fight, curse, and spit on Tulsa’s streets, and we also see a form of neo-hipster grit in contemporary neighborhoods such as Tulsa’s Blue Dome Zone, as we do in Ginsberg’s Lower East Side and Algren’s Wicker Park.

Grit, the literal and metaphorical dirty-abrasive particles of urbanity, remains instrumental to neo-bohemian or modern-day hipsters. It fits in with the postmodern artist who shuns the suburbs for the postindustrial inner city, showcases “heroin chic,” and spouts alternative beliefs and ways of life—that is, values outside of the *perceived/imagined* clean, less gritty or grit-less mainstream. In the lives and literary works (and associated cinematic and photographic works) of Ginsberg, Algren, and Hinton, one sees Marx’s *lumpenproletariat* as an extension of grit, as a moniker for the struggling (or starving) artist. The neo-bohemian hipster manipulates grit, often doing so in particular urban postindustrial neighborhoods, to make his or her chosen statements—

about art, sexuality, politics, nature, etc. The slum is gritty and “to slum it” is to get gritty. Richard Florida’s Creative Class member is often fascinated with this grit, by this authenticity, and s/he may even serve as a weekly and/or weekend warrior of grit, frequenting the dive bars, art shows, independent music concerts, and loft-space parties to get his/her gritty fill. For grit often provides the counterculture or subculture that is (Neo)Bohemia that alluring space of rough-around-the-edges oddity, shock, and even (perceived) danger. Grit is real and perceived edginess, which relates to our fantasy of (neo)bohemia. The participant imagines the danger; s/he fantasizes about being involved in foreign terrain, in a rough (looking) neighborhood for art and consumption. This fantasy sometimes and often is a particle or moment that is scary and unknown (close to the edge), as in an artist’s loft where people shoot heroin, and thus grit at times is a rejection: of the common, clean, pure, and square. And, in sometimes surprising ways, grit is frequently progressive, a call to arms or a message for improvement. Simultaneously, this grit also often combines with nostalgia for the glorious and glamorous old (the “retro”) and/or with an ironic nod towards the gnarly kitsch (the gloriously tacky). The gaudy, tacky, ugly, and punk(ish) are first cousins of grit as conscientious oppositional choices against heteronormative beauty and purity. Grit, and gritty, as I use these terms repeatedly in these writings, sit(s) on top of the Neo-Bohemian pyramid as hipsterdom’s Boss King.

Finally, this dissertation is about gentrification as it pertains to the bohemia-to-neo-bohemia transformation along with what I call a gentrification arc-of-the-imaginary—an arc that includes representations of pre-gentrification and/or *early* gentrification urban conditions, middle class investment, mass cultural acceptance/

inclusion, contemporary hipsters, and *fully* gentrified neo-bohemian neighborhoods and players. Foremost, my selected texts speak to this arc—an arc that harbors the Unlikely: a showcase/collage/montage/spinning kaleidoscope of impossibilities. A hallucination of possibilities; a discussion a crazy person has with himself. Question: Can a graduate student write successfully about postmodern bohemia? Maybe, maybe not. Maybe the proof is in the painful attempt.

**SECTION 2: THE GRIT IN THE PUDDING – PACKED, REPACKED, AND  
BRANDED. ALLEN GINSBERG AND NEO-BOHEMIA: THE COMPLEXITIES  
OF AN EVOLVING MARKETABLE POST-POET-REBEL**

SECTION 2: THE GRIT IS IN THE PUDDING – PACKED, REPACKED, AND  
BRANDED. ALLEN GINSBERG AND NEO-BOHEMIA: THE COMPLEXITIES OF  
AN EVOLVING MARTABLE POST-POET-REBEL



**Figure 3.1** Ginsberg, GAP Ad<sup>34</sup>

Allen Ginsberg lived his life *experimentally*—bravely and openly (if even sophomorically), and his written words often followed suit, yet this does not deviate from the ambiguity and the debate about integrity and authenticity that these actions provoked. His poems depict a man, writing in post-World War II United States, who blended literary sophistication, spirit-inspired artistry, pertinent current events, popular culture,

with the new and even crude and clownish and barbaric/foul/vulgar/*gritty* in astonishingly unique and, yes, debatable fashion; he meshed poetry, multimedia, and fame in unparalleled ways too, and this enmeshment has had its load of controversy; one can't have enmeshment without controversy . . . or ambiguity . . . or confusion . . . or a debate over the merits. One can't swing so high and so low and not expect a debate.

Bohemia has always carried this duality—the duality of the starving artist who wants to experimentally *create* and *produce* and *shine* and *live* without compromising himself—his personal integrity, his aims of artistic freedom, or the trifecta of his bohemian core: Truth, Beauty, and Uncompromised Modes of Living/ Creating/ Expressing. And, now Neo-Bohemia carries this duality even further; that originally starved artist (at times, as in Ginsberg's case here especially) now not only eats, but he eats *a lot* . . . and his eating and meals (i.e. his financial gain, his notoriety/ fame/ celebrity/ publicity, his celebrated public image, his ingratiation with the middle classes) gets captured on television, on a music video, on film, in front of a thousand people in an auditorium, on CDs and on iPods, alongside Bob Dylan (literally and figuratively) and other celebrities on buses and stages and screens . . . on the front cover of *Time* magazine.

Richard Florida and others have written about the rise of a Creative Class in the United States, about how art and commerce have merged in unprecedented fashions since WWII, how statistically more people now are making money off of art and creativity than ever before. This phenomenon coincides with Richard Lloyd's notion of Neo-Bohemia, an umbrella concept that includes “grit-as-glamour,” “heroin chic,” the “rebel-as-insider,” “hipster irony,” et al. in postindustrial urban U.S. pockets such as Wicker Park in Chicago. Allen Ginsberg, as an extension of this complexity-duality-ambiguity-cultural

confusion, was and still is the positive poster poet-person for this neo-bohemian phenomenon we now live in because he brought the bohemianism of his actions and writings to continuous generations of marketable countercultures and celebrated liberalism. He was a living duality. The cultural climate today includes hipsters and neo-bohemians, and Ginsberg certainly has also had an influence on these cultural players with his poems, songs, performances, and overall status as a poet-celebrity and public intellectual. His “aura” varies according to whom one talks to, which, as I’ve mentioned, is largely the point.

Ginsberg’s experiments *still* shine through both financially and culturally now (even the negative publicity and criticism continues to generate profit for his foundation, after his death), thus putting him in the mix as a contributing player in our late-stage capitalist/media-driven industries of culture, a designation that carries both privilege and baggage. For, Ginsberg fits with the historical debate about Bohemia, about its authenticity and its substance. “The bohemian myth revolves around a central problem of authenticity,” Elizabeth Wilson writes.<sup>35</sup> I am obviously biased here, pointing to the substance of Ginsberg the man and poet and spectacular celebrity and bohemian, but my bias is also immaterial to a point; for, it’s the debate and mentioned confusion and duality/ambiguity that holds—as it does with other (neo)bohemian artists and (neo)bohemian neighborhoods—the notion that our perhaps most famous post-WWII poet’s credibility still gets questioned at times, which is, it should be mentioned, not the same case of say a Robert Lowell or even a Billy Collins. These poets more nicely slide into the canon without nearly I imagine as much gripe and ambiguity. That, in contrast, somehow Ginsberg’s fame got in the way of the authenticity of his writing and the

integrity of his bohemian lifestyle, and that this fame, this notoriety is largely intertwined with his celebrity as perhaps the *most famous bohemian writer on the planet* (then and perhaps even now with his all-pervasive visage, abounding). The famous bohemian artist—as flesh-bound and in simulacrum, in the library shelf and in the cash register and online—has entered into our nationalized/globalized debate. The great shift and merger (David Brooks’ great *morph*) is in the cultural mix here, and a cultural chameleon Ginsberg was and still is, on the big screen for example.

In the first chapter of this section (Chapter 4), I apply and analyze elements of the experimental film *Pull My Daisy* in order to understand Ginsberg’s bohemianism before he became a famous poet and national (even global) celebrity. In Chapter 5, I investigate Ginsberg’s celebrity, his role as a “useful laborer” in the increasing spheres of publicized counterculture(s) and neo-bohemia. Poems he wrote beginning in the 1960s help navigate these (counter)cultural/celebrity waters. Last, in Chapter 6, I probe Ginsberg’s function as an older man and celebrity-poet who is debatably past his prime and bohemian significance. He has arguably “sold out” his original bohemianism, and applications and analyses of later Ginsberg poems along with various popular media/popular culture representations of Ginsberg help underscore this debate.

Collectively, these three chapters speak to Ginsberg’s arc-of-gentrification. For, as Richard Lloyd describes his chosen locus-neighborhood of Wicker Park as a gritty struggling art/artist-infused place of *first* authenticity and independent cultural production—that “belie[s] dystopic imaginations of the dead inner city”—and *second* a turned and gentrified commercialized zone with the allure of the cutting edge that investors and middle class consumers have capitalized on,<sup>36</sup> so too has Allen Ginsberg



followed a similar trajectory of grit turned glamorous, of commercial edginess, of bohemian turned *neo*; with this parallel, the spatial nods to the personal here, to the biographical, as *first* Ginsberg the downtrodden man and poet turned into Allen Ginsberg the celebrity and successful “brand” *second*. In these chapters, I examine the Lower East Side and Ginsberg’s relationship to the place. I argue that Ginsberg’s arc played into and parallels the post-WWII gentrification of the Lower East Side/ “East Village.” These connections, these neo-bohemian transformations, resemble those of Lloyd’s Wicker Park as well, but these connections and transformations also illuminate broader conditions of neo-bohemia—of those applications/transformations (and sometimes gentrification) in *every* American city and town. An investigation of Allen Ginsberg’s gentrification, of his Bohemia-to-Neo-Bohemia *arc*—of his life and work, even his spectacles—brings us closer to an understanding of these conditions.

CHAPTER 4: IN THE BEGINNING THERE WERE COCKROACHES. ALLEN GINSBERG IN ALL-BUT-INNOCENT BOHEMIAN BEAM SPHERE

“to take into account not only, as the social history of art usually does, the social conditions of the production of artists . . . but also the social conditions of the production of a set of objects socially constituted as works of *art*, i.e. the conditions of production of the field of social agents . . . which help to define and produce the value of works of art.” – Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* <sup>37</sup>

“The 1950s were over. The company store had bought up our ideas and repackaged them into an image so specious that we realized we were no longer welcome unless we wanted to join the charade. I think Robert and Alfred knew better than Jack and I why *Pull My Daisy* should be made. As Robert said, with *Pull My Daisy* we captured a moment in time.” – David Amram, *Offbeat* <sup>38</sup>

Photographer Robert Frank—his 1958 book of photographs, *The Americans* has been called “perhaps the most influential photography book of the 20th century”<sup>39</sup>—and renowned Abstract Expressionist painter Alfred Leslie came together in 1959 to create the film *Pull My Daisy*.<sup>40</sup> *Daisy*, archived in the National Film Registry in 1996, a 28-minute fairly avant-garde affair, showcases Allen Ginsberg and some of his Beat Generation/Lower East Side creative associates—poet Gregory Corso, poet (and Ginsberg’s lifetime lover) Peter Orlovsky, artist/musician/filmmaker Larry Rivers, actress/director Delphine Selrig, visual artist Alice Neel, actor Richard Bellamy, and jazz musician David Amram—in a bohemian habitus, a space, of unconventional revelry and defiance of containment of the traditional conservative power structures of the day.

In this film, these avant-garde bohemian-beats *riff/celebrate* word salad, improvise poetry and music, dance, sing, wrestle, play, smoke cigarettes and joints, drink wine, act, bear their souls, and pretend.

A wife wakes up in her apartment and takes her young son to school. Two poets enter the apartment to play and create and improvise with one another for the day. The husband returns home from work, soon followed by the wife and son, along with other poets and musicians and a bishop and the bishop's aunt and mother. These people congregate around a cluttered table in this bedraggled apartment, play music, philosophize and poeticize about the cosmos. The bishop and his aunt and mother leave. Soon after, the wife kicks the husband and his "beatnik" friends out of the apartment. Late at night now, these misfits then go off to "play by the fires in the Bowery."

These events happen in one day and one night in a loft apartment/art studio in the Lower East Side, New York. The mid-1950s U.S. is the depicted epoch.

Though *Pull My Daisy* debuted in 1959, a couple of years after Ginsberg's ascent to fame after the publication of *Howl and Other Poems* and its subsequent obscenity trial that garnered national media attention, *Daisy* is based on a saturnalia-infused scene that took place in 1955 in Neal and Carolyn Cassady's residence before the Beats (and Ginsberg specifically) were well-known to the public. *Daisy*, based on the third act of Jack Kerouac's at-the-time unproduced play *Beat Generation*, contains a partially scripted partially improvised Kerouac voice-over of the actions of Ginsberg and company in this Lower East Side loft apartment.

#### 4.1 The Lower East Side

As I expand on it below, this loft space in the Lower East Side that Ginsberg and his associates congregate within in *Pull My Daisy* presents an alternative space to the stereotypically understood 1950s U.S. bourgeois/middle class suburban mindsets and behaviors, but first a contextualization of the Lower East Side (LES) neighborhood during this time remains crucial to the understanding of what takes place in this film.

In sociologist/urban studies scholar Christopher Mele's examination of the history and changes of the Lower East Side, *Selling the Lower East Side*, he explains that through the 1940s, working-class immigrant migration and residential establishment along with government-subsidized low-rent developments helped squelch the realistic possibility of substantial middle class and upper class investment in the neighborhood.<sup>41</sup> Yet, as Mele asserts, the 1950s avant-garde bohemian-beats, among others, informed and inspired the beginning of a socioeconomic transformation in the LES; the hippies then of the 1960s would subsequently take this LES transformation/gentrification to its pinnacle: "Corporate and the subcultural realms grew increasingly intertwined. Art forms developed initially from critically avant-garde movements in the late 1950s and early 1960s seeped into advertisements and product packaging and vice versa."<sup>42</sup> In 1959 (the time of *Daisy's* release), as Mele sets forth, the Lower East Side verged on the cusp of middle class corporatization and commercialization *because of* avant-garde ideas and aesthetics. Intertwined with these avant-garde influences, Mele also states that this neighborhood's "plurality" in the 1950s newly emerged as a catalyst for future middle class inspiration and investment. With a fresh set of eyes then the U.S. middle classes during this period began to more highly value the LES due to its reputation as a place for

*authentic* working class and/or ethnic residents that avant-garde artists both embraced and celebrated. These novel valuations construct a template for bohemia's conversion to "neo." Bohemians were not the only ones now celebrating diversity, multiculturalism, or different ways of thinking and behaving; the 1950s Lower East Side had primed itself for aspects of liberal mainstream American middle class application and insertion.

"At the close of the 1950s," Mele writes, "the Lower East Side resembled a patchwork quilt . . . of tightly knit groups separated by ethnic and, to a lesser degree, class differences . . . The Lower East Side was an eclectic neighborhood that was visibly different in many ways from other New York neighborhoods and in most ways from the predominantly homogeneous white, middle-class, pristine new suburbs . . . In short, the Lower East Side appeared as the symbolic antithesis of postwar suburban society."<sup>43</sup>

Mele explains the LES's function as a place with an anti-suburbs sentiment, but he also cites the place's notable pluralism "that indulged differences in ethnicity, race, politics, religion, and culture." He surmises: "The Lower East Side of the 1950s, then, was a patchwork of Puerto Ricans, Jews, Ukrainians, refugees, postwar emigres, Blacks, and Italians inhabiting strikingly different social and cultural worlds within a small physical space." Crucially, he states that "[f]or the ["post-war New York avant-garde . . . the beatniks or beats"<sup>44</sup>—a growing population of young adults who embraced countercultural movements of the time—the Lower East Side's entangled ethnicities, classes, and cultures were a source of allure and inspiration."<sup>45</sup>

Mele highlights how the avant-garde/bohemian-beats were inspired by this variegated locale—so much so that they increasingly left Greenwich Village/the West Village during the 1950s and moved to the Lower East Side, inevitably spending more

time (and more money) there. He notes that these artists perceived the LES as a more authentic neighborhood for a “scene.” They perceived the West Village as “played out” and overpriced, even overly commercialized; thus the LES diverse working-class and cultural conditions of immigrants and various ethnic groups, along with greater affordability, appealed to subcultural artists’ senses of openness and acceptance of a variety of lifestyles and ways of approaching the world. Greater middle class investment and consumption then followed suit in the LES especially in the late 1960s—even as it eventually raised rents and priced out many of these original residents to move to more affordable New York neighborhoods and surrounding areas.

Finally, Mele in detail describes the subsequent results of this middle class investment, as the LES as a realm for the 1950s beats and avant-garde artists transformed into a place for 1960s hippies and further emergent (pop) countercultures:

When the highly public and visible critique of *suburban* America developed into the 1960s counterculture, the anti-suburban Lower East Side emerged as one of its cultural capitals. Between 1964 and 1968 the streets and avenues between Houston and Fourteenth Streets experienced a cultural explosion of art, music, theater, film, writing, and, most significantly, public performance, all of which were linked to the loosely connected hippie movement. The area was dubbed the ‘East Village,’ and for four years it became the key East Coast site of a countercultural spectacle that had an enduring influence on the cultural history of the United States and the struggle over neighborhood restructuring on the Lower East Side.<sup>46</sup>

*Daisy*, subsequently, as a film created by an avant-garde painter and experimental photographer, Leslie and Frank, that depicts a 1955 scene that took place among what were then little-known avant-garde bohemian writers/poets/artists—what Mele considers “post-war New York avant-garde . . . the beatniks or beats”—speaks to one defining gloriously bohemian *moment* before this process of heightened and highly publicized corporatization/commercialization of aspects of the avant-garde and the eventual notoriety of the 1960s artists-hippies in the neighborhood: Before the Lower East Side became the “cultural explosion” that was the 1960s “East Village.” Foremost, as Mele states of these 1950s post-war LES avant-garde beats, “The bohemian ideology centered on a critique of the apparent hypocrisy of the bourgeois lifestyle.”<sup>47</sup> As I analyze and incorporate elements of *Daisy*, this hypocrisy remains important, especially in the Lower East Side and as it pertains to the life of Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg and his friends, in the tradition of bohemia, sought to counter what they considered the superficial and overly materialist, even soulless nature of the 1950s bourgeois/American middle class suburban attitude, but they also unwittingly set in motion opportunities/inspirations for commercialization/co-optation and corporate application and investment of the counterculture(s)/subculture(s) in late 1950s and 1960s Lower East Side (and beyond)—which then, again, in turn perpetually displaced many of the diverse working-class immigrant residents of the LES.

This phenomenon, thus, in the Lower East Side in the 1950s—of avant-garde bohemian-beats that contribute to the eventual neo-bohemian transformation of the neighborhood—falls at the beginning of our neo-bohemian arc-of-gentrification. Ginsberg and his associates as “early gentrifiers” functioned as the initial instrument of a

process that led to material “improvements” of buildings, businesses, et al, along with influences on the imaginations of future middle class LES participants—fantasies of how struggling artists and bohemians and residents/patrons overall are supposed to act and live and dream and even consume in the neighborhood. Mele again: “An enclave of artists, writers, poets, and other artistic types who flocked to the Lower East Side in the 1950s also lived within the interstices of these fragmented groups. While the artists had little immediate effect on the conflict among landlords, state actors, and working-class residents, their establishment of a community . . . reinforced the area’s avant-garde identity and influenced the settlement of subsequent cultural movements.”<sup>48</sup> As these poets/writers/artists played and created in this LES loft in *Daisy*, the Lower East Side investors, beginning in the late 1950s, meanwhile remained steadfast in lending themselves to a period of urban renewal policies and middle class redevelopment of the working-class, ethnically diverse district. Ginsberg and his friends here in *Daisy* played their part in making the neighborhood more attractive or even surprisingly glamorous during this process, even though these bohemian-beats did not agree with the ways (i.e. ideas/attitudes, behaviors, fashions) of the (stereo)typical 1950s middle class. As I parse this out later, many of the LES middle class investors/residents though just couldn’t help but be inspired by these dirty beat-bohemians in a rundown loft apartment. These artists in *Daisy* in a Lower East Side loft space were in their minds acting in earnest, yet they assumedly would have been appalled by their eventual contributions to the neighborhood’s neo-bohemian gentrification.



## 4.2 Space

This is foremost a story about space. Not space shuttles but space—and its objects, its manipulation of objects, and the players who manipulate these objects along with their souls and spirits in a space. As important as it is for bohemians and hipsters to congregate in a neighborhood such as Wicker Park or the Blue Dome Zone or the Lower East Side, the smaller spaces of residences and establishments (cafes, coffee shops, restaurants, bars, abandoned buildings, et al), legal and not, make up the seams. I repeat the words of John Leland here, as it pertains to the NYC Bowery loft space of *Pull My Daisy* that Allen Ginsberg and his beat friends gather and create a scene in: “We often think of hip as marking geographic space. Every city has a hip neighborhood, and every hip neighborhood has a hot spot or two: maybe a bar or a shooting gallery or congenial apartment. These spaces are essential to bohemia, allowing people to exchange ideas, hook up or just validate their existence outside the mainstream.” Virginia Nicholson writes of the historical bohemian space, primarily that of turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup> Century London and New York, but aspects of her exposition also relate to the transcendent space of *Pull My Daisy*; Nicholson: “The artist’s garret has so transcended fashion and time that it has become one of the most enduring clichés of the age, shorthand for an ideology and an identity, synonymous with both aspiration and despair. Garrets placed one literally and metaphorically above the world.”<sup>49</sup>

Thus, we have the importance and *spirit* of the bohemian garret, the domicile of artistic work, which at times serves as a place for “aspiration”/celebration and almost boundless expression. The loft apartment of *Daisy* functions on these fronts as a place for “despair” and struggling art-hood—of poetic rhapsodizing, painting, playing music, and

even foolishly playing around as participants investigate each other's souls. Also, as a space for atypical/non-normative behavior—i.e. Ginsberg and Corso do not have 9-to-5 jobs in this film, and these men play together here in homo-social union (Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky were lovers during this time and closely sit together on the couch in the film)—this loft space then exists “literally and metaphorically above the world” with its view of the Lower East Side streets below and the loft's room of openness for possibilities of creating art and taking chances a world away from the stereotypical staid 1950s.

David Amram, a musician who wrote the jazz soundtrack and an actor in *Pull My Daisy*, describes the function and magic of these types of places for himself and Jack Kerouac and their friends during this time in New York in the 1950s:

This was the New York where Jack and I each felt most at home—an environment that was inclusive, informal, almost rural, temporarily created for a few hours in the midst of the vast sky-scrapered metropolis, where we miraculously found temporary cocoons of warmth and camaraderie. These party environments . . . where unheralded natural poets celebrated the rising of the moon, or great jam sessions . . . in my basement apartment.<sup>50</sup>

Amram suggests a free-flowing and inviting climate that *Daisy* falls into. These gatherings constitute happenings and parties (“party environments”) that are homes and spaces for *action* and *creation*, but they are also more than that, something less tangible and more fantastical—a space “above the world” (or outside of the normative); they are spheres for romantic transformation with the hopes and possibilities of creating beautiful

and/or innovative art and experiences, and the creators of *Pull My Daisy* sought to capture such a transformation—this great *conversion* of air and wood and glass and words that *was happening*, as Amram indicates, so often in NYC and the Lower East Side during this time.

After writing the play that this film is based on, Kerouac commented on his aims for the theatre (and for film) and for this play in particular. He imagined writing (and presenting) something *new*:

What I wanta do is re-do the theater and the cinema in America, give it a spontaneous dash, remove pre-conceptions of “situation” and let people rave on as they do in real life. That’s what the play is: no plot in particular, no “meaning” in particular, just the way people are. Everything I write I do in the spirit where I imagine myself an Angel returned to earth seeing it with sad eyes as it is.<sup>51</sup>

*Pull My Daisy* as a film, following Kerouac’s sad-eyed vision for the play and world, does not merely capture a “situation” with normal plotlines and expected dialogue; the unconventional narrative here “rave[s] on” with what Kerouac considers “real life” actions. These actions then get transcended by a space and by the characters’ manipulations of this space and its objects, all associations intertwined, as it depicts “just the way people are”—artists who are having fun, talking, accepting each other wholly, and enjoying each other’s company in a loft with old furniture and music and notebooks and joints and wine. But it is more than a depiction of perceived physical reality and its material objects. What is provided in *Daisy* is a space, a forum for the *angelic* to occur, if the angelic can be defined as a sphere that *welcomes* spontaneous moments/“spontaneous

dash[es]” with the dreams of beatitude. “If you were inwardly beautiful,” Nicholson writes, “then your room became beautiful as an extension of your personality.”<sup>52</sup> With *Daisy*’s loft, we now enter a realm for the unorthodox beautiful and more truthful or seemingly more truthful space of camaraderie, creativity, and the transformation of the banal even suffering routine. As Elizabeth Wilson mentions, “Baudelaire wrote that the task of artist of modernity was to see the marvelous in the banal.”<sup>53</sup> The bohemian-beats here dream of shattering the banal and treating this conversion as marvelous.

Nicholson mentions that “[t]he pigsty interior [of a bohemian domicile] carried messages of rebellion, distaste for decorum, and determination to live outside the conventions.”<sup>54</sup> Likewise, *Daisy* opens with establishing shots of a messy, fairly rundown apartment—filled with dirty dishes, cockroaches, paintings on canvases, not to mention the beautiful large loft windows that overlook the busy city street of cars and pedestrians—that serves as home to Milo, a railroad brakeman, and his unnamed wife, a painter, along with their young son Pablo, who has just awoken and is getting ready for school. Ginsberg and Corso now “outside the mainstream” (per John Leland’s words) crash the morning preparations of wife and son, who soon leave after the arrival of the poet-misfits; these two men, “bursting with poetry,” as described by Kerouac, now alone in the apartment casually zoom through the work and school day, starting with morning beers and cigarettes before sharing a joint of marijuana.

The two poets continue to drink, smoke, and talk and *riff*; Gregory Corso remarks to Ginsberg: “I could tell you poems that make you weep with long hair. Goodbye, goodbye.” This is a remarkable line on its own, but the arrival to this moment is more so. Ginsberg thumbs through his journal, shares that joint, before lying on his back; then . . .

we see his excitement; he jumps up, exclaims about Apollinaire: “Apollinaire wrote a poem at the grave of Balzac and fell down!”; Ginsberg then falls down on his back while scribbling furiously into the air. Before these lines and these manic actions, Corso begs: “Come on, man. Don’t act like a hip cat, a hipster.” I feel privileged here to witness the creative and chaotic energy of Ginsberg, the “spontaneous combustion” as A.M. Homes mentions; Ginsberg here wonderfully spazzes out, he spins on the floor, he makes excited poetic and philosophic proclamations and air doodles to Corso who is sitting calmly on the floor with his legs crossed. This is a bohemian sideshow of poetry, play, creativity, and disregard. A chair has been turned over. Corso doesn’t want to sit in it. Paints and dishes and objects are scattered about, a tattered journal contains “secret scatological thought,” and here we have a *moment*, a creative and poetic moment, and the actions are seemingly truthful because I believe they are happening *on the spot*. We are *present*, we are there, or *at least I am*, and I believe it and am thankful for it.

These two poets exhibit complete freedom to uninhibitedly say and do whatever they feel; poetic words and poetic thought are what’s most important to them. Kerouac’s voiceover lines add another level of brilliance for me, notably with that existential questioning of what it means to be a “hipster”—for, Corso (via Kerouac) tells Ginsberg coyly not to be a hipster, which indicates a self-awareness towards the term—but regardless the actions/intentions of these poets here hold true to the shedding of inhibitions of the soul, even without Kerouac’s voiceover. They are goofing off, acting hipster-like, taking chances, and going for it—call *it* the soul of the momentary universe/the “crack” in the cosmos that leads to beautiful awareness and new revelations about one’s self away from conformity, away from the suburbs, away from the soul-

crushing mechanized/machinated factory-like expectations and demands—and I am glad to watch. I am inside. I am outside. The perceived spontaneous realism of this space has created a fantasy, an escape for the *now*, and accurate or not, I feel a step closer to the Truth or truths—or, to what Nicholson describes as the foundations of Bohemia: “Beauty, truth, honesty, lack of pretension.”<sup>55</sup> A.M. Homes:

[The Beats] wanted to soar, to fly, to move through time and space unfettered. They wanted to find spirituality and deliverance among the dispossessed. And they wanted to have a good time . . . have some drinks, and get laid. Compared to the average Joe [especially of the late 1950s] they were wild—awe-inspiring and threatening.<sup>56</sup>

Before standing up and halfway dancing, then gyrating on the floor, standing up again while rhapsodizing on Apollinaire (among others), Ginsberg while reading some poetic musings from his journal announces: “The Lower East Side has produced all of the strange gum-chewing geniuses.” *How is this so?* “Gum-chewing” here indicates an Everyman activity, yet an evocation of “genius” redirects this commonplace, which is the point and the goal: to hopefully turn the mundane into something meaningful. To turn a messy, rundown apartment into a zone of brilliance. To turn thin air and vocalizations into gold for the spirit, to sing into humanity’s ear and ask questions of the cosmos. “By elevating themselves above bourgeois standards of interior decoration,” Nicholson writes, “[bohemian] artists declared their transcendence over frills and facades, artifice and ostentation of every kind. So powerful was this romantic stance vis-à-vis the world of interiors that for artists to survive without comforts, in dust, disorder and want, was to

declare their sense of themselves as creative individuals, even as geniuses.”<sup>57</sup> A.M.

Homes in an Introduction to Kerouac’s play gives her take on the play’s common genius:

Kerouac and his rough-hewn characters—just this side of hobos—want to know how and why we exist and then in some spontaneous combustion they come to know that in the end there are no answers, there is just the moment we are in, and the people around us. . . . Kerouac’s peculiar and deeply personal combination of the working man discussing astral bodies, karmic debt, past lives, and the selling of Jesus . . . the play has a masculine swagger, a brand of bravado. Language and characters careen off each other, in a kind of doped deliciousness, in which one feels the heat of an afternoon, the smell of hay and shit and beer at the racetrack, the greasy squeal of brakes, and the kind of down-and-dirty that never really washes off.<sup>58</sup>

Shit, beer, hobos, bravado, and dirtiness. Yet astral bodies, the selling of Jesus, doped deliciousness, and careening language. This grimy loft space has been primed for these beautifully dirty poets to raise questions, to ponder their karmic debts and riff poetically, and to wrestle on the floor. We can’t wash this off, and they do not chew gum, as far as I can tell; they smoke a joint, drink beer, and goof on their common philosophies, and here lies the genius—of these poets and this film: the believable bohemian revelry without expensive or even many material possessions. These simple surroundings, Nicholson writes, “expressed their very sense of themselves, as individuals for whom things of the soul, the mind, and art were more important than appearances and material possessions.”<sup>59</sup>

Later in the film, Kerouac raps on the doomed cockroaches of the apartment while Ginsberg crouches down in a doorway to brace himself for the perceived coming urban apocalypse while outside the windows the busy streets of people in buses, cabs, and on foot are none the wiser. This loft space then gets a counter-space, one of the mechanized *outside*. Outside, on the streets people are driving to work and taking their kids to school, punching in and out of time clocks and mind-clocks, following routines and mechanisms. Inside, or outside the mainstream, we have a solution for all of that, call it an opportunity and a space for open expression and improvement. A.M. Homes again on the construction of such a realm:

Kerouac was the man who allowed writers to enter the world of flow—different from stream-of-consciousness, his philosophy was about being in the current, open to possibility, allowing creativity to move through you, and you to be one with both process and content. It was about embracing experience rather than resisting it.<sup>60</sup>

Given Kerouac's presented "flow" and opening for possibilities and creativity in *Daisy*, my initial response to the antics of this film was one of awe with an accompanying feeling of thankfulness; awe because I was shocked to see such a creative lack of inhibitions caught on screen, and thankfulness because the literary and popular culture worlds should feel privileged to have such an artifact that depicts these artists in this particular existential cinematic *moment*—a context that is appropriately bohemian in its depictions of uninhibited actions and spontaneous displays of the soul.

Robert Frank confirms these sentiments; he felt as much before shooting *Daisy*: "I think we'll achieve something of value from this experience," he told David Amram.



“This is a special time, David. A special moment in history that we can capture. All of these people together. This most unlikely cast of characters should be perfect to tell Jack’s story.”<sup>61</sup> The director of the film, Alfred Leslie championed these sentiments before shooting as well:

It should be fantastic. It can be our way of honoring Jack’s work, and the enduring bonds of friendship we all share. This will be our statement: Painters, poets, musicians, photographers, all capturing a moment of our joy together. . . . I’ll try to guide our cast in the telling of Jack’s story in a truthful way. No one needs to act. We don’t want anything phony . . . everyone will be themselves, and yet we’ll somehow keep Jack’s ideas intact. It will seem improvised, but we’ll end up having a film that exudes freshness and vitality.<sup>62</sup>

Little moving camera footage of the Beats is offered from the 1940s and 1950s, thus *Daisy*, with its “painters, poets, musicians, photographers, all capturing a moment of . . . joy together,” serves as an important visual time capsule of the core of Beat-dom: controlled spontaneity with a playful vehicle that aims for earnest progressivism in art and life. I am struck by the appearance of harmless actions (i.e. sitting on the floor while, sitting on a couch and around a table while people talk and play music) of these poets/writers/musicians that in actuality display the innovatively serious ways these cultural players have arrived at their artistic expressions. This is not exactly a completely improvised Dadaist-like *happening*, for example, for spontaneity in this film is not as important as the *appearance* of spontaneity; in *Daisy*, as in so many of the Beat Generation offerings/writings, as conveyed by Kerouac’s mantras and only *partially*

truthful proclamations of spontaneous prose/“first thought best thought” (et al), controlled or *appeared* chaos seems to be the desired goal. These beginning scenes of *Daisy* with Ginsberg and Corso, which capture a full (work and school) day in a few minutes, portray seemingly innocent bohemianism, the kind that gets accentuated in Kerouac novels such as *On the Road* and *Dharma Bums* where starving artist-types congregate in smoke-hazed cold-water apartments or modest cabin-shacks to contemplate the dreary universe with untold enthusiasms and existential awareness of the *now* without notions of celebrity or fame. After all, Ginsberg here in *Daisy* plays a version of himself that is pre-fame and celebrity poet. The conveyance that this otherwise domesticated loft space of *Daisy* has become transformed into an open forum for art and intellectual playfulness for Ginsberg and company, as an “anything goes” environment, shows at least one manifestation of these relatively more innocent, less self-conscious Beat-types.

These two poets, Ginsberg and Corso, seemingly impoverished and a bit unwashed and grungy, loiter and mooch off their friends’ warm, empty apartment, lie for hours on the floor in a loafing mode that Walt Whitman would have been proud of—“I loafe and invite my Soul; I lean and loafe at my ease,” said Walt—and romantically combine the beat-bohemian trinity of drink (morning beer instead of coffee in this case), smoke (tobacco and cannabis), and spontaneous poetic proclamations and arguments. In context of the Bourdieu quotation that begins this section, one understands that *Daisy* captures a moment of artistic production via its “objects” of loft apartment, cigarettes, journal musings, organ, saxophone, et al, visually depicting the social and cultural conditions necessary in this case for Corso and Ginsberg to produce innovative poetry and poetic query. Without the availability of these social objects for playfulness—along

with Ginsberg's/Corso's whimsical gamesome usage of these objects along with their bodies and words—there would be no art, no *art-making*, and, further, without the leisurely availability (i.e. time) and space of a working friend's post-war urban apartment, the construction of Corso and Ginsberg's particular poetic ideas would not have as easily materialized, if at all. Thus, the habitus created by Milo and family gets reconstructed/reconfigured by the artists Ginsberg, Corso and company largely through the objects (including their bodies/space for words) they choose to manipulate and combine because of myriad *availabilities*.<sup>63</sup>

Kerouac's voiceover narration contributes to this space of playfulness and poetic spontaneity. He does not present a voice-over narration in the traditional sense, seeing as he supplies *all* of the narration and dialogue for every character, and he did so drunkenly and mostly on the fly. As the wife in *Daisy* uncovers all of the large loft windows, Kerouac proclaims: "Early morning in the universe," instantaneously indicating to the viewer that this is not just a loft space; rather a cosmos has opened up here, a vast space with an ether for poetry and romantic scatological thought. We see more than windows, more than a loft space; we recognize our possibilities. As we see Ginsberg and Corso gyrating and pontificating, we hear Kerouac's continued riffs: "dooms of bridges...goodbye...Empire State Building doomed...struggling to be poets...all the poets...purple moonlight pages...Golgotha...Apollinaire...violins...the Empire State has fallen under...the Gawanas Canal?"

We understand what Kerouac is saying here, at least on some level; he articulates the need to find beauty among the "doom"—to remind ourselves of past romantic poets, and to, most importantly, not be afraid to make unlikely associations and connections.

These words of power sound as if they have been said on the fly, but in reality, they have been spliced and taken from previously written material. Yet this doesn't matter. The spontaneity is still there because these words speak to this *moment*—*our* moment in this universe. Ginsberg then remarks via Kerouac: “Nothing but a million screaming 90-year-old men being run over by gasoline trucks.”

Corso responds via Kerouac: “So throw a match on it!” *Throw a match on it?!* Here the two poets look out the windows of the loft, and Kerouac's narration separates them from the street outside and below. They are of another world, albeit of this universe. We feel this absurdity and this grandiosity. This controlled absurdity, this vastness of a loft space that was in reality only twenty-four feet wide/eighty feet long/sixteen feet high, this combination of the appearance of spontaneity of these two poets with the verbal improvisations of Kerouac, who was well-known for his free-flowing word talents. David Amram explains about Kerouac's improvised narration in the sound studio. Frank and Leslie gave him the silent film to riff over.

Jack was in top form, gesturing towards the screen, as he wailed with his improvised narration, rising to the challenge like Charlie Parker soloing with his string orchestra at Birdland. His words were like a great jazz solo, soaring above and weaving through the structure of the film, shaping it teasing it, and telling a story-poem as if it were a familiar fable.<sup>64</sup>

Reportedly Kerouac improvised on top of the film two or three times (the actual number depends on conflicting reports), and then Leslie/Frank cut parts of these separate takes for the final voiceover narration. What results is a layering of controlled improvisation and spontaneity; herein, again, Ginsberg and Corso act out with loose direction, Kerouac free

flows, and Frank/Leslie have spliced together these spontaneities. A cut-up of actions and words.

What results is not innocuous because of this artful hybrid. Because of Kerouac's heard narration, even an everyday gesture such as a wife opening a window converts into some other space, some other romantic and poetic realm, a bohemian space. The window gains added romance, as do Ginsberg's lip movements and actions. The young Ginsberg, romantically, has been thrown into a poetic and artistic happening—a collaboration of inspiration in this loft. The art and spontaneity and control build off one another here. "Alfred and Robert knew that the narrations were a work of art on their own, even without the film," states Amram. "And yet each narration fit the film in an uncanny way."<sup>65</sup> An isolated work of art gets piled on top of other art forms, and the playfulness rests in this layering—a layering of words over bodies shot with "a rented Arriflex [camera] on a fine grain, black-and-white negative camera stock."<sup>66</sup> Poets, writers, musicians, painters, photographers, filmmakers, and actors had come together to create something surprisingly beautiful in this space—a space that embraces these representations of mid-1950s beat-bohemians as early gentrifiers in the Lower East Side. A space before beatniks, before hippies, before increasing middle class investment in the neighborhood that would cause property values to rise along with residential displacement. This all somehow seems less phony.

### 4.3 Art Making and Myth

The romantic struggling, starving artist who holds his/her art and art-making above all else is a familiar story and myth. Allen Ginsberg and his friends in *Daisy* fall in line with the historical associations and myths of the idealistic struggling/starving bohemian artists who wanted to rebel against established forces and thus offer society something *better* or at least something different and new. Nicholson writes about her chosen modern bohemians: “I believe that such people were not only choosing art, they were choosing the life of the artist. Art offered them a different way of living, one that they believed more than compensated for the loss of comfort and respectability. They reinvented daily life, and brought about changes that are with us to this day.”<sup>67</sup> Nicholson then mentions that the image of the bohemian struggling/starving artist did not begin with twentieth-century modernist artists. She claims that the “prototype” was put forth in Paris in 1851 with Henry Murger’s *Scenes de la Vie de Boheme*.<sup>68</sup> Murger’s *Boheme*, fictional though largely autobiographical sketches, depicts what one might expect: Hungry hand-to-mouth artists gather in a rundown garret; they drink coffee and wine when they can afford it, they excitedly talk and dream about their art, and they continually fall in and out of tortured love. Excess, vice, melodrama, destitution, and romance are all encouraged, often celebrated. Nicholson mentions that “Romanticism propagated” this Murger-inspired bohemianism. “Bohemians and Romantics have much in common; both were driven by headlong intemperance and a desire to live for the moment.”<sup>69</sup> Nineteenth-century Paris combined with the influence of the Romantic Movement to construct a “new definition of the ‘artist’ or ‘writer.’”<sup>70</sup> “Romantics elevated the artistic genius to the status of godlike hero. Art now expressed the originality of the unique creative

individual, and the artist's duty was to realize himself and his unique vision rather than to create works that expressed the dominant beliefs in society."<sup>71</sup> Nicholson then describes the romanticism that drove her bohemians: "idealism, artistic status, rejection of materialism, contempt for wealth."<sup>72</sup>

Elizabeth Wilson extends Nicholson's comments on bohemianism, writing about the myth of the bohemian artist and how this myth came into being:

Since that time, the early nineteenth century, the bohemian has been the hero—and anti-hero—of the story the West wanted to hear about its artists, a story of genius, glamour, outlawry and doom. . . . The vicissitudes of the bohemian way of life, its excesses, its triumphs, its failures and its aura of grim seriousness incongruously expressed in performance and pose, have always been good copy. Yet Bohemia is more than a series of stories about unusual individuals. . . . Bohemia is a cultural *Myth* about art in modernity.<sup>73</sup>

She continues: "Bohemia, therefore, could never be separated from its literary and visual representation . . . The first bohemians pictured themselves as embattled geniuses defending Art against a vulgar bourgeoisie."<sup>74</sup>

Admittedly, I have bought into this myth, or I probably would not be writing this document and making these applications. Even though Frank and Leslie's *Pull My Daisy* takes place a world away from the Romantics and Parisian bohemians of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe, the romantic ideas/representations of artistic idealism, genius, and necessary *excess* bear witness in this film—and, yes, they make for good copy. Ginsberg and his beat-bohemian friends as representations continue this tradition, this

fantasy and myth, of the struggling/starving artist that holds art and creativity and the unhindered momentary *now* above all else—above traditional bourgeoisie status symbols but also here above 1950s American middle class values. At a glance the actions of these poets and artists during this film might seem innocent enough, but if one reads Ginsberg’s “Independence Day Manifesto” that he wrote in 1959, the same year *Daisy* was released, one fully understands that rhapsodizing poetically (through a Kerouac voice-over no less) in a modest apartment with a friend would be interpreted as anything but innocuous to him. Ginsberg has bought into the myth of the artist’s *ideal*; his “unique vision” points to his belief in the artist-poet’s romantic possibility of achieving “god-like” hero status, of changing the minds of the masses:

Recent history is the record of a vast conspiracy to impose one level of mechanical consciousness on mankind and exterminate all manifestations of that unique part of human sentience, identical in all men, which the individual shares with the Creator. . . . At the same time there is a crack in the mass consciousness of America—sudden emergence of insight into a vast national subconscious netherworld filled with nerve gases, universal death bombs, malevolent bureaucracies, secret police systems, drugs that open the door to God, ships leaving Earth, unknown chemical terrors, evil dreams at hand. . . . America is having a nervous breakdown. Poetry is the record of individual insights into the secret soul of the individual and because all individuals are one in the eyes of their creator, into the soul of the world. The world has a soul. America is having a nervous breakdown.<sup>75</sup>



Ginsberg states he believes 1950s America is having a nervous breakdown, and he mentions a “mechanical consciousness” that refers to post-WWII industrial and post-industrial mechanization and automatization that limit the individual’s spirit, but/and his romantic belief in poetry’s capability of connecting with the soul and the “Creator” and meanwhile breaking down “mass consciousness” generally reiterates the classic bohemian myth: that if one is true to his/her art, one can connect with his/her soul and in effect change the world without compromising one’s ideals and integrity.

As a young poet in the 1950s, Ginsberg relied on poetry-as-a-way-to-the-individual-soul and souls of mankind, on the physical construction of poetic thought/voice, to help with this “nervous breakdown,” and thus one then can interpret “beat”-bohemian poetry as a reaction to this breakdown—as a manifestation of and reaction to the schism that the country’s breakdown had created. For Ginsberg, poetry was a way for him to address these national problems and find ways through the “crack” of repressed/oppressed American consciousness—which is why the depictions of physical and oral/aural creations of poetics in *Pull My Daisy*, by Ginsberg-Kerouac, spontaneous or not, are so important and revealing. These romantic poet-artists, in an “early morning universe,” are attempting to creatively tackle the chasm of the state. These efforts, of creative poetic bandaging, rely heavily on this loft space and its mentioned tangibles; however, with Ginsberg’s mentioned poetic romanticism, this space gets transcended . . . into a mythic space for poetic repair. Into a space for poetry-making and the creation/extension of a myth. Bohemia, after all, is foremost a myth of what an artist has the potential to do and change. In this case—on film and ideationally—we do witness the myth of converted space, but more crucially we also see a myth, a hope,

of/for the conversion of a national consciousness via art and romantic art-making. And, this, these ideas/these creations, starting in seemingly harmless loft apartments, but ending in generational philosophies, are now well known but worth repeating here:

Definitions of *Beat* and credos of the *Beat Generation* have varied a bit, but “beat” at least partially took its name from Dante’s Beatific Vision, the beat of jazz, and the junkie-wayward’s vagabond notion of “beat down.”<sup>76</sup> Intrinsically, to be “beat” is also to be flawed and imperfect, which Ginsberg thinks can be conveyed by poetry as an extension of the soul. For, being “beat” is to pronounce the grit and grime of a place, to revel in the ecstasy of exhaustion. John Leland alludes to this extension of beat-dom in *Hip: The History*: “Under its umbrella, hip becomes not sumptuary correctness . . . but a state of forgiveness for being *incorrect*. . . . we admire him not for his perfection but for the blamelessness of his flaws.”<sup>77</sup> We combine these flaws—gritty camera footage of a messy, rundown apartment with scruffy artists and an unpolished voice-over—with something beatific (“holiness” in the universe), and then we have a romantic tone for *Daisy*: a short film fueled by Amram’s jazz music that shows Ginsberg’s flawed excitement as he and Corso and others work poetically “into the soul of the world”; this is, again, very romantic, and this is a, yes, tried and true *reversion/extension* to/of the associations of Romantic poets and Murger’s hand-to-mouth artists and all-around bohemians of yore, but presumably if one had asked Ginsberg what he and Corso were doing in this beginning portion of *Daisy*, he would have said that Yes(!) in the romantic continuum of Bohemia they were “working” on their poetry, not loafing or goofing. For in his eyes excessive, free-form spontaneous poetic rhapsodizing comprised the most beatific valuable work of all, and here lies the crucial point: playfulness and work are

interchangeable—in our past bohemias, in our *Myth* of Bohemia, and here now in this film.

In a post-WWII, Cold War, mechanical, nuclear age, play and poetry have become instrumental alternatives for Ginsberg and his associates in ways that supplanted religion before Ginsberg delved fully into Buddhism and Kerouac reverted back to his more traditional Catholicism. In the mid-1950s, the period *Daisy* is said to depict, these nameless bohemians were fighting the outside forces (i.e. mechanical nuclear age, conformity-laden demands of home and work, “mechanical consciousness”, et al) in the best ways they knew how: with play and words and romantic thought. Thus, these concepts combined with the seemingly harmless epoch of a smoky Lower East Side loft take on added meaning of a romantic/mythic *happening* for psychic national conversion, for what was the Beat Generation if not a series of makeshift affordable spaces for artists to meet, to “blow” and “go,” and feel open to express themselves and their ideas as they strive for ideals and the Ideal? *Daisy* ends with the men going off to “play by fires in the Bowery,” thus illustrating the shifting of a newfound space of revelry for these poets and even the working-man/weekend-beat warrior Milo. These men wanted something better. Accompanying this willingness to perpetually find a space/place for celebration was a hopefulness for something beautiful (or beatific), “a *will* to believe,” as John Clellon Holmes wrote in an essay for the *New York Times*, “[despite] the valueless abyss of modern life.”<sup>78</sup> To find something beautiful in this rundown grit, something perfect in the flaws, to write and express poetically amid the “abyss” and doom and shit. The artists in *Daisy* continually try to capture something holy, as they ask and repeat over and again in the film, something that resembles a type of heaven/utopia on/in earth/universe for the

existing chasm in and outside “America.” Ginsberg and Corso strive for it with their poetic proclamations, the group strives for it as they play music, and they strive for it as they question the bishop who enters halfway through the film, and, after falling short with these efforts, the group goes off into the Bowery night to strive once more, as cheerlead by Kerouac’s verbal visions.

#### 4.4 Outsiders, the Alternative, and Controlled/Spontaneous Revelry

The legacy of Bohemia is one of outsiders and outcasts on the margins, and beginning at least with Murger’s tales, bohemians carried a(n) (un)healthy amount of antipathy towards the bourgeoisie. After World War Two, in the United States, the French term “bourgeoisie” was then replaced by “conformist 1950s U.S. suburbs.” In this climate, before the bohemian-beats were called *beatniks* by the media, before they were lampooned and satirized, Ginsberg and his friends as depicted in *Pull My Daisy* were struggling idealistic poets, writers, and artists in early-to-mid 1950s America whom had yet to see the limelight. Their at-the-time minority viewpoints and unruly actions, away from fame and publicity, easily fit with Bohemia’s tradition of unconventional artists living and working “*against* the dominant culture.”<sup>79</sup> For, the Myth of Bohemia has always presented itself as an orb for misfits and eccentric outsiders, and in watching *Daisy* one immediately sees this day in the life of Ginsberg, et al as *alternative*—as an alternative to Milo’s wife’s domesticated life taking care of her home and child, and as an alternative lifestyle from Milo himself, who comes home tired from a long day of work as a brakeman. Barbara Ehrenreich notes of the Beats’ two main alternative tendencies: “the two strands of . . . protest—one directed against the white-collar work world and the

other against the suburbanized family life that work was supposed to support—come together into the first all-out critique of American consumer culture.”<sup>80</sup> As Ehrenreich mentions, Ginsberg and his friends did not want white-collar jobs, and they refused to live in the suburbs, which presents a rebellion against “American consumer culture.” They did not want to use and consume the expected materials in typical ways, even a loft apartment with tables and chairs and a sink and a bed. They needed to convert these materials into something else more romantic, hopefully more beautiful. In *Daisy*, Ginsberg and Corso sit/lie on the floor, and loaf and play in sheer contrast to Milo’s 9-to-5 grind and in protest of Milo’s wife as she prepares breakfast and takes her son to school. *Daisy* here functions as one moment, one alternate reality, a snapshot *other* choice for a life—call this one *tendency* that represents larger tendencies and cultural vagaries for other people who did not want to conform. Waxing poetically/drunkenly/highly/romantically looks and seems a lot better, or at least more enjoyable, than white-collar responsibility and/or suburban family life—and, this is both potentially irresponsible *and* fantastic.

Certain perhaps conservative viewers of this opening scene with Ginsberg and Corso might demand that these two bums should get jobs, but as Theodore Roszak reflects in *The Making of the Counter Culture*, the Age of Affluence that benefited those living between 1942 and 1972 allowed more people, especially the young, “to explore a new range of issues raised by an unprecedented increase in the standard of living. For a period of some twenty years the world’s most prosperous industrial society became an arena of raucous and challenging moral inquiry the likes of which we may never see again.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, the availability and possibility of this scene in this Bowery apartment was

primed for poets such as Ginsberg and Corso to live a leisurely lifestyle that had ample room for intellectual and artistic pursuits. “In 1944 there had been only 114,000 new single homes started; by 1946 that figure had jumped to 937,000: to 1,118,000 in 1948; and 1.7 million in 1950,” writes David Halberstam.<sup>82</sup> The 1950s American affluence brought increasing home and automobile ownership, not to mention increasing disposable income for televisions and other luxury items to fill these newly bought homes. Kids and teenagers foremost also had newly added disposable income to buy the items they needed for leisure *and* rebellion. Hence, the world, the American economy especially, had opened up for Ginsberg and a younger generation of others, to rebel/to loafe/to even just create art. These dynamics then add a complexity to the mentioned bohemian/'50s suburbs clash. These beat-bohemians were rebelling against post-WWII conformity, but they were (in)directly benefiting from the country's at-the-time high standard of living that created abundant time, space, and money for leisure and artistic creation.

Likewise, the mentioned oppositions to traditional 1950s work, school, and play get new paradigm players with the emergence of Peter Orlovsky (“the saint”) and then a local young bishop (played by painter Larry Rivers) as an honored guest to the apartment. The bishop is asked repeated questions concerning Buddhism and all else in the universe that may or may not be “holy,” a common trope among Ginsberg's earlier writings. Peter asks: “Is baseball holy?” and the bishop ponders this and other questions, but he appears a bit bewildered by the whole scene at the apartment. These joyous clowns, maybe a bit drunk, maybe slightly high, “goof” (as proclaimed by Kerouac) with words and then music, playing brass horns to an accompanied organ. Getting late, the bishop then leaves, and Milo's wife gets upset because the visit had not gone as planned, in a more “civilized

manner,” remarking: “all of this nonsense . . . all the time you give him [the bishop] wine and beer and then there are these beatniks in the house!”

Even though Milo’s wife is a painter and a creative-type in *Daisy*, her angry reservations resemble the ideology of “respectable” American middle class suburban society. She is discomfited with this unorthodox behavior, what has an underlying theme of playfulness and perhaps homoeroticism (or at least homosocialism) that she perceives as immature and uncivilized. Granted, Ginsberg and Peter, lifelong lovers in a homosexual union, closely albeit innocently sit on the couch in this film, but what’s most notable about this boys’ club is the ease at which these adult men spontaneously and uninhibitedly play with one another. Frank and Leslie reportedly preempted this construction, taking pains to make these scenes appear spontaneous and improvised while still holding true to the plot and vision of Kerouac’s script, demanding from them a delicate balance of control and a freeform space of artistic expression. David Amram states:

The day we finally began filming *Pull My Daisy* . . . was a prelude to weeks of chaotic, fun-filled madhouse clowning. Somehow, this endless party was guided by Alfred Leslie’s direction and Robert Frank’s ability to film the unfilmable. Both of them managed to stay calm, supportive, and organized, day and night, patiently telling the cast exactly what our motivation should be, where we should stand, and what we should say, so Jack could later lip-sync key moments of dialogue when he narrated the film.<sup>83</sup>

For years after *Daisy*'s debut, viewers were led to believe this was in fact a completely improvised affair, when in actuality it was scripted after Kerouac's play, and the actors took specific direction from Frank and Leslie around the set. The film historian Blaine Allan writes, "Defending the film against a cult that misunderstood his ideas of spontaneity [Leslie] wrote, a decade after the film's production, that the 'film was no more random or improvised than Antonioni or Rossellini,' and that 'amateurism in DAISY was used to reinforce reality.' As Dody Muller pragmatically points out, the filmmakers did not have the money to be disorganized."<sup>84</sup> Further, Allan writes:

[Leslie] devised a plan to ensure that he would have enough choices when he edited the film by making at least three takes of every setup. . . . Such a plan permitted spontaneity by providing a structure within which the actors could work with relative freedom. On the set, he let the actors go through each shot to observe what ideas they brought to the scene, and walked through it with them and talked it out before putting the shot on film. In addition, the production gained a degree of freedom because it was shot without sound. Planning for triple takes, Leslie suggested changes from one to the next and accepted the alterations that his actors brought to the shot. . . . To prepare, Leslie, broke the script down into "movements." He numbered Kerouac's script in segments, like a musical score numbered by phrase. He recalls that each night he walked through the scenes he planned to shoot the next day, measuring the number of steps needed to cross a space.<sup>85</sup>



What does add to the spontaneous feel of the film, however, is Ginsberg and company's continual resistance to Frank and Leslie's directions. Frank reports having had a difficult time getting his actors to do what he wanted, which falls in line with the beat-bohemian trope of resistance to authority and control, even if the control has been orchestrated via avant-garde filmmakers (a photographer and a painter). In his memoir, *Offbeat* David Amram describes some outrageous scenes that fell on the cutting room floor of *Daisy* that include Ginsberg, Corso, and Orlovsky taking off their clothes and drunkenly pouring wine and trash on one another, amid other unruly and naked antics.<sup>86</sup> The actors continually went off script, both orally and in their movements. Blaine Allan writes, "Cast members also tried dutifully to ruin takes; Ginsberg dropped his trousers while the filmmakers were trying to take a closeup of an easily distracted Corso."<sup>87</sup> It took a load of patience and diligence from Leslie and Frank to reign their subjects in, but in the end they managed to do so. Delphine Seyrig, the actress who plays Milo's wife in *Daisy*, consoled Kerouac whom was dismayed by the perceivably chaotic nature of the set: "Don't worry. Let them be silly. Let them have fun. We'll salvage something beautiful out of all this to honor you. When you put your words to the film it will sing like the angels sing. You and David can do it. Robert and Alfred can do it. I don't know how, but I know we *will*."<sup>88</sup>

Yet, what specifically constitutes *controlled spontaneity* in the final edited film? If one looks to the script of Kerouac's play, *The Beat Generation* and then to the finished product of *Pull My Daisy* (unfortunately an original *Pull My Daisy* film script has not been found), one sees many overlapping similarities. At the core of both narratives is a group of artistic beats who have questions for a visiting bishop, in attempts to ruffle the

feathers of a status quo, along with a scene towards the end of the film where the poets play “cowboy.” Yet, even though these fairly clear-cut aims exist in both texts, the dialogue and physical movements of the actors were left for Leslie and Frank to experiment with and direct/plan out in an open forum, hence some of the foolery left on the cutting room floor along with some of the shocking moments that actually make it into the film.

Notably, the opening scene with Ginsberg and Corso is left out of the original play. Leslie, who was responsible for directing the actions of the actors, reportedly wanted Ginsberg and Corso to drink and play poetically with each other, verbalize their “secret naked doodlings” or “secret scatological thought.” Furthermore, upon the bishop’s arrival and gathering around the table, Leslie knew that he wanted his characters to ask the bishop bizarre questions, but the specific types of questions were open for improvisation. Before the bishop arrives, Milo tells Ginsberg, Corso, and Peter to “act on good behavior,” and that there were to be “no flutes, no nonsense.” These forewarnings set up an opportunity for the visitors to rebel; that is, to surprise the bishop and shock his conservative mother and aunt with awkward questions about Buddhism, heaven, holiness, and “girls with tight dresses,” causing the bishop to nervously pace around the room while pondering and answering these questions. In a telling moment of silence around the table, the music turns darker as we see Ginsberg’s thoughts acted out. He crouches in the doorway, lifts one leg, and shoots the air with his fingers as Kerouac riffs on the doomed cockroaches of the coming apocalypse. This dystopian turn has a dark mood of gloom as Kerouac proclaims: “Freud, Jung, Reich,” indicating the darker psychological undertones that act as foil to the questions about holiness. After this moment, an “improvised”

musical scene begins with the bishop's mother playing organ and Mez, Milo, and Pablo playing brass horns. This scene jumps to the boys on the couch playing "cowboy"; that is, they each come up with their own cowboy Western tale, which culminates with Milo's telling of a cowboy who ends up shooting a priest in the head, a pointed metaphor for what has just taken place with the bishop minutes before.

Blaine Allan mentions that Leslie and Frank roughly worked out the scenes each night before shooting, which took fourteen days, and that they had a fairly clear goal for each scene but that the directions weren't so restrictive that the actors could not improvise when and where they saw fit. David Amram reiterates that even though most of the more chaotic scenes were cut from the finished film, pieces of these incidents remain; these moments, collectively, a reported hybrid of control and improvisation—with Ginsberg and Corso pontificating, with questions for the bishop, with the music jam sessions, with playing cowboy—give the impression of spontaneity, even though each scene or sphere had been primarily pre-constructed. Since no record of the screenplay exists, one can only guess at which moments were actually improvised, but regardless it is certain that much of the film was pre-planned to appear spontaneous, and, what finally and crucially adds to the spontaneous feel of the film is Kerouac's narration; the voiceover sounds like a free-flowing improvised rap, but in reality some lines were taken from his original play script, some directive dialogue was implemented by Leslie and Frank, and perhaps most tellingly, the film editors spliced together different versions of Kerouac's narration, cutting and pasting phrases and segments for effect. Thus, the final voiceover product is partially improvised but mainly edited and polished to paradoxically sound unpolished.<sup>89</sup>

In the end, what we have with *Daisy* is somewhat of a compromise between directors and actors, and this assumedly gets exemplified in such scenes in which Ginsberg gyrates on the floor, Corso and the others ask the bishop ridiculous questions: “Is basketball holy?”, and Kerouac improvises: “Poor Gregory. Hero of stove and pipe butter.” These moments are shocking even now to a typical audience both because they are unexpected and out of the ordinary for a normally nicely packaged 1950s film, but they also fall in line with the plot and narrative intentions of this particular film: to capture a moment in time while using a semi-spontaneous/pseudo-spontaneous vehicle. *Daisy* then depicts the very heart of the beat-bohemian thing—that product of perceived spontaneity that is actually a well thought-out and constructed affair that also entails a few moments of brilliant improvisation. Bohemians, historically, after all took great pains to design, set-up, and (re)construct their rundown and materially limited environments—to prime their garrets and bars (et al) for revelry and free flowing premeditations of moments and *happenings*. And, perhaps this contributes to the reasons the beats would become so heavily marketed and perhaps why Ginsberg in particular would become such a celebrity, even in older age as a player in neo-bohemia; these bohemian-beats and Ginsberg especially knew how to appropriately set the stage for a semi-spontaneous spectacle. The edginess of this film is just planned and controlled enough to allow spectators to have a touch and look, to *comprehend* and understand the offered bohemian narratives and messages. The film was (and is) digestible, as Ginsberg too would become increasingly digestible and even more conventionally understood in his later years. He was *radical* or at least progressive, but he wasn’t, for example, *too* radical for a television show (or for this film for that matter). The myth and space(s) of Ginsberg’s Bohemia

were becoming manageable. In the final section of this chapter, and in subsequent chapters, I then further investigate this potential for (neo)bohemian “manageability” and stage setting, in his favored neighborhood and in spheres beyond.

#### 4.5 In Conclusion: Approaching Neo-Bohemia

All of these moments and actions of Corso and Ginsberg especially in a rundown loft apartment with fairly modest materials in reach contribute to an aura and habitus of bohemianism that coincides with Elizabeth Wilson’s and other scholars’ mentioned traditions of Bohemia/ la vie de Boheme: a social milieu created against a dominant culture that falls into a subculture of artists and associates who live the Bohemian Myth—romantics who go against the status quo, typically resulting in “transgression, excess, sexual outrage, eccentric behavior, outrageous appearance, nostalgia and poverty.”<sup>90</sup> Yet, as I’ve alluded to, Ginsberg and his friends did not remain traditionally nor *completely* bohemian in the sense of (representations of) 1800s Paris or even 1920s Greenwich Village for long. The depicted mid-1950s anonymous bohemian Ginsberg would soon find himself fully immersed in a post-WWII postindustrial setting that included increasing culture industries alongside commercially flexible and pop cultural representations of the artist and rebel. These bohemians were becoming famous, and many of them were going to make a living doing it because their lifestyles and ideas had become increasingly marketable and commodifiable.

It is important to note that Milo’s wife, in the heat of an argument, in *Daisy* calls his friends “beatniks.” She highlights the derogatory connotation of the term, and this negative displacement and reduction of a movement and school of thought hearkens to a

*Life* magazine article that was written soon after the release of *Daisy* in 1959 that lambasts the Beats as cartoonish beatniks who are some of the “hairiest, scrawniest, and most discontented specimens of all time.” The article further reports: “A hundred million squares must ask themselves: ‘What have we done to deserve this?’” Beneath these pugnacious words, a series of photographs follow with all of the accompanied beatnik clichés, the most notable of which is a photograph titled “The Well-Equipped Pad,” with the caption of “all the essentials of uncomfortable living.”<sup>91</sup> This “pad,” which was tellingly recreated in a production studio using paid models, shows a “Beat chick dressed in black . . . a bearded Beat wearing sandals, chinos and turtle-necked sweater and studying a record by the late saxophonist Charlie Parker . . . a typewriter with half-finished poem, [and] . . . Beat poetry leaflet (*Abomunist Manifesto*)” among other stereotypical Beat/beatnik objects and poses.<sup>92</sup>

For all purposes, this article and accompanying photographs were performed in *earnest* ridicule, which speaks to the great disparity between the popular media imaginings of the Beat Generation and the filmic episodes of *Pull My Daisy* that were based on actual events in Neal and Carolyn Cassady’s home in the mid-1950s. For, again, referencing Bourdieu, the objects used by Ginsberg and company are for play alongside meaningful conversation and artistic output, not superficial consumption of purchased items. However, as result of this article’s ridiculous depictions, some of these very same objects used in “The Well-Equipped Pad,” i.e. cheap loft apartment, kitchen table, music records, typewriter, writing journals, beard, etc., lose meaning, or at least are positioned into a realm where they are taken less seriously. This lack of beat seriousness would culminate in *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, a popular primetime television show

starring Bob Denver as the beard-sporting, bongo-playing harmless beatnik, a show which premiered in 1959, the same year as *Pull My Daisy*'s release. The mentioned mythic-romantic elements of *Daisy*—sphere for playful poetic idealism/alternative locale for existential freedom and self-expression, et al—are not to be found in *Dobie Gillis*. At some point, around the late 1950s, the myth had turned into innocuous cartoon and the alternative/protest had been bought by the “company store.” David Amram writes:

The 1950s were over. The company store had bought up our ideas and repackaged them into an image so specious that we realized we were no longer welcome unless we wanted to join the charade. I think Robert and Alfred knew better than Jack and I why *Pull My Daisy* should be made. As Robert said, with *Pull My Daisy* we captured a moment in time.<sup>93</sup>

As I explore in the next chapter, of all the beats, Ginsberg soon emerged as the most vocal spokesman and publicized figure of the 1960s. It was his younger days, as portrayed in *Pull My Daisy*, which helped establish his core sense of a bohemian self, even as he evolved/changed and continually transformed/responded with his growing times. “[I]t went beyond anything we ‘planned,’” he told the writer Bruce Cook. “It was a visionary experience . . . when we started. Now everybody sees and understands these things.”<sup>94</sup> Remarkably, it is in these captured moments of *Pull My Daisy* in 1959 that we see a representation of Ginsberg pre-fame and poet-guru celebrity. In the telling first six minutes of this film, he and a friend (Corso) are “caught” in the construction of their poet prophecies, all available objects in tow. Their roles here fit into a bohemian mold to be certain, and one does wonder if later representations of bohemian Ginsberg are as transparent as this one. For, as I’ve mentioned, Ginsberg (as a character playing himself)

in these moments shows how he arrives at poetic ideas: he freestyles with Corso on lines from his journal; he also transforms a traditional space into a creative milieu; he questions the conservative authorities of work, school, and religion; he plays with his same-sex lover, Peter the “saint”; he immerses himself in an experimental environment of poetry, philosophy, and music; and, he embraces the moment for further experimentations in the Bowery and the bohemian-infused Lower East Side—all unconventional modes of behavior in 1955. As I move forward with an analysis of Ginsberg’s life and work, and even to contemporary pop cultural texts that depict Ginsberg and the Beat Generation such as the film *Howl* (2010), one must keep in mind the socio-spatial ideologies of *Pull My Daisy* as an appropriate bohemian benchmark of *place, space*, and the *alternative* while asking the important question: How did the character of an unknown bohemian Allen Ginsberg of *Pull My Daisy* come to be represented after his death in 1997 in such contemporary commercially marketable pop-cultural neo-bohemian fashions? An investigation of his life and work post *Daisy* can only illuminate how and why the bohemian Ginsberg turned into the bohemian celebrity and then neo-bohemian icon; I now look further to changing spaces and fluctuating myths as our celebrated bohemian takes center page and camera. He sits passively on the couch with decreasing frequency, and he eventually buys his own loft in the Lower East Side.



## CHAPTER 5: BOHEMIAN BEAT MORPHS INTO BOHEMIAN CELEBRITY

*Pull My Daisy* captures one last momentary representation of the younger, anonymous Allen Ginsberg; for, as the 1960s approached—as his books of poetry sold in the tens of thousands (no small feat for a contemporary poet), and as he involved himself in television talk shows, radio segments, public readings to large audiences, voice recordings, and perpetual all-around media attention (his visage was consistently in the newspaper, and he was always good for a soundbite or two)—he had established himself as a famous celebrity poet and liberal voice for the masses, which included a growing audience among the U.S. middle classes. *Howl* (1956) and *Kaddish* (1961) had been published, and he had firmly cemented himself with the famous literary-historical movement that is the Beat Generation.<sup>95</sup>

Even though, as he would always state, he and his beat generation friends started this movement in earnest, he also navigated the tide of media-driven lampoons and commercialization of the *beatniks*. Because of his beat-bohemian experiences and because of his dealings with beatnik ridicule/satire, as he entered the 1960s, he was better prepared for the emerging counterculture and its marketable offshoots and co-optations. He entered the daunting, turbulent yet exciting 1960s flower children/hippie realm with a strong sense of his bohemian self. He never shed that, even as his bohemianism became more and more popular with the 1960s youth, U.S. advertising firms, and inevitably among the widespread middle class American suburbs. He was prepared for this—what I

term his *Inclusion*—because he believed in his bohemian core, and, as I argue, because he held steadfast to it. He, in fact, wanted *everyone* to be bohemian, hoped for it, meditated on it. This *change* on Ginsberg’s part then included an added understanding of his beat-bohemian self but also an awareness that conservative middle class America was not his simple enemy opposition. As he grew into his celebrity and notoriety (and self-awareness), he increasingly maintained hope for the middle class masses, especially among the young. Ginsberg’s new understanding/attitude then fits with my arc-of-gentrification and simultaneously positions Ginsberg as a man who was metaphorically gentrified; as a neo-bohemian neighborhood consists of a blend of the bohemian and the commercial, of idealistic struggling artists and middle class patrons/ dabblers/ investments-investors in/of art and the artistic-bohemian image/myth/style-ways, Ginsberg then as a bohemian who embraced, appealed to/ingratiated himself with, and even celebrated aspects of the middle class masses became a neo-bohemian; he catapulted into neo-bohemia. Frankly, I can think of no better person as a representative for the complexities of neo-bohemia.

As I illustrate below, his change from a bohemian-beat to a countercultural hippie father figure is important, but more so is how his bohemianism increasingly influenced and fit in with the wider American consciousness through his role as “useful laborer” and “flexible accumulator” of art and entertainment in an increasingly neo-bohemian country/cosmos. Richard Lloyd writes, “Rather than looking at artists as a resistant subculture, I became compelled to think of artists as useful labor, and to ask how their efforts are harnessed on behalf of interests that they often sincerely profess to despise.”<sup>96</sup> Lloyd explains that Neo-Bohemia, “for all that it derives from the examples of bohemia

past, is distinguished from them by its own structural contexts, today associated with globalization, neoliberalism, and the postindustrial metropolis”,<sup>97</sup> and he concludes that these new bohemians then function within the late-stage capitalist system, contributing to it in new and novel ways (especially in the provisions of art, media, and entertainment) as workers within the modern capitalist parameters. Likewise, starting in the 1960s, as a useful laborer and progressive-minded accumulator of art/ multi-media/ performance/ activism/ celebrity, Ginsberg then fit in and grew with these U.S. and global capitalist aims. While he maintained the core aspects of his bohemianism, he made a lot of money while doing it, and he garnered fame and accolades, while continually finding new and unique (and lucrative) ways to perpetuate his bohemian messages and images.

In this chapter, I primarily analyze and apply later Ginsberg poems (poems that have received less attention than *Howl* and *Kaddish*) that illuminate his mentioned *change* from a hyper-individualized *separated/isolated* bohemian to a publicly embraced and late-stage capitalism-contributing neo-bohemian celebrity and *laborer*, along with poems that reflect his relationship and impact on the gentrified Lower East Side and his position(s) as a 1960s (neo)bohemian guru/myth.

In the subsequent chapter I investigate a few pop-cultural Ginsberg representations along with some later Ginsberg poems that present the last point of trajectory on this gentrification arc—of how the man sailed even further from Bohemia to Neo-Bohemia in later life and posthumously. Ginsberg then, as a new media-driven and globalized laborer and commodity, functioned/functions as a simulacra *brand* of former (nostalgic) bohemia and neo-bohemia combined.

## 5.1 The Change

There was a transition period for Ginsberg as he moved from his relatively small, close-knit beat subculture into the countercultural and more public 1960s hippie realm. Christopher Mele mentions the differences between the two cultures Ginsberg involved himself in the 1950s and 1960s: Compared to the hippies, “the beats’ critique of bourgeois society in the 1950s was largely intellectual—beats did not develop into a popular social movement but instead sought to influence critically particular established literary and musical genres or create new ones.” He continues, “beat culture remained a critique of middle-class, suburban society, but it never transformed itself into a public movement that would avow direct interest in expressly political or social matters. The formation of a movement ‘broader in shape and more political in direction’ in the 1960s marked a departure from the beats’ more passive social critique.”<sup>98</sup> Mele cites crucial distinctions; the beats were intellectual, and they were clearly positioned outside of society, especially with their “critique of bourgeois society in the 1950s”—a standpoint that aligns them with a more classically bohemian realm and stance. Even though I would argue that a “critique” and rebellion against the 1950s suburban society comprises a pretty political aim, and even though the beats/beatniks received their fair amount of press in the late 1950s, the beats were not as out-in-the-open nor visible or even as publicly commercialized as the 1960s hippies. The hippies upped the public countercultural ante on the beats. They were and still are the quintessential U.S. counterculture; for, assumedly, when the term *counterculture* gets mentioned the 1960s hippies are usually the first group to come to mind. The beats, relatively, invited far less publicity; for starters, Kerouac couldn’t handle and then hated the fame (and its

accompanying misunderstandings), and William Burroughs could have basically cared less, amid his residences overseas and struggles with drug addiction.

But, as Mele states, “Key players in the 1950s movement (such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac) appeared as central figures and spokespersons of the hippie lifestyle. Likewise, principal landmarks of the beat era surfaced as hangouts and meeting places for the hippie movement.” In truth, the beatnik publicity/spectacle, along with alcohol, pretty much killed Kerouac (he died in 1969; in actuality he wasn’t much of a spokesman for the hippie lifestyle), which then left Ginsberg to do the work if he wanted to—but as Ginsberg navigated from one epoch/movement to the next, he would then have to change his mindset; for, as Mele writes, “The beats’ credo of ‘dropping out’ and disengaging from the mainstream as a form of social critique grew less appealing to middle class youth in the 1960s than the prospect of confronting and changing society. In the making of a new counterculture and identity, the description ‘hippie’ supplanted that of beat or beatnik.” He explains, “By the mid-1960s, the hippies had constructed a subculture based around a proactive and open critique of bourgeois society and in support of widespread social change. Consequently, the movement’s rituals and characteristics and the establishment of community were infused with ideals of collectivity and public visibility.”<sup>99</sup> Ginsberg then had to find a way to “fit in” with the “collectivity” and “public visibility” of this emerging counterculture. His beats had inspired aspects of the hippie movement, but if he wanted to lead this new more openly public counterculture, to significantly contribute to the out-front “support of widespread social change,” he would have to make some personal adjustments.

After travelling in India and other parts of Asia for almost two years, and close to a home return to North America, he had a realization on a train in Japan in the summer of 1963. He was not a young poet anymore, he was approaching 40, and he suddenly realized “that his search for visions and death, the classical decision to be or not to be, had been a colossal waste of time. What was going to happen would happen regardless.”<sup>100</sup> Ginsberg broke down crying on the Tokyo express train, in what he describes as an “exalted open state.”<sup>101</sup> He now felt, moving forward, his life would be different as he wrote “The Change: *Kyoto-Tokyo Express*.” He writes: “I am what I am,” establishing his awareness-acceptance; “[he] had slowly come to the belief that the keys to a person’s life were already within each individual.”<sup>102</sup> “Then I began looking around on the train and seeing all the other mortal faces,” he states of this time, “‘with their noses of weakness and woe,’ and I saw how exquisitely dear they all were—we all were—so I pulled out my notebook...”<sup>103</sup>

This was a change from his mindset of his Beat days, even of his immediate post-*Howl* celebrity. He was ready to accept and love himself fully, to fit in with the physical world, all warts and farts included. He had, in his mind, officially shed his insecure and vulnerable even misguided beat(nik) skin, the skin of a hip outsider against the suburban middle class norms. He was ready for *immersion*; that is, the outsider was now ready to connect himself to the flesh-bound and material parameters of the world, and this included an immersion of his fame, his public image and its accompanying fallacies (or illusions of fallacies), a distinction which required a more successful breaking down of his private-public constructs. “The way Allen saw it, by using every available means—‘radio, newspapers, television, lottery banks and gossip’—the world could be connected

to one consciousness, to a blissful state that would eliminate suffering, despair, cruelty, and anger: ‘Everyone plugged in at once to announce the Coming Union of All consciousness,’ Ginsberg stated.<sup>104</sup>

He felt his life previously had consisted of an obsession with his self-involved isolated suffering, that he had held death and doom/destitution as solitary fears and results only he and his select close-knit circle had known; now he was ready to encompass this suffering, to universalize it, to integrate it into the fabric of existence, to celebrate suffering as mosaics of the larger human experience as he was more honest and (for)giving with himself. As a celebrity poet now, he vowed to give and connect all of himself, even as Schumacher tells it, by “using every available means”; in “The Change,” he catalogues some of his/the usual despairs like he always had:

Shit! Intestines boiling in sand fire  
 creep yellow brain cold sweat  
 earth unbalanced vomit thru

...

Oh I remember myself so

Gaspings, staring at dawn over  
 lower Manhattan the bridges  
 covered with rust, the slime

...

Oh how wounded, how wounded, I

...

Oh crying man crying woman  
 crying guerilla shopkeeper  
 crying dysentery boneface on  
 the urinal street of the Self

But Ginsberg then makes a *turn*—a deviation from his poetic habit of isolating himself and his associates from the rest of humanity; he connects/intertwines himself with his mentioned sufferers, *all of them*: “Yes I am that worm soul under/ the heel of the daemon

horses/ I am that man trembling to die/ in vomit & trance in bamboo/ eternities belly  
 ripped . . .” He then returns to his more accustomed “I” identity but only after his  
 newfound immersion: “—Come sweetly/now back to my Self as I was—”

Allen Ginsberg says this: I am  
 a mass of sores and worms  
 & baldness & belly & smell  
 I am false . . .  
 . . .  
 oooh for the hate I have spent  
     in denying my image & cursing  
     the breasts of illusion—  
     Screaming at murderers, trembling  
     between their legs in fear of the  
     steel pistols of my own mortality—

He realizes his Ego/ego, then turns to his more humble nature. He is ready to be part of the living, apart from the hate and illusions and self-centered isolationism. He had spent too much time blaming the world—Moloch, the destroyers of men, murderers, outward crushers of spirit—and now he chooses to be a part of the world, not fear his connection to it. He wrote in his journal around this time that his attitude in New York before he left for India and Japan had been one that was too hung up on himself in relation/connection to the death/destruction of the world, and that a friend who had recently committed suicide had been too caught up with the negative though passing illusions of the world as well; he writes: “I was too trapped in my own death movie in NY last to be any help.”<sup>105</sup> “One conclusion I came to,” he wrote to Kerouac, “. . . is that I really should treat people gentler and not insult and drive them into a corner so they claw out in self defense.”<sup>106</sup> One can now assume that Ginsberg didn’t fully believe in the “Independence Day Manifesto” he wrote in 1959; he did not need to focus on the “nervous breakdown” of the country, nor did he need to busy himself with the “crack” in the nation’s consciousness;



he views these distinctions as illusory and needlessly time-consuming, even overly self-involved and unhelpful. He had spent so much time obsessing about his individual quest/yearning for immortality in the past, while looking through the crack(s); yet, here and now, he realizes his *shared* mortality:

In my train seat I renounce  
 my power, so that I do  
 live I will die

...  
 but a universe of skin and breath  
 & changing thought and  
 burning hand & softened  
 heart in the old bed of  
 my skin From this single  
 birth reborn that I am  
 to be so—

My own identity now nameless  
 Neither man nor dragon or  
 God<sup>107</sup>

This poem presents a different outlook for a celebrity poet; for one normally thinks of a celebrity as ego-driven, as perhaps elitist and of the mindset that s/he is separated from the rest. In “The Change,” Ginsberg vows to strip away his “Identity,” to embrace and accept the pact of humanity and its ensuing human connections to one another regarding life, not necessarily death; he does not put himself *outside* other people; he more nonjudgmentally connects their lives to his death, and vice versa. He does not curse these illusions any longer.

Remarkably, Ginsberg documents this internal change here, with emotional honesty/transparency—and as he would arrive back in the U.S., this newfound philosophy-awareness would serve him well in the changing 1960s American landscape, that then emergent hotbed of changing identity constructions and political voices.

Ginsberg was ready to change/to fit in with his times—“I suddenly didn’t want to be *dominated* by that nonhuman any more, or even be dominated by the moral obligation to enlarge my consciousness any more,” Ginsberg said of this time. “Or do anything any more except *be* my heart—which just desired to be and be alive now. . . . I was suddenly free to love myself again, and therefore love the people around me, in the form that they already were. And love myself in my own form as I am.”<sup>108</sup> He was still bohemian, but he seemingly had changed from a beat-bohemian to more of, say, a *beatitude*-bohemian—a categorization that better fit with the peace and love/acceptance aims of the hippies and flower power (a term that he would actually coin), et al: “But there is only one universe where we can all be together, and *that* universe is the universe where we do *exist* here in our bodies and accept each other’s bodies in tenderness. Because that’s the only common place where everybody can meet—where everybody is invited to the festival.”<sup>109</sup> He promises to no longer dwell on how the outside world has beat him down; in fluidly connecting his public and private selves in more positive ways, he wants to viscerally celebrate whatever beauty there is while inside the world, metaphorically outside of the loft space and confined spaces and marginal group. He wants to be an egoless celebrity outside with the crowds and sun and air, even shit, but out in the open; no private no public, no Identity/no *Them*. We do not blame them, because we *are all* “invited to the festival” of potential bohemia.

5.2 The Lower East Side Has Produced All of the Strange Gum-Chewing Geniuses: The Celebrity-Bohemian Returns Home. Changing Mind, Changing Landscape

After his powerful “Change” abroad, Ginsberg quickly settled into NYC’s creative and frenetic Lower East Side (LES) *mise en scene*. The Lower East Side, like Ginsberg, had gone through some significant changes in the 1950s and 1960s. As Mele indicates, noticeably in 1964 via the popular media and neighborhood real estate speculators/developers/landlords, the place name known as the “East Village” had emerged in public consciousness. The *East Village* became a moniker that indicated “the area’s hippie community,”<sup>110</sup> and “[u]nlike the beats, whose cultural critique was expressed within confined spaces of bars and clubs and apartments, the hippie scene was visible and vocal, and its audience was the general public.”<sup>111</sup> Mele continues: “[s]ocial interaction, not personal introspection, typified the presentation of the hippie self. By 1966 a rite of passage for many neophyte hippies was a pilgrimage to either Haight-Ashbury or the East Village, where initiates experienced the subculture firsthand in parks, bars, streets, and apartments. Cultural expressions and spectacles in public settings were the preferred means to express displeasure with the mainstream and to trumpet the merits of the hippie lifestyle.” And, he states, “The beat movement was a collection of several diverse subcultures each centered around a cultural, and not terribly political, critique of bourgeois society. As such, the beat movement, like its 1920s [bohemian] counterpart, formed an idealized disengagement from the mainstream rather than an active *counterculture* to it.”<sup>112</sup> Mele goes on to describe the hippies’ active political and community involvement in the Lower East Side. He explains that many of the avant-garde artists in the neighborhood from the 1950s (including the Tenth Street School

members, among others) increasingly moved their residences and galleries to “Uptown” and elsewhere. This left the emergent hippies to create public Happenings, demonstrations, sit-ins, and to form many organizations dedicated to “broader issues related to social changes within the neighborhood”<sup>113</sup> such as The Lower East Side Committee on Civil Rights, the Negro Action Group, the Mobilization of Youth project, the Lower East Side chapter of the Council on Racial Equality, and the Lower East Side Neighborhood Association. These organizations were designed to collectively “unite local social, civil, and religious groups against a score of health, employment, and other social problems” and to “combat urban poverty” (which led to federal community assistance aid through the Economic Opportunities Act of 1964) in the neighborhood and beyond.<sup>114</sup>

Ginsberg joined some of these organizations, he took part in various protests and demonstrations in the neighborhood, fighting against censorship and for better housing for the LES poor (as two examples). “Ginsberg,” Shumacher writes, “now famous enough to be included in the latest edition of *Who’s Who in America*, quickly learned that an event was taken seriously or covered simply because his name was identified with or connected to it.”<sup>115</sup> Thus, even though some of his avant-garde artist friends and beat associates from the 1950s had moved on, Ginsberg was still in the neighborhood, as a former beat member who had immersed himself in this more organized and outwardly political scene and counterculture—as a famous person<sup>116</sup>; Ginsberg, likewise, as an artist-activist as “useful laborer,” then more extensively entered a neo-bohemian neighborhood realm with greater popular media and popular culture implications and immersions—a climate of publicized even famous and sometimes *welcomed*

political/alternative/creative expressions and actions with the hopes of significant social change.

He knew, even though he had changed via “personal introspection,” that in order to be a substantial part of this neighborhood counterculture, this new neo-bohemian culture, that he would have to openly connect with the public and better understand the “establishment” and institutions and middle class masses. He needed to find and establish his outside voice in the spectacle, voice his politics while simultaneously having better compassion/understanding of all people—outside of the loft, in the open air.

His new attitude presents itself in his poem “Waking in New York,” a poem written in the spring of 1964 while he lived with Peter Orlovsky in a thirty-five dollars per month Lower East Side apartment “at 704 East Fifth Street, in a badly run-down, drug-dealer-infested neighborhood. . . . [The apartment was] on the top floor of a walk-up that was in terrible condition. . . . The nicest thing about the space was the view of the towers of lower Manhattan from their windows. They furnished their new apartment with discarded furniture and rugs that they found on the street and Allen built his own desk using two sawhorses as supports for a large piece of plywood. At last when he hung oriental scrolls he had brought back from India, it began to feel like home.”<sup>117</sup> In “Waking in New York,” he has now settled into his bohemian enclave. Even though he is a celebrity with decent income, he still vows to live a bohemian lifestyle—to live simply and humbly, to give most of his money away to other people who need it. His struggling beat-bohemian days were behind him, but he still held on to these elements of his bohemian belief system. In this poem, Ginsberg celebrates New York in the mode of

Whitman, while he looks to the surrounding Lower East Side's rooftops and residents and birds, looks to the fresh days of the "Springtime":

Oh New York, oh Now our bird  
 flying past glass window Chirp  
 —our life together here  
 smoke of tenement chimney pots dawn haze  
 passing thru wind soar Sirs—

How shall we greet Thee this Springtime oh Lords—?

He then embraces the many interconnected "selves" of his perceived reality: "to my police my law my state my/ many selfs—/Aye, Self is Law and State Police." Before, he would have separated himself from the "State Police," but now he interconnects himself with these authoritative institutions. And, his visions, encompassing his newfound corporeal holism, are hopeful:

May they have mercy on us all,  
 May be just men not murderers  
 Nor the State murder more,  
 That all beggars be fed, all  
 dying medicined, all loveless  
 Tomorrow be loved  
 well come & be balm.

As he is connected with the law/police, he asks "mercy" and compassion/love for all, for them and for himself interchangeably. He continues to describe his rooftop views of

"giant city awake," and, in his isolation, he looks to his city/neighborhood for support:

"Where is my comfort, where's heart-ease, Where are tears of joy? Where are the companions? in deep homes in Stuyvesant Town behind the yellow-window wall?"<sup>118</sup>

Ginsberg further explicates his desire for the *positive*, and he observes the complexities of New York City and his neighborhood—its urban decay and peril along with its majestic offerings—and ultimately finds beauty and potential in the flawed and jagged folds.

Buddhism (i.e. Ginsberg's conceptions of added awareness/understanding of detachment, illusion, impermanence, even pantheistic (non)materialism) serves as a subtext throughout this poem, an influence that would continue to show up in Ginsberg's work as he increasingly became better versed in meditation and mantras.<sup>119</sup> Ginsberg exemplifies a level of mindful detachment here; he ends the poem with "I fail, book fails—a lassitude, a fear—tho I'm alive and gaze over the descending—No! peer in the inky beauty of the roofs."<sup>120</sup> Ginsberg contemplates "the descending," but then counters with a "No!" and a look towards the transcendent and holy even if impermanent beauty of the roofs—and here lies a noticeable "change" in his consciousness; this poem, a meditation on New York/the Lower East Side and its mixed offerings shows the evolved Ginsberg. Whereas before he most likely would have mourned or challenged the city-neighborhood, he now observes its offerings with mixed blessings but blessings all the same. The first part of the poem asks for mercy in a way that is indicative of his earlier self, but the second part shows acceptance even ironical celebration of the city's harsh buildings of loneliness, birth, death, and interconnected joy. Allen looks forward—in a more well-rounded and healthier even localized way. *All* is included now.

\*

Amid these life/personality changes and shifts of identity and grounded consciousness to accept himself wholly and connect with people/the world more, for the rest of his adult life, Allen Ginsberg would hold on to and continually return to two key facets of his *Pull My Daisy* representation and pre-celebrity beat days: the Lower East Side in New York City and certain aspects of his core bohemian nature—in the latter's sense of his need for openness/acceptance: his compassionate want of sexual freedom and

love, his disregard of material wealth/his vow of penury, and his libertarian ideas regarding artistic expression and intoxication (of both the synthetic and natural kind), among a few other ideals—even as this core nature commingled at times with celebrity, the popular media, and illusions and myths/falsities/legends of grandeur and greatness, *and* gentrification. For, in conjunction with his Change, these aspects of his bohemian self then fit with his desire to break down his ego and openly embrace/(attempt to)love everyone—to ingratiate himself with the hippies and at least try to patiently understand everyone else, for better and, as I explain, sometimes worse.

In addressing this (in)famous location, the Lower East Side, as a key locus for his (neo)bohemian tendencies, and Ginsberg's associated familial and continual artistic loyalty to the place, it proves helpful to reference responses Ginsberg gave in an interview with Gary Pacernick in *The American Poetry Review* less than a year before he died in 1997:

**Gary Pacernick (GP):** ...What place do you identify with, in other words, what physical location, like Jersey or—

**Ginsberg:** Living Lower East Side, probably.

**GP:** Have you lived there much of your life, even though you traveled all over the world?

**Ginsberg:** Well, I've had this one apartment where I am now for twenty-one years.

**GP:** I didn't know that.

**Ginsberg:** And then before that I had—see, my mother, when she came to America, moved to about a mile from here on Orchard and Rivington. That was her first place of residence.

**GP:** So it's really your roots.

**Ginsberg:** So, I'm really back where my mother's family—my father's family came to New York and then Newark. But before I lived here, I moved here in '75, I lived for five years or so on East 10<sup>th</sup> Street, a couple blocks away. And before that on East 2<sup>nd</sup> Street



in the sixties. And in the fifties, where I took all those photographs, early photographs of Burroughs and Kerouac, that's East 7<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>121</sup>

Although, as Pacernick implies, Ginsberg is one of the most well-travelled poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century—not to mention his residences in San Francisco/Berkeley, in Boulder while teaching at the Naropa Institute, along with his intermittent stints at his East Hill (Cherry Valley) Farm in upstate New York and his small Bedrock Mortar cabin in the Sierra Nevada in Northern California near Gary Snyder's residential farm—he would always maintain and revert to his home roots of the Lower East Side, a locale that has a well-documented potent history for artists and creative-types. Michael Robbins chimes:

The Lower East Side, now gentrified into the East Village, was a hotbed of sixties radicalism and inanity, a pseudo-bohemia of cheap rent and urban grittiness. Daniel Kane's thesis in *All Poets Welcome* is that 'in terms of the growing poetry scene, the Lower East Side *as a neighborhood* proved helpful in lending 'alternative' status to artistic production.' The West Village, New York's prewar artistic epicenter, had ossified into an 'overpriced, bourgeois, and co-opted' neighborhood of poseurs, while the Lower East Side retained its 'tradition of working-class radicalism and resistance.' Into this fiery parcel flocked dozens of poets who were or would become associated with an 'increasingly established number of often ill-defined and porous poetic 'schools.'" The Beats; the 'generations' of the New York School; Black Mountain; Deep Image; Umbra; the San Francisco Renaissance; Language: these and more were represented and in some cases formed or consolidated in the coffeehouses and other public

spaces of the Lower East Side. It is no exaggeration to say that this milieu transformed American poetry—establishing the styles and ideas that continue to define our literary imagination.<sup>122</sup>

Robbins reiterates what Christopher Mele articulates in *Selling the Lower East Side*—in the late 1950s and early 1960s, periods in which Ginsberg visibly contributed greatly to the neighborhood, the LES replaced the West Village as the prime more authentic spot for poets, bohemians, radicals, and “inanity”—first for the beats and then for the more politically inspired out-front hippies. Revealingly, he states that this epoch’s ideas and aesthetics continue to inspire our imaginations; however, Robbins also mentions “pseudo-bohemia” along with a “milieu [that] transformed American poetry,” a curious juxtaposition. Some questions of authenticity then beckon: Why does he consider the sixties Lower East Side as “pseudo”? And, why does Daniel Kane, in his thesis, put quotation marks around *alternative* as it pertains to “cultural production”?

I can only assume that Robbins and Kane write un-evenhandedly/backhandedly even ironically about these bohemian-poets/artists contributions to the neighborhood partly because of these (neo)bohemians’ public/publicized impact on the gentrification of the neighborhood from the Lower East Side to the more commercially associated “East Village.” These (neo)bohemian artists/activists, both beats and hippies, moved there for not completely selfless reasons; on the surface, some of them wanted to come off as hip and cool, be part of a movement/scene, even as they believed they were establishing something authentic in contributing to and celebrating the diversity and pluralism of the place. Perhaps to Robbins and Kane, the authenticity of the place only referred to the cheap rent, urban grittiness, and original working class and/or ethnically diverse, minority

residents. These bohemians/counterculturalists then offered something else, perhaps less authentic due to their symbolic cultural motivations for living in the Lower East Side and because of their influence on the gentrification investment in/of the neighborhood. As some say, these beats and hippies were “slumming it,” and they had drawn some detractors in the process. “The notion of forging a new, alternative community was, in itself, somewhat patronizing to those who had sought to maintain community amidst poverty and neglect on the Lower East Side. Latinos and elderly sometimes appeared disparagingly in the many venues of hippie entertainment and performance.”<sup>123</sup> “The prevailing attitude [in the LES] was that hippies were spoiled and ungrateful. By choosing to ‘act’ poor, they had mocked and (temporarily) rejected the middle-class respectability and lifestyle that many of the residents yearned to achieve some part of.”<sup>124</sup> This then puts the LES hippies in the tradition of Bohemia, with members who often had *chosen* to forego bourgeois/middle class values for a socio-economically lower and materially more deprived experience in defense of more idealistic aims; but this also connects with the historical backlash against bohemians from people who did not live nor buy into the Bohemian Myth. Ginsberg fell in with this line of bohemian fantasy too—thinking he could contribute to the neighborhood’s progressive/avant-garde artist agenda, yet he experienced his own levels of backlash and criticism—from some academics, from some middle and upper class members, from many other people who did not understand and/or appreciate his alternative/countercultural words/behaviors/spectacles.<sup>125</sup>

Robbins and Kane, with their uneven praise, coincide with some other skeptical critics about this LES epoch; they acknowledge what Ginsberg and the beats and other poets/artists have contributed historically, but they also question the legitimacy of their

congregations, aims, and modes of production—which are questions the LES neo-bohemian players would repeatedly answer over the years, on through to the present moment. As more and more U.S. middle class/upper class members migrated/invested in the neighborhood, coinciding with the main trope of Lloyd’s Neo-Bohemia, beginning in the 1950s, the transformations and contributions of this neighborhood presented a perceivably mixed bag of gentrification, local and political backlash, celebration, celebrity, and confusion and complexity of/about a scene and neighborhood. Given this critical and historical complexity, it is not surprising that Ginsberg used the Lower East Side as his home base throughout his adult life. He embodied the complexity of the neighborhood very well—whether one considers the place *pseudo*, *neo*, and/or *authentic*. His eastern European Jewish family roots were established there long before he was born—perhaps he guiltily felt he had to always hold a residence there in order to honor the place of his mother Naomi’s upbringing—and beginning in the 1950s the Lower East Side was the likely destination for a poet or artist in NYC to live and create, perhaps unknowingly “lending ‘alternative’ status to artistic production” in the neighborhood. As Robbins indicates, the West Village was arguably “played out” artistically after the 1950s, and the logical next move for a working artist and/or bohemian was over to the Lower East Side with its cheaper rent and grittier milieu. Ginsberg wanted to be a part of this emerging scene, and he wanted to enter the fabric of the world/mass consciousness through a publicized counterculture.

These locale-oriented aesthetics still raise questions of authenticity for Robbins (et al), and I wonder: based on his reasoning, was the LES more authentic than the West Village during the 1960s? It seems Robbins would say “YES,” largely as a result of

differing socio-economics and commercialism/tourism in/of the two neighborhoods; yet, even with these distinctions, another question begs: Can Bohemia ever be *completely* authentic in Robbins's eyes? Maybe *not*—which points to the perplexing nature of categorical certainty in this case. In my mind, even though it's an important distinction to try to pin down at times, attempting to categorize a bohemian moment or even neighborhood as *authentic* becomes elusive, slippery, and nearly impossibly difficult. For me, what makes the answers to these questions more manageable is to look to the earnest (or not-so-earnest) motivations of the given (neo)bohemian participants. Ginsberg earnestly aimed to write his poetry and change the world for what he thought was the better, and I do think his lasting bohemianism contributed to that. Even though he would make a substantial amount of money through his poetry readings, et al, he maintained his vow of penury. He continued to live simply and cheaply, and he used his LES apartment and other properties away from the neighborhood to house many of his more misfortunate friends, rent-free, many of whom were recovering drug addicts and ex-convicts. He donated the bulk of his money to progressive-minded charities and leftist non-profit organizations, and he continually held art, beauty, and peace in the highest regard.<sup>126</sup> His aims were authentic in the sense that they were authentically compassionate and earnest, and his new attitude, after his Change in the 1960s, speaks to his attempts to authentically break down the walls between his private and public selves to give more of himself (and his money) to the middle classes and everyone else, whether they agreed with his ideas or not. Again, this was all (or mostly) in earnest and thus, in my mind, it made him nearly as authentic as anyone.

As for his residence in the LES, one could say he was a more authentic resident of the place because his family had a history there, and he had genuine aims of connecting to his roots. Likewise, he wanted to contribute positively to the character and ethos (and history) of the neighborhood. By extension, based on my definition, authenticity can then be applied to other people and realms. I suppose if a person chooses to live in the LES in earnest and create art then that makes that person reasonably authentic. Relatedly, if a person wants to buy a LES property as a place of business in earnest then I suppose s/he is acting authentically. But authenticity gets lost when a person loses this earnestness. When a person wants to look like an artist rather than create art. When s/he wears dirty clothes with intentional irony even though s/he is middle class. When a person joins a hippie scene to only partake in the parties and excess, not caring much about the progressive messages. When a successful business capitalizes on the grit and grime of the LES side's reputation to gain maximum profit, even though that business owner could care less what the place actually looks like. There is a lack of earnestness in these instances. Typically, I then surmise, when motivations of "business"/profit and superficiality/appearances replace motivations of beauty, truth, creation, and earnestness, the exchange then starts to lose authenticity, which subsequently contributes to criticisms of a neighborhood as "pseudo" and/or as an ironic "alternative" or as a "sell out."

This debate/discussion is a fruitful (or at least an amusing) one to have, but regardless of one's answers to these types of questions, one notion remains for certain: especially after WWII, increasingly and foremost the Lower East Side combined a neighborhood "brand" of edge and art for the middle classes—a holistic/high and low aestheticized synthesis that would quickly and continuously entice investors and

consumers, and likewise annoy and displace some residents. Today, many of the starving/struggling artist-types (along with working classes/lower class members) cannot afford the gentrified Lower East Side and have migrated out of Manhattan entirely into more financially reasonable neighborhoods in Brooklyn, Queens, Jersey City, among other destinations not too far away, but during Ginsberg's time there in the 1950s and 1960s it provided the likely and manageable literary, film, and visual art creative and activist environment that he so easily fit into. The fusion of writers, poets, painters, musicians, photographers, and filmmakers is/was excellently captured in *Pull My Daisy* (both on and off camera), as mentioned, a document of a Lower East Side happening as much as anything else. *Daisy* represents Ginsberg's longtime involvement with painters such as Larry Rivers and Alfred Leslie, his associations with musicians such as David Amram, alongside his poet/writer friends. Joyce Mendelsohn, Christopher Mele, and other scholars<sup>127</sup> have written extensive histories about the Lower East Side, its residents (famous and not), and its changes over the decades, but what's most important to note here, even though his heritage countered the neighborhood's growing trendiness, is that Ginsberg both contributed greatly to a historical-artistic scene(s) and helped put the gentrification ball in motion in this neighborhood, for better and worse, with his celebrated bohemian lifestyle and writings/protests.

Assumedly, young beat and hippie activists/artists and writers read about, heard about and saw the revelry taking place in a loft apartment such as the one in *Pull My Daisy* and hoped to duplicate it, or *extend* it (in the hippies' case). With the ascending celebrity of Alfred Leslie and other abstract expressionists and then pop-art heroes such as Andy Warhol, alongside avant-garde filmmakers such as Jonas Mekas and

writers/poets of the schools Robbins mentions who were associates of Ginsberg and lived in and around his neighborhood (at varying times), more and more artists/creative types would move to and congregate around the Lower East Side. Many of them would move out of the neighborhood in the 1960s, but by then the hippies along with other struggling artists had seen enough to carry the (neo)bohemian torch. Meanwhile, as Ginsberg's stature in the public's eye grew, his reputation as a Lower East Side celebrity only assumedly helped enhance property value and cultural capital in the neighborhood; however, as he indicates, his residence there was also a continuation of his Jewish background. He wasn't exactly a WASP-y artist who only wanted to be a part of the scene. His family had a history there, and he was continuing that tradition, only extenuating it with his poems and alternative doings and personae. Although, he probably would not be happy if he could see the neighborhood today—(perhaps ironically) he would probably say the neighborhood has lost an element of authenticity—and knowing he played a part in the gentrification/prettification of the area certainly would not bring him much comfort.

Ginsberg's "City Midnight Junk Strains *for Frank O'Hara*" captures these aforementioned (neo)bohemian celebrity contributions/(socio)spatial complexities and sentiments very well. Ginsberg here writes of/from the Lower East Side in 1966 in an elegy for the recently deceased poet O'Hara, a man/artist who played his own part in the myriad cultural scenes of downtown Manhattan. Ginsberg's remembrance and nostalgia highlight the combination of celebrity, glamour, and the controversial nature of these place constructions. "City Midnight" begins as Ginsberg mourns the death of his friend, "The gaudy poet." He states there is an "emptiness" in the Cedar Bar—the Cedar Tavern,



an at-the-time avant-garde artist/writer/beat/hippie hotspot for congregation. He writes: “Throng of drunken/ guys talking about paint/ & lofts, and Pennsylvania youth. / Kline attacked by his heart/ & chattering Frank /stopped forever— / Faithful drunken adorers, mourn.” Ginsberg paints a picture of drunk creative people and avant-garde “adorers” talking about art (“paint”) and their spaces for creation and revelry (“lofts”), along with the youth. He mentions that avant-garde artist Franz Kline has a broken heart over O’Hara’s death and that the normally chatty photographer Robert Frank (director of *Pull My Daisy*) is left speechless. Ginsberg then mentions O’Hara’s “old apartment 9<sup>th</sup> Street by the park,” before asking: “Did he think me an Angel/ as angel I am still talking into earth’s microphone willy nilly.” He insinuates that O’Hara has passed and that he, Ginsberg, is still around to talk “into earth’s microphone,” to continue that tradition of public poetry, and creative art-making, and gossip and out-front angelic proclamations. These descriptions nicely capture the elements/sentiments of his and his friends’ LES artist/writer bohemian scene. One of their own has died, and the community now mourns for him. This is both high and low culture: misfit artists who mourn and celebrate the lofty ideals of their poet-friend: “and you mixed with money / because you knew enough language to be rich,” Ginsberg writes, “if you wanted your walls to be empty.” Ginsberg explains that the poet O’Hara of fairly modest financial means (“empty walls”) mingled with the rich but that he most importantly was an artist of the highest pedigree, a lure for the financial and cultural elite. Ginsberg then imagines O’Hara in front of him:

I see you walking you said with your tie  
     flopped over your shoulder in the wind down 5<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
         under the handsome breasted workmen  
             on their scaffolds ascending Time  
                 & washing the windows of Life  
 —off to a date with martinis & a blond  
     beloved poet far from home  
     —with thee and Thy sacred Metropolis  
 in the enormous bliss of a long afternoon  
 where death is a shadow  
     cast by Rockefeller Center  
         over your intimate street.  
 ...  
 Peter stares out the window at robbers  
     the Lower East Side distracted in Amphetamine  
 I stare into my head & look for your / broken roman nose  
     your wet mouth-smell of martinis  
     & a big artistic tipsy kiss.<sup>128</sup>

Here Ginsberg combines the romance of O'Hara's Manhattan martinis, his beautiful boys, his socialite life with the "sacred Metropolis" and its handsome workmen and ascending buildings. He mentions the "death" cast by Rockefeller Center, an image that implies the at-times intimidating nature of the place, but he also mentions the "intimate street"—indicating that as he escaped into the hands of his welcoming scene, O'Hara celebrated his poetry with his boys and his drinks, his "bliss" of camaraderie and creative friendship, even gossip. While Ginsberg fantasizes (i.e., "stares into his head"), he mentions the Lower East Side and amphetamines and robbers. The artistic romance here poetically meets the crime and excesses of a city neighborhood (and city), all (neo)bohemian mythological and rational merging in route, and by linking O'Hara (and the Tenth Street School and other avant-garde artists, et al) with the Lower East Side Ginsberg glamourizes his home, and his friend, inadvertently creating a pervasive advertisement for his celebrated neighborhood.



—and as I looked at the crowd of kids on the stoop—a boy stepped up, put  
 his  
     arm around my neck  
 tenderly I thought for a moment, squeezed harder, his umbrella handle  
     against my skull,  
 and his friends took my arm, a young brown companion tripped his foot  
     ‘gainst my ankle—  
 as I went down shouting Om Ah Hum to gangs of lovers on the stoop  
     watching  
 slowly appreciating, why this is a raid, these strangers mean strange  
 business  
 with what—my pockets, bald head, broken-healed-bone leg, my softshoes,  
     my heart

In “Mugging,” Ginsberg states that these teenaged “brown” muggers steal his watch and wallet with \$70 and some credit cards, but that they leave his “shoulder bag with 10,000 dollars full of poetry left on the broken floor.” As an older white male who has a solid income and education (and reputation), he has differentiated himself racially and socioeconomically from these muggers. Assumedly, this was not his intention, but nonetheless he represents the complexity of gentrification in the neighborhood, of what Mele and others have stated about the cultural frictions in post-WWII LES over the years between middle class white residents and lower class and/or minority residents. Tellingly, Ginsberg, seemingly naïve to these complexities in this moment, gets up disoriented and walks into his neighborhood’s broken arms:

Went out the door dim eyed, bent down & picked up my glasses from step  
     edge I placed them while dragged in the store—looked out—  
 Whole street a bombed-out face, building rows’ eyes & teeth missing  
 burned apartments half the long block, gutted cellars, hallways’ charred  
     beams  
 ...  
     —passing empty apartments, old lady frayed  
     paper bags  
 sitting in the tin-boarded doorframe of a dead house.<sup>129</sup>

In this poem, Ginsberg celebrates/glamourizes his neighborhood's imperfections, even turning a mugging into a spiritual experience, presenting a Whitman-like approach, an embrace of the nitty-gritty, the *entire* space, the good and bad, in connected holiness.

Especially in the 1970s, the LES was known as a “tough” neighborhood, a place of crime and disrepair. As Mele describes in *Selling the Lower East Side*, even though in the 1960s the hippies “‘breathed new life’ to the ghetto and, ironically, offered some hope to the stalled notion of middle-class revival”<sup>130</sup> (i.e., helped spark a gentrification in the area), “[t]ourism and commercialism of the counterculture [would become] the underlying reasons for the area’s decline.”<sup>131</sup> “Teens, tourists, and ‘plastic’ hippies (those who lived uptown or in the suburbs) pandered to the overtly commercial aspects of the East Village.”<sup>132</sup> These superficial scenes and participants then bothered and infuriated other people in the neighborhood. By the end of the 1960s, a backlash included increasing reports of murders and lesser crimes against hippies. Likewise, “[b]oth critics and supporters of hippies (and many hippies themselves) questioned the wisdom of middle-class white youths carving out an alternative space in a multiethnic, poor ghetto. That the question was posed following the murder of an affluent white suburban woman by poor black inner-city males during an era of urban riots across the United States provides strong evidence of the important connection between space, race, and class in the representation of neighborhood.” Mele continues: “Following the East Village murders, reports circulated that Blacks and Puerto Rican young males had long *encroached* on the East Village to commit crimes against hippies (the reference to minorities as outsiders is itself telling).”<sup>133</sup> Mele explains that the “poverty, violence, and danger of the minority ghetto reemerged in dominant representations of a threatening and

marginal space . . . [and that] [p]rophetically, the majority of East Village hippies chose the course taken by hundreds of thousands of earlier residents and departed the neighborhood en masse. By 1969, the spatial core of hippie culture was no longer the city but the countryside as hippies communities and communes popped up across upstate New York [and elsewhere].”<sup>134</sup> Mele writes, “The ensuing notions of the East Village fraught with images of danger and decay were central to the policies and actions that led to neighborhood disinvestment and ‘blowout’ between 1969 and 1979.”<sup>135</sup>

As Mele explains, a cycle of gentrification took place in the LES in the twentieth century, one that entails “the shift in representations of subcultural differences from the maligned margins to the middle-class mainstream and, consequently, the shift in the characterization of the Lower East Side from the deteriorated ghetto to the desirable urban niche.” He continues further: “In the East Village, real estate developers have translated the symbolic value of cultural difference into economic value, attracting middle-class renters, diners, and shoppers who find allure in this edgier version of ‘bohemian mix,’ flush with modern living spaces and other amenities.”<sup>136</sup> The beats then hippies brought publicity and tourists to the neighborhood in the 1950s and 1960s, the 1970s saw the LES hippie exodus and disinvestment and “blow out” with increased crime and abandonment; yet the 1980s would come, the gentrification would start anew, and the toughness/dilapidation/grime/grit along with its images/ associations/ representations of the dirt and grime (et al) would get recycled once again into the commercial equation, as Mark Greif and others have articulated.

Ironically and tellingly, soon after his LES mugging incident, Ginsberg sold his poem “Mugging” to *The New York Times* for five hundred dollars.<sup>137</sup> Ginsberg had

romanticized his neighborhood in this poem—its crumbling environment and its ethnically diverse residents—and then he was going to profit from it. In his mind, he was embracing the neighborhood, even celebrating it, but others found his poems/actions to be patronizing and even ultimately unhelpful, arguing that he was wrongfully benefitting both financially and culturally from his neighborhood. For, as a privileged and financially secure man, he wasn't struggling like many others in the neighborhood. Perhaps to his credit though, Ginsberg did not flee the neighborhood like countless other members of the counterculture. He remained in the neighborhood through the 1970s (and until his death in 1997) as the hippies and many others as part of *white flight* decided to move away, but he played a strong part in the romance/fantasy of the place, a part of these conversions and gentrification(s), a part of the equation, and (yes) he played his part in some of the problem(s).<sup>138</sup>

In the end though, wittingly and unwittingly, Ginsberg celebrated *all* of it; he was in the mix during these changes. He contributed to them. The romance, his romance, had met the dirt and *dive* and investment . . . and controversy. As Ginsberg sailed through the 1950s and '60s '70s, his complex relationship with/to his beloved Lower East Side proves that elements of his bohemianism had gone mainstream—the public gravitation towards the representations of starving art-hood, with its excesses and paradoxical looks of deprivation, had created a highly profitable market of counterculture. Yet, he wasn't about to change his core nature of artistic and political/philosophical-spiritual sensibilities, nor his main long-time residence—especially since this neighborhood carried a family history and tradition for him long before investors and tourists had taken hold. In the next section(s), as I move out of the neighborhood, I investigate how the

(neo)bohemian Ginsberg entered into the realm of *myth*. As a national (even globalized) useful artistic/public laborer and celebrity, his status as a mythic figure encapsulates another plot point of our arc-of-gentrification (and arc-of-the-imaginary), for it was the perception (real and imagined) of Ginsberg as a counterculture guru that increasingly influenced other people (particularly of the middle class) to enter a (neo)bohemian realm, all spaces and places intertwined. As I expand on Ginsberg's myth, it also remains important to remember Ginsberg's beat-bohemian days along with his special involvement with and longstanding relationship to the Lower East Side.

### 5.3 Ginsberg as Myth

“The prophetic trickster points toward what is actually happening: the muddiness, the ambiguity, the noise. They are part of the real, not something to be filtered out.” – Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World*<sup>139</sup>

“He is not just a cultural phenomenon, not just a prophet, not just a Beatnik, not just a liberator, not just a grand old man for us to play our fantasies on—he is a *poet*. And it's no easier being a poet these days than it is being a woman, or being a Cherokee, or being a faggot, or being black, or being anything that doesn't fit the straight network.” – Charley Shively, 1973<sup>140</sup>

In the final three sections of this chapter, as investigations of Ginsberg in his neo-bohemian “prime,” I aim to show how his celebrity/fame/publicized *reputation* and modes of neo-bohemian production/ “labor”—his poetry, his multi-media work, performances, et al—contributed to his *inclusion* in American middle class consciousness as an ultimate cultural (bohemian) myth. As I explain, elements of his longstanding bohemianism also contributed to this public inclusion/acceptance and legend/myth. Finally, I intend to convey that as a neo-bohemian neighborhood in its prime garners a reputation and myth as the *absolute place* of the moment by bohemians/ investors/



consumers/ fans (alike) in and outside the artistic/bohemian nucleus, Ginsberg then in parallel created a mythic personage as a bohemian to be massively gravitated towards.

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There comes a moment in every neo-bohemian neighborhood's life when it has reached its pinnacle—when there's an appropriate balance of struggling artists and investors, scene-makers and cultural tourists. This presents the neighborhood's prime even climax as the “place to be,” as the locus for a premiere scene before it gets labeled by a sufficient amount of hip culture experts as “played out”/ “sold out” and likewise before a substantial number of the neighborhood's struggling artists and lower class residents have been “priced out.” Pinpointing these exact climactic times invites slippery distinctions, but some moments can be listed with a fair amount of certainty: Greenwich Village in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Lower East Side in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Wicker Park in the 1990s, and the Blue Dome Zone today, as our (my) most relevant examples.

Richard Lloyd writes about his Wicker Park in the 1990s: “during the 1990s, Wicker Park was considered among the most vibrant arts communities in the country, and the neighborhood Flat Iron Building alone provides studio space shared by more than one hundred artists.”<sup>141</sup> Further, “the 1990s were an eventful decade for the Wicker Park neighborhood, during which it transformed from a relatively obscure and depopulated barrio into a celebrated center of hip urban culture. Locally produced paintings adorned the walls of the neighborhood galleries and also of its local bars, coffee shops, and even Internet firms, and the music of homegrown performers, as well as guests like Lost

Pilgrims and later the Rolling Stones, drifted from smoky clubs to the nocturnal sidewalks.”<sup>142</sup> Lloyd writes:

By 1993 . . . the word was getting out. Individuals with aspirations in a range of creative pursuits, from the rarefied fine arts to more popular genres such as music and film, were crowding into local lofts and flats. . . . Anointed the ‘new capital of cutting edge’ by *Billboard* magazine, Wicker Park was descended upon by industry gatekeepers . . . the neighborhood ethos was constituted not only in headlines or even by the massing of creative aspirants, but also by local institutions with greater or lesser staying power: the local galleries, coffee shops, and bars that continued to announce, and trade upon, bohemian notoriety. . . . Indeed, even the decidedly un-hip national newspaper *USA Today* declared Wicker Park to be ‘the Windy City’s burst of bohemia’ in 1995, and . . . *The New York Times* travel section celebrated it as Chicago’s bohemian hub of funkiness and creativity. . . . Wicker Park is understood, both by media observers and by local insiders, in the context of the mythic tradition of bohemia, shorthand for both a distinctive sort of urban district and an associated style of life.<sup>143</sup>

These places at these times, such as Wicker Park in the 1990s, arguably and even controversially reached their defining (neo)bohemian moments as celebrated locales of publicized avant-garde/local art and notorious alternative lifestyle scenes. Likewise, in parallel, Allen Ginsberg reached his artistic/creative pinnacle as a celebrity bohemian with “an associated style of life” in the late 1960s (and early 1970s); he merged with the

hippie counterculture as a useful laborer/flexible accumulator of art and show and activism in varying public contexts and (in)famous spaces. His recognized and publicized *authenticity* as a former beat poet and current bohemian-hippie and then unlikely unorthodox *leader* with legions of followers, including some “industry gatekeepers,” would reach its climax during this period. Michael Schumacher writes of this, “By this time, Allen was again wrapped up in social and political causes . . . His skills at organization and debate made him a natural candidate for this new kind of activity, and by mid-1967, his public reputation had undergone a significant shift: Although he was an open critic of the media, he was also adept at using television, radio, and newspapers to his benefit, and from his media exposure he was becoming as well known for his political stances as he was for his poetry. People who had never read or heard a line of his work were aware of the name Allen Ginsberg.”<sup>144</sup> And, Finbow writes, “The year 1968 would be one of politics, a year of dissatisfaction with the peace movement, a year when Allen’s fame reached its pinnacle—it began with a death and the end of an era.”<sup>145</sup> Starting in this period, appropriately intertwined with the birth and “death” of an era, as the masses were “descending,” Ginsberg began to enter the realm of guru, legend, and myth.

For, *myth* in this case generally refers to a sphere/condition wherein the mass public, people largely who do not know you nor have ever met you, are talking about you in both realistic and fictional ways. They repeat rumors and stories about you, often perceiving you and holding you up as larger than the flesh-bound person you are. With your talent and your words and your performances/publicity, you have managed to tap into the collective consciousness in ways that transcend the truth from the imagined. In this guise, Ginsberg’s myth would stay with him until his death in 1997 and even after on

through to the present moment (as witnessed by contemporary anecdotes, stories, and films about the man. As perhaps proven by this dissertation itself.). I surmise, however, that the height of his myth took place in between the 1967 Hippie Summer of Love and his first term as a professor at the Naropa Institute in the summer of 1974. The mass public was *talking* about Ginsberg the most during this period. Furthermore, I see Ginsberg's myth, especially during this mentioned period, as both a perpetuation and *revision* of the traditionally understood Bohemian Myth. Elizabeth Wilson explicates that

As soon as the bohemian appeared on the urban stage there were eager consumers of stories of glamorous and sordid individuals, men and women of genius and eccentricity, who lived exciting lives and challenged the conventions. The vicissitudes of the bohemian way of life, its excesses, its triumphs, its failures and its aura of grim seriousness incongruously expressed in performance and pose, have always been good copy. Yet Bohemia is more than a series of stories about unusual individuals. The figure of the bohemian personifies the ambivalent role of art in industrial society; and Bohemia is a cultural *Myth* about art in modernity, a myth that seeks to reconcile Art to industrial capitalism, to create for it a role in consumer society. The bohemian is above all an idea, the personification of a myth . . . Components of the myth are transgression, excess, sexual outrage, eccentric behavior, outrageous appearance, nostalgia and poverty—although wealth could contribute to the legend provided the bohemian treated it with contempt, flinging money around instead of investing it with bourgeois caution.”<sup>146</sup>

The myth of Ginsberg checks off all of the tenets on Wilson's mythic bohemian checklist: as an unconventional artist, as an eccentric who shunned traditional notions of wealth and sexuality and excess, he catapulted himself into the realm of bohemian myth. Also, by extension of "a myth that seeks to reconcile Art to industrial capitalism," Ginsberg as a bohemian type who lived and operated in the postindustrial/ postmodern United States, rather than Wilson's modern bohemians in industrial society, then entered a neo-bohemian realm as myth largely due to the novel media and entertainment provisions that interconnected with his poetry and status as a celebrity poet—a more globalized market the early bohemians were not privy to. As Richard Lloyd writes of contemporary neo-bohemian artists as "useful laborers" and "flexible accumulators" involved in "select new capitalist enterprises"<sup>147</sup> in a postindustrial/postmodern neo-bohemian neighborhood (and larger society), so too did Ginsberg function as an artistic/creative/progressive "laborer" in the late-stage capitalist countercultural period, beginning in the 1960s (arguably the start of the postmodern period). He contributed to various capitalist industries with his "work" involving poetry (in affordable, quickly produced paperback form), multi-media/entertainment (television, sound studios, radio, et al), and technologically enhanced performances (he often used the aid of microphones, electric guitars, modern sound theatres, et al, for his shows); his myth continually intermixed with these exposures on prime-time television, in widely circulated newspapers, and performances in front of thousands in auditoriums/ amphitheaters across the country. As Lloyd writes, "But the theory of neo-bohemia is about much more than the life of a single neighborhood; it invites us to rethink in broad ways the interrelations of lived space, subjectivity, and instrumental labor in this contemporary period of

globalized capitalism and flexible accumulation” especially in the realms of media and entertainment.<sup>148</sup> Ginsberg, in this light, most notably beginning in the period from 1967 to 1974 (at the height of his myth and fame), as an instrument of labor, then began his rise as a neo-bohemian touchstone. The following paragraphs incorporate analyses of Ginsberg poems along with glowing critical/even scholarly sound-bites/praises from this period to support these dynamics.

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There is not enough space here to completely list all of the stories and anecdotes (some true and not) from this period (1967-1974) that contributed to the Myth of Allen Ginsberg, but a fairly quick rundown of some of these events could help: Beginning in the late 1960s, Ginsberg recorded albums and toured with Bob Dylan and attended jam sessions with the likes of Paul McCartney and John Lennon, debated on the neo-con William Buckley’s primetime TV show *Firing Line* (among other shows), and he saw his visage fairly regularly on the front pages of newspapers; also, finding himself in the epicenter of the hippie counterculture’s antics and group protests (he coined the term “flower power”), he took part in now famous demonstrations in Berkeley, made peace with the Hell’s Angels during one of these demonstrations, led meditations and chants amid the violence and chaos of the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, confronted injustices in person in Cuba and what was then Czechoslovakia (among other places), and famously protested for countless other leftist and/or radical causes.<sup>149</sup> Some of the titles of his poems during this period indicate these leanings and involvement: “First Party At Ken Kesey’s with Hell’s Angels”; “Consulting I Ching Smoking Pot

Listening to the Fugs Sing Blake”; “Pentagon Exorcism”; “War Profit Litany”; “Grant Park: August 28, 1968”; “Anti-Vietnam War Peace Mobilization.”

In a poem called “A Vow,” written in the fall of 1966, Ginsberg explains his precursory intentions as an independent-minded activist who was prepared for these forthcoming public spectacles and for onlookers to increasingly talk about him:

I will haunt these States  
with beard bald head  
eyes staring out plane window,

...

Common Sense, Common law, common tenderness  
& common tranquility  
our means in America to control the money munching  
war machine, bright lit industry  
everywhere digesting forests and excreting soft pyramids  
of newsprint, Redwood and Ponderosa patriarchs

...

I'll haunt these States all year  
gazing bleakly out train windows, blue airfield  
red TV network on evening plains,  
decoding radar Provincial editorial paper message,  
deciphering Iron Pipe laborers' curses as  
clanging hammers they raise steamshovel claws  
over Puerto Rican agony lawyers' screams in slums.<sup>150</sup>

Ginsberg here professes his “vow” to the country; using “Common Sense, Common law, common tenderness & common tranquility,” he promises to fight/protest for/against corporate abuses, an unjust war, irresponsible wasting of natural resources, media manipulation, inhumane treatment of the working classes, and government violations. He had accepted his role as public activist/spokesman, and his poems and songs and interviews would consistently serve as documentations of these vows and intentions. However, what’s perhaps most notable about these lines are the bits about “staring out plane window,” “train windows,” and “TV networks.” Even as a (neo)bohemian and

politically progressive poet-activist who fights for these above mentioned causes, he benefits from airplanes, trains, televisions, radios, newspapers, et al. As much as he cursed the “war machine” and “bright lit industry,” he was not completely separate from these industries, hence his ambivalence about being a bohemian poet in a post-industrial society. He relied on these technologies, benefited from the speed and diversity of which multi-media outlets could generate his words and messages and performances. He vowed to “haunt these states,” but like it or not, he would work with these industries as much as he protested against them. These complexities, even hypocrisies, were tantamount to his emerging neo-bohemian myth.

In his poem “Pentagon Exorcism,” written in the fall of 1967, Ginsberg captures further politically radical sentiments as he broadcasts the charge of tens of thousands of protesters in DC, the majority of which were younger than he was—the largest anti-war demonstration to date.<sup>151</sup>

Who represents my body in Pentagon? Who spends  
my spirit’s billions for war manufacture? Who  
levies the majority to exult unwilling in Bomb  
Roar? “*Brainwash!*” Mind-fear! Governor’s language!  
“*Military-Industrial-Complex!*” President’s language!  
Corporate voices jabber on electric networks building

...

sustaining hurt millions in house security  
tuning to images on TV’s separate universe where  
peasant manhoods burn in black & white forest  
villages—represented less than myself by Magic  
Intelligence influence matter-scientists’ *Rockefeller*

...

Back! Back! Back! Central Mind-machine Pentagon reverse  
consciousness! Hallucination manifest! A million Americas  
gaze out of man-spirit’s naked Pentacle! Magnanimous  
reaction to signal Peking, isolate Space-beings!<sup>152</sup>



But here's the thing: Ginsberg wasn't even actually *at* this protest and Pentagon "exorcism." He was travelling around Europe with his parents while it was happening. He only wrote a poem about it, but people just assumed he was there leading the charge. This speaks to his myth, to his contributions to it. Some of the stories about him actually happened, but some were facetious and only based on rumor. Yet, in the spirit of myth/legend, sometimes facts are not as important as what people falsely believe to be true. Truth and fiction then combined, with out-front demands such as these—of "Pentagon wake from planet-sleep!" and "Spirit Spirit Dance Dance Spirit Spirit Dance! / Transform Pentagon skeleton to maiden-temple"—Ginsberg's 1960s-celebrity and legendary fame now as a Hippie Guru and former Beat Generation member had given him countercultural capital and respected gravitas (real and imagined) in such political demonstrations and situations that contributed to an image that was in truth sometimes more than the man himself—as he was often hyperbolically lauded by many of the young hippies, mostly in their teens and twenties, who had grown up with Beat literature and read about Ginsberg and his friends' lives through the media; thus, in his 30s and 40s, rightfully and/or wrongfully, Ginsberg became known as a *credible* bohemian father figure for this younger generation of progressives.

In another poem such as "Anti-Vietnam War Peace Mobilization," written in the spring of 1970—as he also did via poems written in Berkeley in 1967, Chicago in 1968 and at the Miami Presidential Primary in 1972—he writes of his part in, his leadership of, a mass protest of mainly young liberal activists:

White sunshine on sweating skulls  
 Washington's Monument pyramided high granite clouds  
 over a soul mass, children screaming in their brains on quiet grass

...

Assembled before White House filled with mustached Germans  
& police buttons, army telephones, CIA Buzzers, FBI bugs

...

One hundred thousand bodies naked before an Iron Robot  
Nixon's brain Presidential cranium case spying thru binoculars  
from the Paranoia Smog Factory's East Wing.<sup>153</sup>

Actually factually and physically present this time, writing from the lawns of Washington D.C., amid thousands of “naked” protesters, Ginsberg juxtaposes the “quiet” masses with the violent “Buzzers” and “bugs” of a police-state or “Iron Robot.” His voice is loud, direct and clearly transparent from where he quietly yet famously sits, which clashes with “Nixon’s brain” in “the Paranoia Smog Factory’s East Wing.” Tellingly, he is outside in an open space in the grass while President Nixon stands confined behind closed doors in paranoia, “spying.” This poem exemplifies Ginsberg’s savvy brilliance. He rallies these young troops of hippie radicals by simply sitting in the grass and honestly calling out the President and his Iron Robot (the FBI, CIA, White House, police, army, war machine, et al). Unlike Nixon, he doesn’t have an official title in leading his charge, nor does he have a headquarters or official organization that he belongs to. He only has his voice, his poetry, the mass media, and countless young hippies that are listening to him in the grass. And, not only was Ginsberg affecting young liberals, but he was also entering the wider mainstream consciousness via a few angles, his name was becoming known by people who had never read a line of contemporary poetry, and amid this involvement and growing notoriety, the myth of Allen Ginsberg had been formed, a primarily pop-cultural media-driven myth constructed of such terms as “guru,” “prophet,” “icon,” and “genius” as he evolved from bohemian poet to neo-bohemian celebrity and then icon.

In a retrospective, Ken Goffman in *Counter Culture Through the Ages* writes, “Ginsberg went through a whole variety of mutations, from beat hero to psychedelic guru to Yippie leader before arriving at a general mix of Buddhism and pacifist activism.”<sup>154</sup> His unique notoriety rested in his ability to *transform* himself, to keenly change with his cultural climate: from Beat to Hippie to Punk Enthusiast to Anti-Nuke Activist, et al. Of course, as Goffman mentions, some fans and figures of the media had already lionized Ginsberg during this time, but also as early as 1969, even scholars of the academy such as George Lyon, a professor of American literature at the University of Texas at Austin, were writing seriously about Ginsberg in ways that perpetuated this myth as well, calling Ginsberg the quintessential “angel-headed hipster.” The Pop Culture Poet had gained respect from some members of academia, contributing to his involvement in a rare blend of spheres. The former *beatnik* and current hippie leader was now taken *more* seriously. Lyon writes:

Ginsberg has found in mythology and mysticism a feeling of oneness with the universe, with God, which has enabled him to live freely and sanely and personally in a world that is cruel, brutal and impersonal. His unifying vision is a personal one, modified by factors that are not relevant to all men of his time, but he has attempted to circumvent that problem by revealing himself as completely as is painfully possible, thereby allowing what is personal to the poet to show itself as such, while the archetype remains pure. Thus the poet hopes to transmit his myth.<sup>155</sup>

While commenting on Ginsberg’s hope “to transmit his [own] myth,” Lyon, as no less than a tenure-track professor and scholar at a well-known university, also pushes the

myth of Ginsberg even further with ideas about his being one with the universe alongside having a unified vision and personal transparency. This speaks to the notion that not only were the words of Allen Ginsberg being mythologized, even institutionalized (in this case), but so was his “delivery”: his delivery of poems and chants in public, and his delivery of nakedness (sometimes literally) and intimacy. Bill Morgan writes, “At the party [in 1965 after a reading in Cambridge, England] Allen took off all his clothes and drunkenly sang and danced with a hotel ‘Do Not Disturb’ sign tied to his penis. John Lennon and George Harrison came in around midnight but were alarmed by Allen’s antics and ran away laughing over whether their ‘reputations’ had been ruined.”<sup>156</sup> Spectacularly, in Lyon’s mind, Ginsberg’s mythic ability to “live freely” and reveal “himself as completely as is painfully possible” while allowing “the archetype to remain pure,” allows Ginsberg’s poetry to resemble his public displays in its openness and “purity.” Dancing naked as he did among the Beatles at a party, literally and figuratively, was not only celebrated by young hippies. Others had started to notice and “dance” as well, allowing for his *transparency* to get mythologized.

These vehicles, these deeds and stories/legends—an amalgam of fact and fiction—were held up as sometimes bigger than the man himself. His agency as a facilitator of his created and perceived spectacles now trumped even the messages that he delivered, and as a result Ginsberg became known as a new kind of celebrity leader without an *official* title: a leader with very few authoritarian demands, a hipster’s notion that the *now* transcends anything else. The deliveries had manifested a myth or myths, which then constructed how his poems were read and how his followers perceived him. For, how do you then critique a poem written by a mythic figure? How does one

challenge the authority of myth? Ariel, writing for the journal *Religions*, describes this unique kind of leadership/myth:

Serving as a father figure for the counterculture—a symbol of an alternative set of cultural norms, lifestyles and literary forms—Ginsberg was a charismatic counter-leader, with no clearly defined followers or movement. As a leader in a more liberated era, he offered energy, ideas, inspiration, and color, but no structure or authority. Instead he was a prophet of freedom, calling on people to express themselves openly, to expand and experiment. This role demanded charisma but of a different kind—one that was more spiritual and less organizational or hierarchical.<sup>157</sup>

Ariel, writing in a reputable scholarly journal called *Religions* no less, lauds Ginsberg as a “charismatic counter-leader,” who has “no clearly defined followers . . . [and] no structure or authority.” He touts Ginsberg as a “prophet of freedom.” Coinciding with his bohemian conceptions of “order” (or non-order), through his role as a kind of anti-leader, Ginsberg’s power as this unorthodox leader had grown. He had given the hippies a forum to believe they could worship and follow on their own terms. His myth was constructed by the perceptions of *freedom* that his followers took in and felt, which were more powerful than unruly hairstyles, tie-dye apparel, and all the other more superficial associations. Arguably, at times Ginsberg is remembered more as a 1960s countercultural figure than a Beat member, and thus his function as a *bridge* between generations makes sense in the process of myth-building. The *stories* from the 1940s-1970s built on top of themselves, and the teenagers/young adults (of the 1960s perhaps especially) looked to

the older Ginsberg to make these (counter)cultural connections regarding poetry/art, freedom, and open expression—from beat to hippie to punk, et al. William A. Henry III remarks in a review of Ginsberg’s reading at Columbia University: “He drew together the strident Beat Generation of the 1950s, led the flower children of the 1960s into Eastern religions, hymned the antinuclear movement of the 1970s. Throughout, he sustained his vernacular yet visionary voice—marked, said one admiring fellow poet, by a ‘note of hysteria that hit the taste of the young.’”<sup>158</sup> Furthermore, George Dennison writes of this bridge and appeal: “The story of Ginsberg’s development is the story of a great leap. I do not mean from one stage of mastery to another, but a leap of *being* which transforms life itself into a hazardous, yet brilliantly exciting, field of values. In this transformation deep subjects arise, and the act of sustaining them creates a universal relevance in the life itself. Ginsberg is loved by the young throughout the world.”<sup>159</sup> The myth was in the *great leap*—in the bridge, the transparent bridge, especially among the “young.” But, it’s also added to and represented by the glowing praises of Ginsberg by scholars and other writers/critics (such as the ones I’ve included in this section). His great leap consisted of a Bohemian-to-Neo-Bohemian one, and the stories and praises about him contribute(d) to this arc and myth—this rare ability to transcend decades and classes of people; Mark Shechner also writes in this vein:

The appeal of Ginsberg in the sixties lay in the appearance he gave of seeing through or beyond the veils and blinders of ordinary social thought. I remember vividly a moment in the mid-sixties when Ginsberg, operating as only he could, through the medium of power poetry, affected a truce between antiwar marchers in the Bay area and the Hell’s Angels, who,

egged on by local officials and police, were poised to assault the demonstrators. Appealing to the bikers that, more or less, “we’re all social outlaws together,” not only did Ginsberg pacify them, but apparently mollified the surly Oakland police as well. Moreover, the truce was sealed, as I recall, by the reading of a poem, “To the Angels,” at a rally in the East Bay. Who could help at such moments but believe that here was a truly transcendent figure, someone who just, by his presence alone, dissolved the ordinary social categories.<sup>160</sup>

High praises and stories such as this one—Ginsberg’s convincing of the Hell’s Angels to get on board with the movement, his dancing naked around the Beatles at a party (et al)—ratchet up the myth; for, a myth—a concoction of fact and fiction, say and hearsay, of controversy and reconciliation, as Shechner even subjectively “recalls” some details here—consists of stories, of notable tales of *wonder*. Ginsberg helped *create* these tales, vitally as part of the processes of *Change* and *bridge*, and, as years went on, Ginsberg would increasingly combine this perceived cultural power—as this *new* kind of *rebel*-leader, not only one of mystery and enigma yet also one of transparency and welcome embrace—with a savvy understanding and manipulation of the media and popular culture. He worked for this and towards this. He couldn’t control what others said or rumored about him, but he could be honest in his transparency as he collapsed his public/private selves—with all truthful and hyperbolic associations attached.

Given this, he would continually appear on television and radio, and constantly perform to packed audiences. He would set his poetry to music, using finger cymbals and a harmonium, and in part of what Richard Hishneh has termed Ginsberg’s “marketing

genius,”<sup>161</sup> Ginsberg would collaborate with well-known musicians such as the Beatles<sup>162</sup>, Bob Dylan, the Clash, and U2. For decades, Steven Taylor of the Fugs accompanied Ginsberg’s poetry readings with his vocals and guitar. Vectors such as these of his myth/celebrity had taken on contemporary, even new technological, kaleidoscopic outlays. I now look to further *inclusions* of Ginsberg, interconnections among himself and the U.S. middle classes, as further foundation for this unlikely myth.

#### 5.4 Inclusion

Middle class investment is a significant part of the neo-bohemian gentrification process, and likewise a large middle class audience (especially in the 1960s, among the youth) embraced the creative-bohemian man/place of Ginsberg as well. In an earlier section of this chapter, I wrote about Ginsberg’s *Change* in Asia in 1963—a sudden realization that left him thinking less about his own polarization and death and more about how he could better attempt to connect with all beings in shared mortality. In conjunction, as Ginsberg shifted his personal consciousness this way, the country had also changed *enough* in the late 1960s to allow him to have a significant voice—to perhaps surprisingly find his way into many American homes, campuses, and minds. This cultural and psychic reciprocity then serves as what I call Ginsberg’s *Inclusion*. For, inclusion refers to the want of bringing everyone in, along with a greater number of people *allowing* you in, and furthermore this inclusion *includes* a man’s private comfort in the acceptance of his own *included* inner voice.

Within this interconnected reciprocity, through and after the 1960s, Ginsberg would find more people *coming around* and agreeing with him, as he would continue to



serve (for examples, the list is long) as a loudly vocal advocate for LGBT rights, anti-censorship laws, and environmentalism; he protested against global nuclear proliferation and for the decriminalization/legalization of marijuana, and played the part of activist in support of many other causes. This shift then, this impact on the middle classes, began in the 1960s. And, largely intertwined with his avid political activism—via poetry collections, his interviews in the media, and his public performances—he is perhaps unarguably the most famous poet of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup>-Century.

He was most certainly the most visible, embodying the role of celebrity-poet and poet-activist more so than anyone (perhaps) before or since. One can view this meteoric celebrity-poet rise in a neo-bohemian context, for materially (even superficially) Ginsberg always held on to his bohemian sensibilities. He consistently lobbied for artistic freedom, he lived modestly, he did not own many possessions, shopping mainly at Salvation Army and Goodwill outlets (writing to Richard Eberhart: “I have no vow of poverty, I have a vow of penury—i.e. live cheap and buy clothes at Salvation Army and do not get things complicated with too many possessions.”<sup>163</sup>); he donated most of his income to friends and charities, he often wore his hair and beard long, he regularly gravitated towards outcasts (drug addicts, homosexuals, the homeless, convicted criminals, etc.), and yet remarkably managed to ingratiate his art and eccentricities with masses of people, many in the middle class, even many in the academy—a contemporary bohemian combination that joined the bohemian Ginsberg as *laborer/ contributor/ accumulator* with his fans/admirers and consumers. While just stating something like “he made a vow of penury” provides a pretty good sound-bite, the implications of it are more impactful and influential as many of the younger counter-culturalists looked to him as a

model for how to behave and live. His fame and various involvement brought him a lot of money and success, so it's remarkable that he decided to give the majority of his money away and still live a largely bohemian lifestyle all the while. This gave him credibility as a public countercultural voice though, as these are not ordinary actions for a celebrity—his mix of commercialism and idealism, of art and showmanship, is noteworthy. As a publicized producer of art and a progressive agenda, Ginsberg had found his niche in modern free-enterprise consumer-based society alongside his place as a respected poet.

George Lyon again:

We often speak of “fine arts” and “popular arts” as though there existed an absolute distinction between the two, as though the “popular arts” were completely devoid of aesthetic worth, as though the “fine arts” did not often move with the same dynamics as popular phenomena. Occasionally a figure will link both worlds, and we will be forced to look at three things before we can understand him; we will have to look at his artistic creation, at the world in which he lives, and at his characteristics as a human being. Such a figure was Lord Byron, who has been to many scholars more interesting than his art, and who in many ways can serve us as a symbol of his age. As it is with Byron, so it is with Allen Ginsberg; we must attempt to understand what his writing means to the poet in the context of the mid-twentieth century America.<sup>164</sup>

George Lyon amazingly deems Ginsberg as a kind of Contemporary Byron because Ginsberg managed to interconnect and blend with his times (publishing from 1955 to 1997, especially) in both “high” and “low” contexts wherein he used print

journalism, radio, television, and film to his advantage, all in efforts to spread his words/ideas and those of his friends and associates. Lyon mentions, “we must attempt to understand what his writing means to the poet in the context of the mid-twentieth century,” and he cites the “three things” one must use in understanding Ginsberg in this context: “his artistic creation,” “the world in which he lives,” and “his characteristics as a human being.” In these writings, I am trying to better understand Ginsberg and his work in this light—viewing Ginsberg as a man who leaped into the public consciousness in the 1960s, and in doing so still foremost remaining a *poet*. For, compared to his earlier more canonized works, his poetry starting in the 1960s reads as more confident, comfortable, and inclusive. He was more comfortable in his own skin, and his celebrity/fame had given him confidence to speak his mind clearly, even more plainly than before, more freely. I also write *inclusive* here because it is clear in these 1960s poems that Ginsberg feels less like an outsider. With his growing celebrity, he knows he has an audience and a group to belong to (call it *beat* or *hippie* or *punk* or *back-to-the-earth* or *alternative* or whatever) and that noticeably more and more people have cropped up like him with every subsequent day. With this established foundation, Ginsberg feels freer and more willing to jump into the fray with less vulnerability and less of a concern for political and societal repercussions. He instead, as an older and wiser man (and more famous), has learned to relish conflict. I look to specific Ginsberg poems written in the 1960s at the height of his fame to illustrate these mentioned sentiments of inclusion and confidence.

In a poem titled “Nov. 23, 1963: Alone,” Ginsberg remarks that he is “alone,” yet he mentions the bohemian actions of his friends: “with Hubert in beret & tweed beard sober on meth-freak newspaper splatter rorschach universe, drinking milk . . . / with

Robert in his black jacket & tie deciding to make a point of his courtesy over the kitchen linoleum.”<sup>165</sup> Unlike Ginsberg’s references to his friends in “Howl” who have grimly survived (or not) the doomed apocalypse of the Moloch-fueled America, his friends here in “Alone” alternately *live*. They are hopeful, they are publicly *bohemian*:

with Charlie muttering in his underwear strewn bedroom

...

with Lance with his crummy painting & leopard blue breast seeking to buy  
a motorcycle to crosscountry smiling & wan

...

with Christopher running around in raincoats talking fast about his  
eyesock-  
ets seeing true streets of ‘60s<sup>166</sup>

The poem ends with Ginsberg walking into the next room. He is alone, literally, during the composition of this poem, but fewer of his friends are in mental hospitals or underground now. Even though the country has a long way to go at this time (and still does), a greater *acceptance* has started to creep into the national consciousness—of alternative ways of loving and living—and as a result Ginsberg voices his observations of those *living*. The *best minds* were now mostly living and relatively sane.

Similarly, in a poem such as “Uptown,” written in 1966, Ginsberg gracefully handles what in the past would have been a potentially soul-crippling incident. A man at an uptown bar says to Ginsberg: “If I had my way I’d cut off your hair and send you to Vietnam . . . And if I couldn’t do that I’d cut your throat.” There are many potential responses to such statements that anyone remotely familiar with bar culture can imagine. Ginsberg responds to this surly, prejudiced “Irishman” as the man walks out the door: “Bless you sir.”<sup>167</sup> Bless you sir! This shows Ginsberg’s Buddhist sense of patience and understanding, and in turn shows his evolution as a long-haired bohemian “hippie” in the

American mainstream city. He has now with experience and added celebrity managed to better absorb opposing forces. This is also exemplified in Ginsberg's travel poems, his *Fall of America* series, wherein he depicts the zig-zags he makes across the continent, written later in the 1960s decade, which captures "Wichita Vortex Sutra" and other poems about the middle states of America among the U.S.'s more conservative roads. Finbow writes: "In these long poems, Ginsberg mirrors Robert Frank's portraits of Americans and anticipates the road photos of Gary Winogrand, providing snapshots of people and events as a portfolio-documentary of America."<sup>168</sup>

Particularly, in "Iron House," a "portfolio-documentary of America," Ginsberg rides a train (among other vehicles) in 1966, and he finds himself among "ninety nine soldiers" and a bit alien in his anti-Vietnam sentiments, yet he remains compassionate, hopeful, and less likely to compartmentalize his politics versus the politics of others. He knows the numbers of outsiders with similar political views are increasing, yet he better understands the *other* side now, the hawkish patriots and Christian God-fearing, and he embraces all of the passengers no matter how bizarre they seem to him. "Iron Horse" starts in fairly typical Ginsberg fashion, at least content-wise. He is masturbating while looking out the train window to America's passing landscapes. He proceeds into a Burroughs-style cut-up combination of his observations, his thoughts, overheard conversations, and headlines of newspapers and magazines he is reading. One senses both a Buddhist influence of detachment and an element of heteroglossia; Ginsberg lets these coinciding and competing voices enter and flee, he lets them sit together on the page, and he does so without judgment, an effect not seen as much in his earlier work. As the poem progresses, Ginsberg repeatedly returns to the Vietnam War and to the "ninety nine

soldiers,” and he ultimately feels compassion for these men and their military situations, illuminating Keats’s “negative capability”—i.e. the ability to hold opposing viewpoints in his mind with equal consideration.<sup>169</sup>

Greil Marcus writes, “‘In 1967 the orderly assumptions and good-natured disruptions that in the 1950s bordered real life were melting down in riot and war; the civil rights movement, the great wave of relief in a republic fulfilling its own promises, disappeared into the Summer of Love, into the undertow of belief in a world where everyone was his or her own Christ.’ Or Buddha, Messiah, Shiva—Ginsberg . . . played [his] part in creating this . . . dynamic cultural torque revolving around Vietnam and peace protests, the Manson Family and the flower children.”<sup>170</sup> With his poems, with his personae, he found himself immersed as an increasingly perceived new kind of bohemian (neo/pseudo) Christ/Buddha, as a poet who preached love and acceptance as he protested against the Vietnam War and for Civil Rights, etc. His involvements in these realms was exhaustive; his modes of bohemian celebrity production were non-stop; “The demands on Ginsberg’s time were equaled only, perhaps, by the demands for his work.”<sup>171</sup>

Schumacher captures this nearly sleepless *immersion* in a long quote below:

The day after giving his testimony in Washington, D.C., Allen was back on the West Coast, participating in a flurry of activities that included a benefit reading for the Artists Liberation Front, readings in smaller venues, and a panel discussion on narcotics sponsored by *Playboy* magazine. San Francisco was on the verge of birthing the hippie culture that would be so nationally prominent within a year, during the “Summer of Love,” and Allen easily fit into the milieu of mid-sixties bohemianism

that now had rock ‘n’ roll rather than jazz as its sound track. Ralph J. Gleason, covering a multimedia show that featured Ginsberg, the rock ‘n’ roll band Sopwith Camel, a mime troupe, and a dance company—Allen appearing onstage in an Uncle Sam top hat, reading “Wichita Vortex Sutra”—may have caught the flavor of the West Coast in his descriptive account of the evening: “It was a mardi gras, a masked ball with people in costumes, painted with designs, carrying plasticine banners through the audience while multi-colored liquid light projections played around them.” Ginsberg, Gleason noted, had reached such a stage as an artist that he was “on the edge of doing, from another direction, what Dylan had done—speak through the mass media.”<sup>172</sup>

As Schumacher nicely explicates, through mass multi-media, through protests and radical leftist involvement, primarily via *poetry*, Ginsberg labored and contributed tirelessly to the moment and movement, even party and “festival.” Yet, it was his compassion and acceptance that kept him sane during this charged neo-bohemian pinnacle. Though he became subjectively Christ/Buddha-like, his giving bohemian nature kept him balanced and at least less self-involved and superficial. Ariel writes:

Early on in his career as a poet and public speaker, Allen decided to dedicate the income he received from lectures and reading tours to his various public causes. Ginsberg was in his element on stage, inspiring his audience. Reading poetry is an art, which Ginsberg mastered to perfection, creating an atmosphere that matched his poetry and [persona]. From the late 1950s until his death, he gave hundreds of poetry readings, some of

which yielded handsome incomes. One of the major beneficiaries from the income from Ginsberg's poetry readings was the Committee on Poetry [COP], a nonprofit organization Ginsberg founded in 1966, which offered material and legal support to fellow poets and colleagues, as well as cultural rebels such as Timothy Leary, who became entangled in legal battles. This commitment provided Ginsberg with an additional leadership edge.<sup>173</sup>

This commitment to *charity* speaks to his enduring bohemian spirit, for Ginsberg always true to the lyrics, "take what you need and leave the rest,"<sup>174</sup> was modest in his material needs, always relentlessly giving to others in times of need, only keeping the bare bones minimum for himself.

[Ginsberg] . . . took part in the 'return to nature' movement of the '60s and '70s and the building of agricultural communes. In this experiment, Ginsberg was the initiator, founder (from his own income, primarily), and the community leader. Gordon Ball tells the history of East Hill Farm in upstate New York as a story of both triumph and failure. Ginsberg was interested in creating a spiritual retreat for himself and his friends, as well as offering a site for rehabilitation to acquaintances, including Peter Orlovsky, who were struggling with drugs and other addictions.<sup>175</sup>

The list of Ginsberg's inspired philanthropic involvement is long, but what is most remarkable about this generosity is that he managed to combine his poems, activism, poetry readings and philanthropy with equal fanfare and enthusiasm, for the wider middle classes and his friends—providing an artistic and cultural admixture that is not easily



duplicated. His life, these deeds, prove that a bohemian can also be a celebrity who earns a generous income.

\*

Ginsberg publicly read his work for nearly the last time at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas, in 1996. He read to a packed auditorium, I was told by a current Texas State creative writing professor, and people were crowded in the aisles, violating all kinds of fire codes. At the age of 69, Ginsberg entranced the audience. “I had not seen a reading of this kind before, and I have not since,” said this professor. “After the reading, Ginsberg went out into the main academic quad on campus, about five hundred people gathered around him, and he stood up on a bench and got people to chant ‘Suck cock! Eat pussy!’ over and over again. There was no one else like him.”<sup>176</sup>

Spectacles such as these contribute to his Myth and illuminate the Inclusion of Ginsberg; he had ingratiated himself with the *many*, he was able to stand up in a university academic quad and freely voice whatever he wanted, and he had garnered an audience—of college students in Texas, of hippies in Golden Gate Park, of prime-time viewers on television, et al—that would *repeat his words back to him*. His myth was in the spectacle, both livewire and on the page, and again—as a neo-bohemian neighborhood increasingly attracts middle class investors/consumers at the height of its bohemian moment, so too did Allen Ginsberg attract great attention and audiences during the 1960s and ‘70s. His *changed* heart was open for this.

In this last section, I look to the intricacies of further Ginsberg poems that ground us in the more practical nature of Ginsberg’s bohemian sentiments, presenting a small step back from the fantasies of the Ginsberg Myth. For, despite all of the packed

audiences and television images and radio sound-bites (et al) that Ginsberg produced, after all, and again, he was primarily a bohemian poet who was simply and honestly/courageously attempting to change the world for the better.

### 5.5 Sex, Drugs, & Punk Rock ... a.k.a. *Bohemian Pudding*

I return to some of the tenets of Ginsberg's lasting bohemianism. Other poets have been bohemian, and related to this section, other bohemian-poets have written candidly about (homo)sexuality, drugs/excess, and culture-breaking artistic expressions (punk rock music in this case), but no contemporary poet did so with the fanfare and publicity and *synergy* that Ginsberg did. His bohemianism was especially impactful because of this neo-bohemian admixture. Thus, even in the pinnacle of a neo-bohemian neighborhood's fame, one must get back to the basics and still look to the elements of that neighborhood's core bohemianism that contribute as driving forces to and foundations for that neighborhood's public spectacles and commercialization. Three particular modes/vehicles of expression-as-production are important to mention here: the celebration of open sexuality, excess, and alternative art forms serve as a core trifecta for our (neo)bohemian subject/hero.

During this highlighted period, during Ginsberg's heyday of celebrity and fame, the 1960s and 1970s, he cycled and recycled, reworked, various slants of his alternative/progressive *matter*, and for starters the subject of his out-front homosexuality more increasingly found its way into various poems (and readings and interviews and sound-bites). *Alternative* and free-form sexuality has always been a bohemian motif: "The bohemians' defiance of the conventions of public behavior in their manners and

dress deeply offended bourgeois society, but even worse were the transgressions in their private lives,” Wilson writes. “Above all they challenged sexual convention, for in Bohemia sexual love, instead of being compartmentalized in marriage and hidden in prostitution and deviance, took center-stage. There was thus a challenge to social convention in the flouting of unsanctioned sexual behavior. Bohemian shock tactics brought eroticism into the open so that it suffused the social realm.”<sup>177</sup> Writing in a time (in the 1950s and 1960s, especially) in which celebrities weren’t exactly comfortable in broadcasting or even admitting their sexual preferences, Ginsberg was vocal and clear and unapologetic about his. He was *loud*, at a volume some could say is too *much* for most, thus his levels of fame and recognition were remarkable, considering. When he voiced those words in the academic quad at Texas State it was not just to *shock*; he was offering something *else*. The yelling of “cock” and “pussy” shows that he was free to yell anything he wanted, but, more importantly, that open sexuality was encouraged, even to be celebrated. Ginsberg was openly gay long before many celebrities were open about their homosexuality, yet, tellingly, he was never reduced to being called a *gay poet*; his sexuality was only one aspect of his alternative, bohemian life, which meant that his (homo)sexuality in his poems could easily get read alongside say what he ate for breakfast, his anti-nuke protests, and/or his various travels. In poems such as “Please Master,” “Sweet Boy, Gimme Yr Ass,” “Pussy Blues,” and “Love Returned,” he unabashedly details his private life-desires. In “Please Master,” he writes:

please master can I wrap my arms around your white ass  
 please master can I lick your groin curled with blond soft fur  
 please master can I touch my tongue to your rosy asshole  
 please master may I pass my face to your balls,  
 please master, please look into my eyes,<sup>178</sup>

That last line of “please master, please look into my eyes” expresses a level of tenderness and meaningfulness beyond shocking, alternative sex-making; for, “Please Master” is not just a graphic poem with S & M sex and obedience. As part of his collection *Elegies for Neal Cassady* (1968), the poem recounts Ginsberg’s love for the recently deceased Cassady, and regards what he would do for his friend out of love. Depicting Ginsberg’s obedience to his lover, the poem captures what a person will carry out to satisfy his loved one, no matter how humiliating the reader might perceive the actions: “Please master call me a dog, an ass beast, a wet asshole.” Here Ginsberg’s requests represent the offerings of other individuals who make sacrifices for the larger *good* or *love*, an honest and new kind of elegy. He illustrates that his submission came out of love, and in his way he honors Cassady. Next to this poem, in the same collection, Ginsberg also writes in “Elegy for Neal Cassady”: “Tender Spirit, thank you for touching me with tender hands/ When you were young, in a beautiful body.” Schumacher writes of this complexity of shocking sex mixed with insinuations of love/gratitude and tenderness:

At the time of its publication, “Please Master” was by far the most graphic depiction of homoeroticism ever published by an American poet. In it, Ginsberg unflinchingly guides the reader through the moments of disrobing and foreplay, through oral and, finally, anal sex, the poem skirting the margins of pornography without ever losing its tenderness. For heterosexual readers, the quasiviolent actions associated with anal sex might seem disconcerting—perhaps undignified, given the poet’s reputation—but Ginsberg is anything but concerned about appeasing the

straight community. Neal Cassady's death had given him pause to reflect upon the nature of his sexuality, and "Please Master" was an accurate detailing of the aspects of tenderness and sadism present in the Cassady/Ginsberg love affair. In its depiction of the physical love between two men, "Please Master" is an elegy in its own right, as powerful and moving as the earlier "Elegy for Neal Cassady."<sup>179</sup>

If one then thinks about "cock" and "pussy" chants at Texas State one gets a further understanding for Ginsberg's intentions *beyond shock*. He wants to celebrate the beautiful grittiness of life, one that includes the complicated idea that violent sex can also be beautiful. Shumacher writes, "'Please Master' is further assurance from Ginsberg that homoeroticism is not only acceptable but also to be celebrated. It is not as much a list poem . . . as it is a mantra, a poem that if chanted properly can make homosexual love as real as Hindu mantras make the deities they summon. As unlikely as it might appear, 'Please Master' can be read as a prayer, offered not in silence or hushed whispers but spoken—or even shouted—in joy, in hope, in indisputable faith."<sup>180</sup> Yes, this poem is a lovely albeit unconventional elegy, and it is a *mantra*—both a devotional incantation for a recently deceased human being out of love and a vocalized repeated message to love freely and openly, no matter the shock or embarrassment or condemnation of/from the recipient with stodgy conservative values. To discount Ginsberg's larger aims for this poem is to discount his greater vision for a free celebration for *all* types of love and tenderness. In his unique way, he was one of the first LGBT activist-celebrities.

Mark Shechner writes, "As for the public homosexuality, even granting that as a campaigner for sexual pluralism Ginsberg has been instrumental in creating the current

social climate in which coming out is encouraged and gay-baiting is on the defensive . . . . What surely is exemplary on Ginsberg's part is the risk he has taken in placing his own sexual nature out in the open; proclaiming it, writing about it, worrying over it, and insisting on its right to gratification, thus keeping himself clear of the enervating compromises of closet homosexuality."<sup>181</sup> In these crucial ways, Ginsberg helped in bringing acceptance of varied sexual preferences and practices to the mass cultural climate. As Charley Shively indicates, at the time of these poems' publications, these ideas were shocking and new but that these days, "Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky [Ginsberg's longtime lover] no longer appear as oddities or freaks but as clues, examples. They are not something to avoid, but lives to study, to build upon. We look to them for echoes."<sup>182</sup>

"We look to them for echoes"; with passing time, we can appreciate how courageous Ginsberg was in his candidness about sex, and one can say with a fair amount of certainty that his unapologetic words and public vocalizations about his love made life a little bit easier for others in his wake to love more freely and without embarrassment. His strong sense of his bohemianism contributed to this.

Similar to his usage of shocking homosexual love as his subject matter in a time when few others were doing so, Ginsberg also wrote candidly about his usage of drugs and their varying effects and associations. "Erotic experience was only one of several routes to the altered state to which the bohemian aspired," Wilson writes. "The stereotype of the bohemians as jolly fornicators, roisterers, and barflies is superficial because it completely ignores the significance of Excess. . . . The point of Excess was ultimately not self-gratification, but self-discovery."<sup>183</sup> Again, it would take a while for the greater

masses to better understand Ginsberg's words about this subject matter of "Excess," about his messages about using drugs responsibly in efforts to enhance one's consciousness and feel greater compassion/awareness/connection for/to other human beings. In truth, Ginsberg only occasionally drank alcohol and smoked marijuana; and, he selectively often premeditatedly imbibed other drugs in order to reach his larger aims. As Schumacher explains, Ginsberg's approach towards drugs was an intellectual one, a nearly *scientific* one:

This is not to say that Ginsberg totally supported the widespread, wholesale use of all types of drugs. He recognized the harm that could come from the use of certain drugs, and throughout his life as a public figure, he drew a careful distinction between the use of hard drugs and soft drugs, between the use of such addictive drugs as heroin and amphetamines and such nonaddictive drugs as marijuana and LSD. To his critics, this might have seemed like a confusing, perhaps even hypocritical posture, since Allen admitted openly that he had experimented with all types of drugs, soft and hard, and since he had been so tolerant of those around him who used addictive and harmful drugs. In fact, a close look at Ginsberg's use of and attitudes toward drugs indicates that he was very consistent over the years. He never did use drugs to the extent that his detractors believed he did, and there is no question that he took an almost scientific approach to his experimentation with drugs that he knew to be addictive. His views toward junkies, Methedrine addicts, and other users were consistent as well: He did not make any moral judgment on their

activities . . . but he also considered those people to be individuals consumed by the type of illness that required patience and medical treatment rather than harassment or prosecution by the law.<sup>184</sup>

Ginsberg wrote poems *about* certain drugs—“A Methedrine Vision in Hollywood,” “Consulting I Ching Smoking Pot...”, “City Midnight Junk Strains,”—but he also wrote poems under the influence—“Wales Visitation” (LSD), “Bixby Canyon” (marijuana)—along with poems concerning corruption within the drug trade and regarding unjust U.S. drug laws/penalties (i.e., “CIA Dope Calypso”). He often aimed to use these substances in hopes of getting a different perspective, of altering his consciousness: “With psychedelics as catalysts, I have seen the world more deeply at specific times,” Ginsberg stated before the Judiciary Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, “and that has made me more peaceable.”<sup>185</sup> Ginsberg understood, if taken seriously, the benefits certain drug-induced experiences could have, and, given these perspectives, he constantly voiced his discern with the fallacies and misinformation involved (including the stereotypes of him being just a drug-induced hippie). Schumacher: “The more Allen delved into it, the more he became convinced that drugs—both their distribution and the laws concerning them—were at the base of an enormous control system that was denying people their human and constitutional rights.”<sup>186</sup>

In a poem titled “Birdbrain” (1980), he voices some of these concerns involving drug usage and the drug trade:

Birdbrain wore a mustache & ran Germany on Amphetamines the last year  
of World War II  
...  
Birdbrain outlawed Opiates on the world market  
Birdbrain formed the Black Market in Opium



Birdbrain's father shot skag in hallways of the lower East Side  
 Birdbrain organized Operation Condor to spray poison fumes on the mari-  
 juana fields of Sonora  
 Birdbrain got sick in Harvard Square from smoking Mexican grass<sup>187</sup>

Similarly, in "Capitol Air" (1980), he writes: "I don't like Narcs & Mafia marketing  
 Smack/The General bullying Congress in his tweed vest/The President building up his  
 armies in the East & West."<sup>188</sup> And, in "Industrial Waves" (1981), Ginsberg writes:

Freedom to bust you for grass if you please  
 ...  
 Freedom to not be allowed to smoke pot  
 Freedom to drink till you got the DT's  
 Freedom to never take LSD.  
 ...  
 Freedom to sell dope if you're CIA  
 Or a Narc on the Street you can do it anyway  
 Or the sister of the Shah or informer for the law—  
 If your name is Abbie Hoffman you might take a fall.<sup>189</sup>

In these poems, Ginsberg shows the spectrum of drug users/abusers—from people in the  
 Lower East Side to Harvard to the CIA to Hitler to Abbie Hoffman—and he explicates  
 the benefits of select drug usage, and his sympathy and patience for addiction as a  
 medical issue, along with hypocritical governmental involvement in the drug trade and  
 their restrictions of freedom in regards to a person's right to put into her body whatever  
 she pleases. These issues and *rights* preoccupied much of Ginsberg's time in the 1970s  
 and '80s; he carried around a Drug File with his own research and media clippings, et al;  
 he met with politicians quite often to discuss these issues—all in a time (enter Nancy  
 Reagan) wherein these issues were not often easily and openly discussed.

He had a knack for getting involved in these types of controversial issues, just as  
 he had a knack for taking part in unlikely/unknown artistic movements and spectacles,  
 the last prong of what I call his bohemian trifecta—and this includes *punk rock*. Yes,

even punk rock, especially in the late '70s before it became more and more commoditized as primarily a style of dress. Along with befriending the likes of Joe Strummer from *The Clash*, Patti Smith and Jim Carroll, Ginsberg always kept a residence in the Lower East Side, the birthplace of American punk rock. He attended concerts at CBGB's, read/sang his poetry there and at other seminal LES punk-oriented venues, and, even as a man in his fifties, was a part of this scene as well. Amazingly—which just goes to show his embrace of practically every new and emergent artistic scene he felt was created and presented in earnest and with the right intentions. His attitude, of course, quintessentially puts him in a traditionally bohemian mode of mind: “Bohemian politics represented an attempt to reconcile two incompatible views. On the one hand there was the view that the highest purpose of the arts and of artists was to reveal a vision of a better world and that this purpose was ultimately political. On the other hand, there was the view that the purpose of politics was to create a world of freedom for the arts, since it was art that gave meaning to life.”<sup>190</sup> In his celebration of punk rock, Ginsberg could “reconcile” these two views. He saw punk rock music as a free artistic expression, but he also perceived this expression as political—and that American politicians could benefit from the breaking down of walls that punk rock offered.

In “Punk Rock Your My Big Crybaby” (1977), he screams his involvement:

I can't get excited, Louder! Viciouser!  
 Fuck me in the ass! Suck me! Come in my ears!  
 I want those pink Abdominal bellybuttons!  
 Promise you'll murder me in the gutter with Orgasms!  
 I'll buy a ticket to your nightclub, I wanna get busted!  
 50 years old I wanna Go! with whips & chains & leather!  
 Spank me! Kiss me in the eye! Suck me all over  
 from Mabuhay Gardens to CBGB's coast to coast  
 Skull to toe Gimme yr electric guitar naked,

Punk President, eat up the FBI w / yr big mouth.<sup>191</sup>

*Open sexuality. Mind-expanding drugs. Punk rock.* (But, also anti-nuke protest, alternative energy, anti-censorship legislation, expansion of Eastern religions, et al) In 1948, Ginsberg explained about his Beat Generation: “[I]t went beyond anything we ‘planned,’” he told the writer Bruce Cook. “It was a visionary experience in 1948, when we started. Now everybody sees and understands these things”,<sup>192</sup> and the same rationale-philosophy can be said about these other areas/periods of his life. He publicly *voiced* his homosexuality, his idealistic usage of different drugs, his celebration of alternative art forms (punk rock as one example), and he broadcasted aspects of Eastern religious thought and his various progressive politics long before the masses understood and embraced them. But/and the crucial point here is this: The public still, largely during these times, embraced *him*. Shechner writes:

Ginsberg has long since graduated from being a subterranean and “know-nothing Bohemian” (Norman Podhoretz’s tactful phrase) to being everyone’s favorite prophet. He is our anarchist-in-residence, queer and avuncular, whose passion for young boys and tirades against empire, oppression, and, lately, heroin are disarmed and domesticated by his irony. He reads poems about shit to packed houses in the prep schools.<sup>193</sup>

The sound-bite remains that he was *cool* and *radical* and *ahead of his time*, even in reading “poems about shit to packed houses in the prep schools,” but as it usually is with sound-bites, the realities were more complicated—more *extensive*; Ginsberg had a *knack*, a penchant for fingering the pulse of things, call it an *instinct for change*, a progressive and liberal, *visionary impulse*: He understood what was coming, and what

would (eventually) be popular, as is often the case for the (neo)bohemian person (or neighborhood) with wherewithal; he was in tune with the *Now* as a progressive type, even a prophet, *yes*; he had a keen understanding of *Inclusion*, that the tent does indeed also include opium/anal sex/loud music/shit and piss, for examples, along with middle class consumption. But, this mindset is also in part, as I've taken great pains to argue here, a continuation of the Bohemian Myth and tradition. I call him *neo-bohemian* because he fit in at certain times with the American middle class in an increasingly postmodern world, while he used multi-media and publicity to his advantage, but his bohemianism is what foremost drove his spirit and the immediacy and transparency of his words/thoughts, behaviors, and spectacles.

As I delve more into Ginsberg's later life neo-bohemianism in the next chapter, it helps *not* to forget this bohemian core.

CHAPTER 6: NEO-BOHEMIAN ICON AND LENDEN IN (LATER) LIFE AND  
SIMULACRA. HAS THE MAN BEEN (FULLY) GENTRIFIED?

“Mass culture is not just about soap opera and the tabloids, it is not just pop music and football, but goes beyond these to popularizing the historical avant-garde. Reproductions of the Impressionists decorate millions of sitting-room walls, calendars, birthday cards and biscuit tins.”—Elizabeth Wilson<sup>194</sup>

In the 1980s and 1990s, Allen Ginsberg functioned as a walking archive of Bohemia and countercultural radicalism. He wore the badges of Beat, Hippie Leader, and Countercultural Hero (among a few others) into older age. These labels though came with a price, as is the neo-bohemian way. As he included himself in popular media/popular culture, some critics viewed him as a “sell out,” as a formerly authentic bohemian who had compromised his artistic integrity and credibility. He made an MTV music video and posed for a GAP clothing advertisement (as just two examples), and many of the purists were not happy about it. Just before he died, Ginsberg sold his literary archive to Stanford University for one million dollars, and he bought a large expensive loft apartment in the gentrified Lower East Side. Detractors criticized him for these choices as well.

Though, as this chapter articulates, it’s a bit reductionist to just call Ginsberg a sell-out and leave it at that. The reality is more complicated. In truth, he maintained many of his longstanding bohemian tendencies, and, crucially, in the context of neo-bohemia, many people had caught up to agree with and extend his originally bohemian ideas and aims. As I explain, this *hybrid*, these exchanges/connections between/of his bohemianism

and the mass public did, however, also invoke a fair amount of self-doubt on Ginsberg's part, in later life especially. At times, he did question the authenticity of his celebrity/fame along with his motivations for being in the limelight. These conditions, this confusion, then place Ginsberg on the last plot point of our arc-of-gentrification—the plot point wherein a neo-bohemian neighborhood/man is arguably “played out.” The bohemian man had become (overly) gentrified. As a bohemian neighborhood maintains its “neo” status (for however long), criticisms/doubts as to the place's authenticity and integrity perpetually accrue. Ginsberg's popular media/popular culture involvement now well past his late 1960s “prime” along with his increased financial success and subsequent criticisms and self-doubts holistically/complicatedly function similarly in these ways. And, as I explain in the last section of this chapter, these criticisms and debates have continued long after the man's death, which then makes us consider the “brand” that is Allen Ginsberg. For, as I argue, Ginsberg became a brand after his death, once he was no longer physically available to find new “forms” (i.e. new emerging media, vehicles, and *defenses*) for his poetry/art and activism.

### 6.1 Back to the Lower East Side

Christopher Mele in *Selling the Lower East Side* captures the conditions and inspirations of the gentrified Lower East Side in the 1990s. The Bohemia-inspired musical, *Rent*, which takes the LES as its setting, is playing several times a week to packed Broadway-theatre audiences. The success of the musical has prompted Bloomingdale's, the upscale Upper East Side clothing store, to offer a *Rent*-inspired clothing line that captures the “East Village look.”<sup>195</sup> MTV, the music television network,

has “offered a one-year lease of an East Village apartment as part of a promotion for a film about a white male tenement dweller’s love/hate relationship with his cockroach infested walk-up.” A subsequent “cable network, Comedy Central, televise[s] its ‘alternative’ and caviling stand-up series from Tompkins Square Park, the site of earlier unrest over neighborhood renewal between locals and police.”<sup>196</sup> Via the Internet, “curiosity in the East Village has prompted the appearance of a cyber soap opera that bears the neighborhood’s name . . . where browsers interact with plot lines of the fictionally disenfranchised, the struggling artist, and the strung-out drug addict.”<sup>197</sup>

Mele explains that these representations of the East Village spin a particular “rendition” of the neighborhood: “Primarily through media exposure, middle-class visitors encounter, become familiar with, and appreciate an illusion of the East Village lifted from bits and pieces of an otherwise complex interplay of ethnic, racial, class, political, and sexual social relations. Symbols, images, and rhetoric typify local social life as ‘peculiar’ or ‘offbeat’ but always aesthetically pleasing and penetrable to the inquisitive (and acquisitive) middle and upper classes.”<sup>198</sup>

Mark Greif, founding editor of the journal *n+I*, and who grew up in the Lower East Side, describes the transformation of the neighborhood that he witnessed firsthand:

I’d never been so close to a neighborhood “in transition.” But I also hadn’t seen a transition quite like this. I knew bohemia. It was very clear to me that the hipster neighborhood was not bohemian; it wasn’t artists. Artists were occasionally there—drinking coffee—but they were usually thin on the ground. Instead of doing art, people everywhere were “doing” products . . . the hipster subculture was pro-consumer, amoral, pro-lifestyle.<sup>199</sup>

Both Mele and Greif comment on how the Lower East Side changed in the 1990s and early 2000s, and in Greif's case he points to what he sees as the neighborhood's official authentically artistic and cultural *end* in 2003. His characterization/distinguishing of the hipster rather than the bohemian is a telling one, for in his estimation the neighborhood's artists had fallen away to the perils of fashion and consumerism. The counterculture (first the hippies of the 1960s, then the punks of the 1970s and '80s) had become marketed and branded, and thus the neighborhood in the '90s with its *hipsters* represented a continuation of this phenomenon. Mele chimes about the LES '90s milieu: "Advertising, promotion, and the niche marketing of 'difference' have transformed once threatening and scorned subcultural aesthetics . . . into more or less readily available, consumable lifestyles. . . . In the East Village, real estate developers have translated the symbolic value of cultural difference into economic value, attracting middle-class renters, diners, and shoppers who find the allure in this edgier version of 'bohemian mix,' flush with modern living spaces and other amenities."<sup>200</sup>

Likewise, in Greif's eyes, the artistic counterculture had become "the hipster subculture." Artists had given way to Richard Florida's "creative class"—that is, mainly "amoral" consumption-oriented hipsters and/or white collar workers, not artists, who utilize creativity and cultural capital in their varying industries (as diverse as graphic design to law) to gain maximum profit and attention. The importance of profit-via-practical creativity had replaced the more genuine (art-for-art's-sake) artistic production, and the hipster appearances had supplanted the creative substance. As Greif indicates, what were in the past beat or hippie or even punk/New Wave artists in the neighborhood were now hipsters playing the part of the beatnik or hippie or punk without much of the



accompanying artistic production. And, as Greif explains, *hipsters are not bohemians*—a point that lends itself to questions about quality and authenticity in postmodern late-stage capitalism.

Can a hipster be bohemian? Can a bohemian be a hipster? John Leland in his book *Hip: the History* treats these terms as synonyms, but others, such as Greif, present a clear distinction and dichotomy—sides that Allen Ginsberg, as a *representation*, would debatably fall on depending on the referrer. For, Ginsberg was *both* a bohemian and a hipster, he was *each*, and he was *neither*, again, according to the respondent. Ginsberg was viewed as hip because he looked cool with that beard and secondhand/ (and/or)working-man’s clothes, and because he ingratiated himself with the young with his poetry and readings; he often was involved in the newest art movement or protest, thus pretty continually putting himself around the *cutting edge*. Others, detractors, criticized Ginsberg as superficial, as just a celebrity with little substance. Some criticized the quality of his poetry.<sup>201</sup> Leland alludes to this confusion/debate: “In such places as [the LES] . . . the bohemian and the juvenile delinquent came face-to-face . . . and the hipster was a fact in American life”<sup>202</sup>—a fact that merged art with mainstream consumerism, and Ginsberg found himself in the eye and as the Eye of it in a merger and pull of the various forces. For, with his growing celebrity, starting especially in the 1960s, Ginsberg as a spotlighted Lower East Side resident unknowingly played a part in this cultural transformation, as did *Rent* and some of the other representations that Mele mentions. Similarly, Richard Lloyd explains how Wicker Park celebrities changed the landscape of the neighborhood:

This flurry of attention [on resident celebrity artists] shone a light on the neighborhood as a diverse package of cutting-edge innovation, and multiple interests took note . . . by that time the neighborhood ethos was constituted not only in headlines or even by the massing of creative aspirants, but also by local institutions with greater or lesser staying power: the local galleries, coffee shops, and bars that continued to announce, and trade upon, bohemian notoriety.<sup>203</sup>

If one walks around the Lower East Side today, one notices many expensive boutique stores and cafes, some upscale bars and restaurants, relatively clean streets, and many professional-looking perhaps creative class residents. One takes a quick look at apartment listings and notices the exorbitant prices for rent and purchase that no struggling artist could realistically afford (a quick online apartment search puts a typical LES studio apartment of 600 square feet at \$2000 per month minimum). Some of the historical grit and edge remain in this neighborhood, but there is now an irony and paradox attached to these aesthetics. If certain businesses and patrons of the LES look gritty and edgy, it's because these looks/styles help them generate revenue and cultural cachet. As an example, take a LES dive bar called *Welcome to the Johnsons* which bills itself as “an unpretentious bar with beer from a fridge, a jukebox & a 1970s wood-paneled-basement vibe” with its \$2 PBR beers, plastic-covered sofas, its notoriously and intentionally disgusting bathroom, Ms. Pacman arcade game, dank and musty smells, and all-around seedy ambiance. This bar, now ironic in its intentional embellishment of a famous rundown city scape and feel, feeds off the historical glamorization of the LES's grit and grime/edge and filth.

Ginsberg then, like it or not (and I don't *fully* like it), in varying degrees fits in or at least partially connects with *all of this*—hipsters/poseurs, gritty LES dive bars that generate serious profits, Broadway plays that glamourize struggling artists, Internet games that dramatize the LES drug addict, a “bohemian mix” of vast retail/entertainment consumption, rundown apartments that sell for exorbitant prices.

A further look at some of Ginsberg's commercialized (neo)bohemian involvement will help clarify/expand these *conditions*—help perhaps parse out (or confuse) the bohemian from the chatter and glitter and the plastic wires of consumption.

## 6.2 MTV

In Wicker Park's history, in its transformation from a struggling artist bohemian enclave to a neo-bohemian zone of price hikes and glamourized albeit grit-oriented entertainment, Richard Lloyd pinpoints one notable moment that signaled Wicker Park's ultimate (counter)cultural demise as an authentic neighborhood that had sold out to celebrity and public investment. In 2001, the cast of MTV's reality show “The Real World” set up shop in a historical Wicker Park building that had formerly converted its loft spaces into artist studios. “With the arrival of MTV's cameras,” Lloyd writes, “the entertainment potential of the neighborhood exploded the local boundaries, the Wicker Park scene now figuring prominently in an immensely popular series that doubles as an instructional manual in consumer culture for its young fans.”<sup>204</sup> Lloyd then depicts how many long-time residents of Wicker Park were appalled, believing the “Real World” house and show symbolized gentrification's biggest destroyer of a neighborhood that prided itself on local art and production, alongside its authentic participants. These locals

were disturbed by “MTV’s co-optation of a neighborhood aesthetic over which they feel proprietary.”<sup>205</sup> For, the Wicker Park regulars asked themselves: what is less local or authentic than a bunch of strangers from other places whom have been paid to look “real” and “cool” on camera? The local backlash was immense, several protests of the show took place during its airing, and the neighborhood since has hardly recovered its local artistic credibility. Rents have increased, and the neighborhood’s reputation is currently that of a place that has been “played out.” Tellingly, mainly young artists will tell you this, not very many young middle class professionals will.

As a revealing parallel, in perhaps the penultimate indication of Ginsberg’s pop cultural immersion, in 1996 he appeared in a Gus Van Sant-directed MTV music video, singing/orating his “Ballad of the Skeletons,” with musical accompaniment by Paul McCartney and Philip Glass, to widespread acclaim. This fusion was remarkable not only because no other contemporary anthologized poet had ever contributed to a MTV music video but more so because Ginsberg at the age of 70 as former Beat and Hippie and overall countercultural mongrel was now voicing a liberal agenda for yet another generation of consumers (in the 1990s!). Danny Goldberg, then CEO of Mercury Records, replied that strikingly “‘Skeletons’ received highly publicized and much-coveted ‘buzz bin’ rotation on MTV in the weeks before the last election—to the consternation of other record companies who were submitting artists with more conventional credentials. This made Allen the only seventy-year-old besides Tony Bennett to ever be played on MTV.”<sup>206</sup>

The music video opens with images of U.S. military soldiers, boats, planes and weapons then cuts to an aerial view of the inside of the nation’s House of Representatives

Chamber before showing a distinguished Ginsberg with coat and tie, trimmed beard, eyeglasses, and red/white/blue prototypical Uncle Sam top hat (the same hat he wore during some late-1960s demonstrations). As we hear McCartney and Glass's music in the background, Ginsberg calmly but forcefully iterates his poetic lines:

Said the Presidential Skeleton

I won't sign the bill

Said the Speaker skeleton

Yes you will

Said the Representative Skeleton

I object

Said the Supreme Court skeleton

Whaddya expect

Said the Old Christ skeleton

Care for the Poor

Said the Son of God skeleton

AIDS needs cure

Said the Homophobe skeleton

Gay folk suck

Said the Heritage Policy skeleton

Blacks 're outa luck

Said the Macho skeleton

Women in their place

Said the Fundamentalist skeleton

Increase human race

Said Nancy's skeleton

Just say No

Said the Rasta skeleton

Blow Nancy Blow<sup>207</sup>

With these clever politically charged lines, Van Sant mixes a montage of famous political and pop-cultural images: Clinton-Bush-Perot presidential debate, LBJ, Lincoln Memorial, protests against Castro and for "Legal Pot," hippies, civil rights race riots, astronauts on the moon, JFK, Janet Reno, Bob Dole, Newt Gingrich, American flag,

among other archetypal(/stereotypical) images and figures. Towards the end of the video, we see what appears to be the aftermath of some kind of bomb explosion—a collection of smoke behind the profile of the wise Ginsberg. The video ends with Ginsberg hatless, enlarged typewritten words scroll behind him, and the faint ghost of the American flag flickers in. Ginsberg clasps his hands together and bows to the camera before holding up a pen, an obvious gesture. “I started it,” Ginsberg stated to the *LA Times* in 1996, “because [of] all that inflated bull about the family values, the ‘contract with America,’ Newt Gingrich and all the loudmouth stuff on talk radio, and Rush Limbaugh and all those other guys. It seemed obnoxious and stupid and kind of sub-contradictory, so I figured I’d write a poem to knock it out of the ring.”<sup>208</sup>

In only four minutes, the video’s images capture the various political protest phases of Ginsberg’s life for a younger generation of mid-1990s MTV viewers while his spoken words capture his views on special interest-fueled government corruption, military imperialism, censorship, civil and human rights, AIDs, racism, homophobia, police misuse of powers, homelessness, nuclear proliferation, environmentalism, multinational capitalism, poverty, the Gulf War, Nancy Reagan/DARE/the war on drugs, etc. In his last opined stanza, Ginsberg remarks: “Said the TV skeleton/Eat sound bites/Said the Newscast skeleton/That’s all Goodnight.”<sup>209</sup>

An irony exists here in this concluding message with Ginsberg’s four-minute poem of “sound bites” on an MTV channel owned and operated by Viacom Media Networks, a monster conglomerate. This hybrid captures Neo-Bohemia through poetry, no less—a nearly forgotten medium by the masses in the 1990s. Here, an independent individual poet who is free to do and say what he pleases has used cable television’s most

popular music video channel to voice his opinions and concerns. Some perhaps would call this a *sell-out* because this is MTV. Others might call this an innovative and effective mixture of ideas and media. Regardless: Ginsberg had (perhaps officially) become *Neo-Ginsberg*.

The fact that Ginsberg was even allowed to make such a video illustrates that many of the words/messages of his Beat and '60s (and beyond) countercultures had become more widely accepted in the 1990s and that his image was still a pretty viable one for advocating these relatively liberal ideas, notably just before a presidential election. The prophetic/radical opinions of his earlier days had become more widespread, aspects of his political and personal bohemianism had become mainstream, a facet of Richard Lloyd's neo-bohemia. "New patterns of production characterize the city and its neighborhoods, with a larger role for culture and technology," Lloyd writes. "It is in this context that a new bohemia . . . emerges."<sup>210</sup> A new bohemia had "emerged" here in a new "pattern of production" (i.e. a music video), and, though I am stunned Ginsberg was even allowed to make such a video in 1996, and it does somewhat show the "changing" times, again a more sinister viewpoint would be that he had "sold out," that he had exchanged his artistic integrity for money and fame and that his radical messages had lost weight and been co-opted by a cultural machine such as Viacom (and MTV) that had cornered the markets of "hip" and "cool." Cultural theorists who confer with Adorno and Horkheimer's associations and concepts of a dubious culture industry would say so. Wilson writes: "Adorno had believed that the 'masses' had had the wool pulled over their eyes by Hollywood and Tin Pan Alley, and had thus succumbed to 'false consciousness.'"<sup>211</sup> In the eyes of these critics, Ginsberg's video was now merely

harmless entertainment like everything else.<sup>212</sup> By extension, of course on the politically leftist side of things, by people who felt “proprietary” towards the perceivably *radical* Ginsberg, a further criticism would be that because Ginsberg used MTV (and Paul McCartney, et al) as his vehicle that he became automatically *not radical enough*—that a political video of this nature positioned possibly between Madonna and Pearl Jam was not outrageous enough and failed to cause a substantial ripple because it was a part of the problem of mindless consumption, hence the complexities of voicing dissent in a media-driven public. These criticisms of Ginsberg situate him in a related realm as Wicker Park once the MTV “Real World” came to town. His authenticity had been challenged.

This particular MTV video as a kind of neo-bohemian hybrid is not the same as say co-opting a tie-dye shirt, however. Ginsberg is hardly just selling a packaged object/item to buy at a store. This video contains above all else *words with messages*—words criticizing Nancy Reagan and other facets of conservative American government and society. The implications of these messages were at least two-fold: Fans of Ginsberg could argue that he worked around the technocratic system by co-opting it for his own agenda, as he had always done, turning the medium in on itself—i.e. “Said the TV skeleton/Eat sound bites”—and that via MTV, as an outsider gone *inside* without comprising his beliefs, he had become a spokesman for yet another generation of young liberals. Wilson writes: “It was not that mass culture had triumphed over high art, but rather that the boundaries between them had collapsed. This meant that the tastes of the majority could be brought in from the cold, and it made possible a move away from what was judged to be the elitism of Marxists such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer.”<sup>213</sup> The boundaries in this case, arguably, of “high” poetry and “low” MTV



video, had collapsed. Arguably, Ginsberg had *won* in that previous avant-garde messages were now embraced and consumed by the *many*; also, the medium *was* the message, yes, now, in the sense that Ginsberg had *succeeded* in getting MTV rotation. Again, he wasn't interested in selling objects and items; he, as always, was preoccupied with changing the consciousness of as many people as possible. And, this attempt for Ginsberg was not "false" because his primary goal was not financial gain. He, foremost, before an election, wanted fewer people to vote for conservative politicians who were against legal abortion, smoking marijuana, government-organized protection of the environment, and for war-mongering, et al.<sup>214</sup>

"It's a great collage," Ginsberg stated simply about Van Sant's finished product. "He went back to old Pathé, Satan skeletons, and mixed them up with Rush Limbaugh, and Dole, and the local politicians, Newt Gingrich, and the President. And mixed those up with the atom bomb, when I talk about the electric chair— 'Hey, what's cookin?'—you got Satan setting off an atom bomb, and I'm trembling with a USA hat on, the Uncle Sam hat on. So it's quite a production, it's fun."<sup>215</sup> Is Ginsberg's confidence and earnestness even playfulness here too naïve? Maybe. Maybe not. Perhaps his biggest success was in creating these types of issues/debates about authenticity and the substance of any given message. If, as Wilson writes, the "market and the spectacle of consumer society had become all-inclusive" then a space for Ginsberg and this type of debate (and acceptance) had opened up. A music video was not just a music video anymore. It was a chance for a "great collage" of *inclusion* and *bridge*. For, Ginsberg himself explained he didn't believe in the term "sell out," anyway, saying it was:

one of those cornball ideas that people who didn't have anything to do got hung up on. I wouldn't have minded doing it if I could find what to sell out to. Geniuses don't sell out, in the sense that genius bursts the bounds of either selling out or not selling out. When somebody has real inspiration like Dylan, the move to electric is just simply the expansion of his genius into more forms, wilder forms. He's got that sense of negative capability being able to go all the way in, without necessarily losing himself.

Committing himself and at the same time doing it like a poet, landing like a cat with nine lives.<sup>216</sup>

Thus, Ginsberg's "move to electric" (i.e. his making of a MTV music video), as parallel to Bob Dylan's taking up the electric guitar, in his mind was just an expansion "of his genius into more forms." For, to be neo-bohemian is not always necessarily just to "sell out." In its most worthy manifestation(s), it consists of an inspired artist finding new forms—new more modern vehicles, platforms, and technologies—for his artistic/creative expressions and messages. John Leland explains this: "By this logic, the gifted trickster can sell a riddle of himself, and use the mass media to disperse that riddle to a broad audience. In a pop culture that produced both 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' [and 'Ballad of the Skeletons' for that matter] and the Subaru ads that spieled, 'it's like punk rock, but a car,' the dichotomy of hip and commerce is too limiting."<sup>217</sup> For, in truth, Bohemia and the modes of Hip have always been tied to aspects of a market. Artists have always sought to sell their work, if possible. The merits and quality of Ginsberg's "Ballad of the Skeleton" are up for debate, but he knew that he couldn't escape the market. In turn, he just used the newest most available means (an MTV music video in this case) to

perpetuate his poetry and political messages. In his eyes, to *sell out* would have been to *not* voice his art and messages to as many people as possible, by any means possible. After all, a poem is still a poem whether no one reads it or a billion people around the world hear it on MTV. I don't think he compromised anything by going with this "form." But, then again, I'm just one biased consumer.

### 6.3 GAP

Elizabeth Wilson in *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts* writes, "[Bohemia] was an alternative world. It presented itself both as the absolute opposite of bourgeois society, a site of political dissidence challenging the oppressive powers of the state, and as a stronghold of artistic values against the philistine."<sup>218</sup> Historically, Bohemia has covered a big tent of resistance and defiance; from the artistic "water drinkers" of 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Paris to the Lost Generation of the 1920s Paris and Greenwich Village in New York to the Beats and then to the counterculture of the 1960s hippies to the punks of the 1970s to the reactionaries and radicals in Seattle in 1999 to many more epochs along the way, bohemians have remained responsive and "fringe" in ways that have presented themselves as fashionable and political. Wilson states, "Politically bohemians tended to be drawn to utopian systems and extreme oppositionalism. Their goal was total social transformation rather than incremental political change. Consequently their revolutionary challenge to social privilege, conformity and conservatism was symbolic, hence their use of outrage and confrontational lifestyles as weapons."<sup>219</sup>

Especially since the 1960s, advertising and business would regularly take these images of the bohemian and use them to sell products, often times attempting to leave the politics out of the equation. Thomas Frank writes:

Hip capitalism wasn't something on the fringes of enterprise, an occasional hippie entrepreneur selling posters or drug paraphernalia. Nor was it a purely demographic maneuver, just a different spin to sell products to a different group. What happened in the sixties is that hip became central to the way American capitalism understood itself and explained itself to the public.<sup>220</sup>

*Hip, Neo-Bohemia, and the Counterculture:* These terms bleed into one another, and sometimes they are synonymous in their references to the marketability of the struggling artist-bohemian and the countercultural hero. Simply, the image of the rebel makes money. Leland writes, "Hip from its origins was tied to the needs of the market" and "If hip is a subversive intelligence cultivated by outsiders, the mainstream has always had a stake in keeping up."<sup>221</sup> Further: "Even as collegiate bohemians turned on to *Naked Lunch* or *On the Road*, the corporate culture saw itself as trying to break out of the same box. Only instead of creating poetry or jazz, it imagined new ads or products or models of corporate individualism." *And:* "The virtues of the straight world, such as tradition, caution and prudence, would not sell all the new gizmos and goods that American factories were now producing. An expanding economy needs its troublemakers and tricksters, people who invent new desires that can be satisfied by new products."<sup>222</sup>

Hence, with the continual (re)invention of "new desires," we open up a realm, in the neo-bohemian neighborhood and the neo-bohemian culture in general, through

advertising perhaps foremost, for both bohemianism and *partial* bohemianism in a late stage capitalist culture and among creative classes in a postmodern realm—rebellion against the bourgeoisie had fallen away to rebellion against multi-national corporations, the suburbs, and the yuppie, even though many of these sites were using symbols of the bohemian and counterculture for their own needs and consumptions (“the market and the spectacle of consumer society had become all-inclusive”<sup>223</sup>)—and within this changing cultural landscape, Ginsberg would find his art, life, and image on many sides of this emergent bohemian/neo-bohemian dynamic. Amid television shows (and other multi-media forms he was involved with) and poetry readings that often resembled rock concerts, a feat that few other American contemporary poets have been able to consistently duplicate, Ginsberg did *remain bohemian* in many senses of the term (i.e., he dressed and lived simply, he donated most of his earnings, and he constantly strived for the creative/alternative/*new*), shocking audiences all the while with his candor about his sexuality and his sexual and creative/radical exploits. Bob Rosenthal, Ginsberg’s longtime assistant states:

Allen hated accumulating money – he didn’t have savings accounts; whenever he needed money, he just made more money. But he had a wonderful facility for making money. He could go out for readings, he could sign photographs, he could publish books, he could do talks – anything. He was very generous. He lived a life of poverty but he made a lot of money – he was making \$300,000 a year. I was paying more taxes, just like Warren Buffet’s secretary. He kept every receipt and when it was all totaled up, he paid very little taxes. It was by design: Allen didn’t want

to pay any tax for war, so any money he paid he either hired secretaries, wrote off on taxi cabs, books, whatever, and basically he made about \$6,000 a year after everything worked out and he paid no taxes. . . . Most of his reading fees were put into a non-profit, the Committee on Poetry, and then he gave that money away. So he supported a lot of people. He didn't want things.<sup>224</sup>

Even though Ginsberg continued to wear second-hand clothes, live in a cheap LES apartment (excluding the last two months of this life), and intentionally live simply (even “in poverty” as Rosenthal writes), Ginsberg’s bohemianism shifted as his celebrity grew and as his contexts changed—as the market *and the audience* changed. As Daniel Bell puts it, “The adversary culture has come to dominate the cultural order.”<sup>225</sup> It’s no coincidence, Bell writes, that the number of artists and culture class members have drastically increased since 1970, and, with this, flexible accumulation has taken bohemian styles and ideas into an expanded market of commodity production. In this rise, later in life, Ginsberg even sold his image for advertisements to Microsoft and GAP for large sums, which he was criticized for, but he used the money to start a program for impoverished kids at the Naropa Institute.<sup>226</sup> So goes the duality of the Neo-Bohemian Thing. He was still living this bohemian life, and he was speaking and writing candidly about his aging body and his political concerns, but simultaneously he was willing to sit for an ad for a clothing company that has stores in most American malls. His image as a beat poet or countercultural figure could ostensibly sell more khaki pants to “hip” teenagers and adults now, a trend that, again, Thomas Frank writes extensively about in

*The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism.*

Frank notes that after the 1950s, a “creative revolution” struck the advertising companies in the 1960s, that ad companies grew counter culturally alongside their consumers: “While writers from Norman Mailer to Theodore Roszak [author of *Counter Culture*] assumed (as many still assume) that the business ‘establishment’ required a rigid, repressive system of order, [the] philosophy of advertising, which would reign triumphant in the 1960s amid a seemingly endless series of successful and celebrated . . . campaigns, was exactly the opposite—a hostility to rules of any kind; a sort of commercial antinomianism.”<sup>227</sup> The advertising industry caught up with the youthful consumers who sought to be “cool” and individualistic, and this cool trend of the 1960s has carried until the present moment. Allen Ginsberg sitting cross-legged in a GAP ad shows that GAP wants even conservative middle class Americans to buy clothes because the liberal/progressive Ginsberg does, that the counterculture has a place in the main culture, especially as it pertains to style *and* profit—that the differences between the counterculture and main culture are sometimes difficult to decipher in the postmodern world.

Yet, if one looks closely at this GAP advertisement, one also better understands the complexity involved in a Hip counterculture/mass culture merger/confusion such as this one. With a slight smile on his face, a trimmed beard and eyeglasses, a coat and tie, and of course khaki pants, the ad’s caption reads: “Allen Ginsberg wears khakis.” However, if one *zooms in* on this image, one notices more than just the casual pants. Ginsberg sits in the half-lotus position on the floor, shoes off. His meditation pillow is in

front of him with an ashtray with ground-out cigarette butt on top of it. To his left also on the floor is the base of a water bong used assumedly for smoking marijuana. Behind Ginsberg, below a framed photograph of Hindu gods, is Ginsberg's shrine: with a scroll, a lit candle, an Asian cloth, along with some other Oriental ornaments. These objects then represent his sense of the symbolically and commercially *alternative*: of marijuana, of Eastern religious thought, of the unconventional ways of even lighting one's home and/or sitting in one's home. The countercultural implications are there, almost as archetypes, even stereotypes now (i.e., marijuana and Eastern mysticism); his *pose* then is (neo)bohemian. His objects are (neo)bohemian, which then puts a spin on our GAP ad, all affiliated questions therein. Is GAP co-opting Ginsberg's image to sell apparel along with even unwittingly the pop-(counter)cultural objects around him, or is Ginsberg co-opting the GAP to convey his (neo)bohemian sensibilities—implying that he might just smoke marijuana and meditate while he wears his khaki pants? And, more so, are these countercultural objects/elements as prevalent as GAP's khaki pants? Do we put these objects into the same categories? Does Ginsberg fit in the same category as these objects? Does a man get co-opted like an object does, as a neighborhood does? Similar to the complexity of the MTV music video "Ballad of the Skeletons," Ginsberg's GAP ad conveys a merger, yes, but it also captures a *power struggle between cultures*—or at least *an illusion of a struggle*. The khaki pants are perhaps the least controversial of all of the items, which may or may not be the point. As Leland explains,

If hip were just a salvo against the mainstream, we would have to look at it as a flop. The mainstream will always be there. To see hip simply as rebellion, as Ginsberg wrote his father, "misses the huge awful point."



Even without corporate co-optation, rebellion is mainly an illusion of freedom, because ultimately rebels are chained to whatever they're rebelling against. . . . Hip has survived as a shaping force of American life because it is constitutionally impure. . . . To chide Cobain or Ginsberg or Miles for their ambition—or worse, to not even notice—is to miss the ways that ambition informed their best work, including their carefully crafted public selves. Hip becomes relevant precisely when it is impure, jumping in the pit with the beast of capitalism—feeding it, resisting it, exploiting it, shaping it, co-opting *it*, even as it is co-opted in return. . . . If hip is a measure of enlightenment, it is only reasonable to expect its truths to play out in the marketplace as well—to open avenues of access even as they provide the buffer of autonomy.<sup>228</sup>

The *impurity* of Ginsberg's GAP advertisement is apparent, but, again, that's also partially the point. As Leland articulates, we cannot forget the “ambitions” for and guiding Ginsberg's actions. Perhaps, as Leland mentions, Ginsberg viewed rebellion as “an illusion of freedom.” He knew he was tied to a market, as we all are, and knowing this he wanted to use his proceeds for a good cause—but he also wanted to reach an audience of people who shop at the GAP or at least people who look at GAP ads: Which means *merger* and *exchange*, not exactly co-optation; for, in a situation of reciprocal co-optation, the one-sided sinister co-optation gets lost, and this impurity (and accompanying ambitions) then creates our ultimate enlightenment of exchange:

[In graffiti letters on a public bathroom wall:] *Go ahead! Smoke your cigarettes and marijuana while you wear your khakis and meditate cross-legged on the*

*floor! The GAP doesn't mind! The Buddha doesn't mind! Impoverished Denver kids don't mind! Your wallet don't mind! Your mind don't mind!*

Rosenthal states:

In the GAP ad, there's a very small disclaimer that says all the money is going to the Jack Kerouac School. It actually got Denver impoverished youth a summer program at Naropa but it didn't matter, people were really mad because I think Allen had a really pure persona – he was above it all, he wasn't commercialized. William Burroughs had all sorts of ads, actually. Nobody cared. It never mattered about William but with Allen, people resented the idea. Allen had to walk around with this persona he created that was a mixture of pure and earthy – he had to live with that. Allen took money from the Rockefeller brothers and gave it to Naropa – his idea was very much akin to Chögyam Trungpa's idea that you take the bad money and you make it good; you take in the poison and you breathe out the nectar.<sup>229</sup>

Poison? Nectar? Unlike Burroughs, Ginsberg was perceived as “pure and earthy,” thus people became angry when he posed for advertisements or made cable music videos. He “took money from the Rockefeller brothers” to support good causes. He dealt with the backlash from all of this because he knew that helping impoverished kids was more important than wearing khaki pants. Just as a neo-bohemian neighborhood that caters to art/artists and progressive agendas is more important than the young professionals/middle class culture vultures who consume the entertainment and food/drinks/retail items in the neighborhood.



lauded Ginsberg during the ceremony, stating that “Ginsberg had at one time been considered disreputable and unacceptable because of his outspoken views on sex and drugs, when, in fact, he had been striving to create an important human awareness. Ginsberg was an original thinker, Burroughs said, and his Gold Medal was testament to a shift in opinion that now recognized his respectability. ‘This shift, whereby original thinkers are accepted, is very beneficial both to those who accept them and to the thinkers themselves’” Burroughs stated.<sup>231</sup>

This *shift*. The *times* had *changed* or at least caught up with the life and ideas of the bohemian Ginsberg; his friends and his fans (including this reader/writer) celebrated/celebrate this, but one does have to ask, in the wake-rate of late-stage capitalism: *Was there a cost?* The answer to this question rests at least in part with the doubts Ginsberg expressed in his later poetry. The Ginsberg who wrote in his poem “Ego Confession” in 1974, “I want to be known as the most brilliant man in America” was the same poet who just a few years later in 1977 would doubt himself in a poem titled “Grim Skeleton”:

Some Fantasy of Fame

I dreamt in adolescence Came true last week over Television,  
 Now homunculus I made’s out there in American streets  
 talking with my voice, accounted ledgered opinionated  
 Interviewed & Codified in Poems, books & manuscripts, whole library  
 shelves stacked with ambitious egohood’s thousand pages imaged  
 forth smart selft over half a lifetime! Who’m I now, Frankenstein  
 hypocrite of good Cheer whose sick-stomached Discretion’s grown  
 fifty years overweight—while others I hate practice sainthood in  
 Himalayas

...

Whose sucker am I, the media run by rich whitemen like myself, jew  
 intellectuals afraid of poverty bust screaming beaten uncontrolled behind  
 bars

...

Agh! Who'll I read this to like a fool! Who'll applaud these lies<sup>232</sup>

“Grim Skeleton” honestly captures Ginsberg’s awareness of himself as a celebrity. He questions his ego, his reasons for seeking fame and his reduction to “homunculus” status, along with his less-than-pure perhaps duplicitous involvement with the media. He calls himself a “Frankenstein hypocrite,” and overweight—a glutton, while other people he hates are practicing “sainthood in [the] Himalayas.” He derides himself for being a “rich” white man and questions who will praise his “lies.” Perhaps he is being too hard/harsh on/with himself here, or perhaps this poem keenly presents the *guilt* of an idealistic (former) bohemian who has been accepted and included by the *many*, even ingratiated himself with the mass media and made some decent cash. In this case, the shift or change does not come without the guilt and fear of hypocrisy. For some, as in Ginsberg’s case, to get celebrated and make a decent leaving is to feel as though *you* have *lost something*, to feel like a “sucker” who has *sold out* and perhaps lost an ideal. As I look to Ginsberg’s later poems and representations, this *sense of loss* becomes very important. For: Can a bohemian even *become* and *be* a celebrity and financially successful? And, if so, has s/he now lost something? Is the loss of one’s bohemianism like the loss of one’s car keys? And, can one’s bohemianism be found and reclaimed as one’s car keys can?

In one of his later poems, “I’m a Prisoner of Allen Ginsberg,” Ginsberg admits his dependence on the myth-personae-monster/Frankenstein he has created:

Who is this Slave Master makes  
     me answer letters in his name  
 Write poetry year after year, keep up  
     appearances  
 This egoist whose file cabinets  
     leave no room for more  
     pictures of Me?<sup>233</sup>

Ginsberg understands that his own physical being that experiences everyday life pains and mundane acts does not necessarily fit with the mythic personage he has helped create, and similar to many situations other celebrities find themselves in, he realizes that fact and fiction are not identical. Yet, this is why Ginsberg includes poems about his bowels and health problems. He seeks to break down his private/public distinctions as best he can. His later works, such as his last collection *Death and Fame* (written right before his death), show Ginsberg's politics and sense of activism, but they contain a further lack of inhibitions as an older celebrity-poet voicing his spine on the verge of death. His main objective is not to just shock the reader; the poems and songs in this last collection show his easeful nakedness and comfort with his messages, and lack of inhibitions, no matter how uneven or "out there" they are perceived to be. As an elderly man who seeks to feel more comfortable with his celebrity, he writes truthfully about such topics as his loose bowels and hemorrhoids in the same way he does about nuclear proliferation and government corruption. He aims to juxtapose his role as political activist and celebrity poet with his description as a regular sentient being who craps his pants like anyone else: "Reading No Nature in the toilet / Sitting down, absorbed / page after page, forgetting / time, forgetting my bottom / relax, detritus / flopping out into water / —better than pushing and squeezing, / nervous, self conscious."<sup>234</sup> In the wake of such candid vulnerability, many of his later poems such as "Reading Bai Juyi" point out that Ginsberg's quest for fame and glory has been a product of his inflated ego in search of what at times were futile ends: "Why've I wanted to appear heroic, why / strain to accomplish what no mortal could— / Heaven on earth, self perfection, household /

security, & the accomplishment of changing the World. / A noble ambition, but that of a pathetic dreamer. / Tomorrow if I recover from bronchitis / I'll put on a serious face and go down to the Market."<sup>235</sup> Here Ginsberg admits his futile quest for fame but in the same breath admits he has household security along with bronchitis and needs to go food shopping, which contributes to our complexity/clash: The neo-bohemian feels guilty for liking stability and fame (and striving for impossible "self perfection"), not to mention enough money to go to the supermarket. He understands the potential compromise of the financial with the spiritual-poetic/artistic, and feels like a "pathetic dreamer." Further, in "I Went to the Movie of Life," Ginsberg questions if it would be easy for one to distinguish the "movie" of his life from his actual life: "or is this movie, or real, if I turn to face the camera I'd break / the scene, dissolve the plot illusion, or is't illusion / art, or just my life?"<sup>236</sup> He understands the confinement that fame can carry—the "movie" of his life in the public gaze that usually only tells his story as an out-front shocking leftist poet and activist without putting forth what has been left on the editing room floor (i.e. his life behind closed doors away from the media)—and thus later in life Ginsberg often had doubts about living up to his public image.

In *Cosmopolitan Greetings*, two poems lie side by side on the page that explain this duality; "Personals Ad" shows the lonely Ginsberg's request for a companion "to share bed meditation apartment Lower East Side, / help inspire mankind conquer world anger & guilt" while "Proclamation" starts off: "I am the King of the Universe / I am the Messiah with a new dispensation." These two poems express the conflicting identities of the aging Ginsberg—the lonely older man who longs for a soulmate to share in his private life alongside the vocal public "prophet" full of ego strength. The former poem

ends with, “Find me here in New York Alone / going to lady psychiatrist who says Make time in your life / for someone you can call darling, honey, who holds you dear / can get excited & lay his head on your heart in peace” while the latter poem ends with “No this isn’t true, I really am God himself. / Not at all human. Don’t associate me / w[ith] that Crowd. / In any case you can believe every word / I say.” These two poems together form the crux of the conundrum: Can a prophet find a soulmate? Can a celebrity love truthfully in private? Can a bohemian be a celebrity?

In Ginsberg’s case, because his poetry and songs are so consistently transparent and revealingly confessional—he poetically professes his doubts about living up to his created myth alongside his various follies on the toilet—this perception divide is perhaps not as vast as so many others’ cases in the public’s gaze. Ginsberg’s continuous honesty both on the page and conversationally helped him bridge his private life and public image probably better than most others. In a poem such as “Sunday Prayer,” he candidly catalogues his physical incongruities: “From nineteenth year College chronic active Hepatitis / affects my kidney stones & high-blood pressure / Right cheek paralyzed slightly, eye squints tired, / lethargy dumps, no one’s abdomen to kiss, / cock skewed and lumpy erection aches.” In “Put Down Your Cigarette Rag,” he advises, instead of smoking a cigarette, to spend “Twenty-four hours in bed / & give your boyfriend head / Put something in your mouth / Like skin not cigarette filth / Suck tit suck tit suck cock suck cock.” Ginsberg can’t as successfully promote the second poem without fully disclosing himself in the first. In order for the reader to go down that hallway of open sexuality and intimacy, s/he must also feel a complete immersion into the private life/self of Allen Ginsberg, the sentient being with flaws and all. These confessional poems



present a deconstruction of Ginsberg legend, the guru with excrement and ailment, which curiously then perhaps perpetuates the legend further in its freshly unorthodox way. After all, Ginsberg, more so than anyone else, successfully conveys that a prophet also takes a dump—that a genius also masturbates, and therein lies his *inclusive* genius. We celebrate this inclusivity, this gritty glimpse of the naked, foul, and, in turn, we forgive and even embrace the ego-driven—we welcome the vulnerability along with the arrogance. The taint along with the pearly smile. We forgive all of it because we are asked to celebrate all of it. Call it Whitmanic. Call it the bohemian spirit. Ada Clare writes of this:

The Bohemian was by nature, if not by habit . . . for all things above and beyond convention. The Bohemian is not, like the creature of society, a victim of rules and customs; he steps over them with an easy, graceful, joyous unconsciousness, guided by the principles of good taste and feeling. Above all others, essentially, the Bohemian must not be narrow-minded; if he be, he is degraded back to the position of a new wordling.<sup>237</sup>

#### 6.5 Countercultural Agenda: Later Ginsberg Poems and Neo-Bohemia

Which/and, now that the reader has immersed herself in the innards and naked proclamations/“doubts” of the poet, has tested his “narrow mind,” s/he is now ready to go further with the poet into perhaps the more serious terrain of the overtly political and spiritual “beyond convention.” I repeat Leland’s words: “Hip has survived as a shaping force of American life because it is constitutionally impure.”<sup>238</sup> The reader/follower needs Ginsberg’s impurities before s/he can get to these other issues outside the bathroom and bedroom. In his later-life-poems such as “Empire Air” (1984), “Cosmopolitan

Greetings” (1986), “The Charnel Ground” (1992), “Newt Gingrich Declares War on ‘McGovernik Counterculture’” (1995), and “Thirty State Bummers” (1997), Ginsberg then brings us back to his hip countercultural agenda. We are ready for this because we *trust* him, the older dirty sage, imperfections and self-doubts and all, in our contemporary *Now*. We are ready for these lines in “Empire Air”: “I’m equal to Sun, Sun & I on the level / I’ve no appendicitis, I hang a Brooks Brothers tie / My clothes are Salvation Army! Conquer America! Conquer Greed! / Conquer warmonger Hands! / Conquer yourself! Conquer your gluttony Ginsberg! Conquer lust for / Conquest!” Then: “Conquer World Grief / Bank default! Go Conquer mortal Nuclear Waste! /Then go back Conquer your own heart!”<sup>239</sup> The older poet herein challenges his reader to simultaneously accept, to “Conquer!” his own “heart” along with Ginsberg’s vanity and the atrocities of the world, which then opens up for advice in “Cosmopolitan Greetings”:

Stand up against governments, against God.  
Stay irresponsible.  
  
Say only what we know & imagine.  
Absolutes are coercion.  
Change is absolute.  
Ordinary mind includes eternal perceptions.  
...  
Others can measure their vision by what they see.  
Candor ends paranoia.<sup>240</sup>

The old poet has earned the right to make such “advice” with his clothes from Salvation Army and his Whitmanic ego and absolute candor about *all*. In his later poem “The Charnel Ground,” he projects his cohesive-inclusive approach onto his Lower East Side neighborhood. The residents of the place are there, as are Ginsberg’s thoughts, but so are the connections to world politics and perceived injustice:

who'd put his boyfriend in Bellevue, calling police, while the artistic  
 Buddhist composer  
 on sixth floor lay spaced out feet swollen with water, dying slowly of  
 AIDS over a year—

The Chinese teacher cleaned & cooked in Apt. 23 for the homosexual  
 poet who pined for his gymnast  
 thighs & buttocks—Downstairs th' old hippie flower girl fell drunk  
 over banister, smashed her jaw—  
 her son despite moderate fame cheated of rocknroll money, twenty  
 thousand people in stadiums  
 cheering his tattooed skinhead murderous Hare Krishna vegetarian  
 drum lyrics—

...  
 southwest corner where art yuppies come out of the overpriced Japanese  
 Sushi Bar—& they poured salt into potato soup heart failure  
 vats at KK's Polish restaurant  
 —Garbage piled up, nonbiodegradable plastic bags emptied by diabetic  
 sidewalk homeless

...  
 News comes on the radio, they bomb Baghdad and the Garden of Eden  
 again?  
 A million starve in Sudan, mountains of eats stocked on docks, local  
 gangs & U.N.'s trembling bureaucrat officers sweat near the  
 equator arguing over  
 wheat piles shoved by bulldozers—Swedish doctors ran out of  
 medicine—

...  
 & I'm on my way uptown to get a CAT scan liver biopsy, visit the  
 cardiologist,  
 account for high blood pressure, kidneystones, diabetes, misty eyes &  
 dysesthia—

...  
 Old age sickness death again come round in the wink of an eye—<sup>241</sup>

We have returned to our familiar neo-bohemian realm: a LES with an “artistic Buddhist composer,” a “homosexual poet,” “old hippie flower girl,” a bald tattooed fading rock star, “art yuppies” who eat sushi—alongside Ginsberg's observances of “nonbiodegradable” trash and news reports of bombs in the Middle East and vast hunger in Africa. A younger Ginsberg would have stopped there, with his observations and his politics, but here the older Ginsberg catalogues his health woes and includes the line “Old

age sickness death again.” He makes a link between his failing body and inevitable death to suffering bohemians, to trash, to military destruction, to governmental injustices on the world stage. His local is now global, as his private life is utterly public. The Lower East Side is connected to Baghdad and Sudan and AIDS and “art yuppies,” as is this “homosexual poet” the aging Ginsberg with relatable mortal worries. And, as Lloyd explains, this concentration of the local, the bohemian neighborhood, is tantamount to Neo-Bohemia’s function as a site specific phenomenon with broader even global implications. Ginsberg, as local poet in a particular neighborhood with his specific mortal worries, then functions as bridge for larger mass bohemian styles and concerns.

Finally, two poems he wrote a year or two before his death capture quite well that of the aging representative (neo)bohemian in the 1990s. Around the age of 70, he still had plenty left in the bohemian tank. In the 1980s and ‘90s, the U.S. in some respects experienced a return to some of the 1950s values that Ginsberg had fought so long and hard against: FCC censorship of some of his poems on the airwaves and increasing distrust of anything “weird” or unconventional in dress, sexuality, or opinions against the status quo. In a poem, Ginsberg replies to a newspaper article involving Newt Gingrich and the politician’s then recent statements about members of the Left; in fact, both Gingrich and Jesse Helms, the notoriously conservative North Carolina senator, had recently and openly declared “war” on the “counterculture.” In the opening of “Newt Gingrich Declares War on ‘McGovernik Counterculture,’” Ginsberg asks:

Does that mean war on every boy with more than one earring on the  
same ear?  
against every girl with a belly button ring? What about nose piercing?  
a diamond ring in right nostril?  
Does that mean more plainclothesmen high on LSD at Dead concerts?

What about MTV—no more Michael Jackson, no Dylan Subterranean  
Homesick Blues? Yoko & John no more Give Peace a Chance  
Will there be laws against Punk, Generation X, the Voidoids, Slackers,  
Grunge?

...

Sitting meditation, that be frowned satanic in Congress? Tai Chi, Tai  
Kwando, Karate, Martial Arts? Ballet? Opera, *La Boheme*?  
Don't mention us cocksuckers?! Is eating pussy countercultural?  
Sappho, Socrates, Da Vinci, Shakespeare, Michelangelo,  
Proust in or out the canon?

J.E. Hoover's name wiped off FBI granite in the Capital?  
Poetry slams, is poetry countercultural, like a Third Party?  
Is ecology pro or counter culture? Astronomy determining the Uni-  
verse's age & size?

Long hair, relativity, is Einstein countercultural?<sup>242</sup>

Ginsberg's *inclusions* of the alleged counterculture are telling. For, what exactly constitutes the *counterculture* anyway? He mentions body piercings, MTV, Dylan, punk, grunge, meditation, *La Boheme*, cocksucking, poetry, ecology, long-haired Einstein, among else. This broad list of "counterculture" speaks to the pervasiveness of the *other*, the *weird*, the *different from* the conservative vision and ideal in spheres as various as television, music, politics, the bedroom and hygiene. Ginsberg understands his role in these spheres, that the precedent of *La Boheme* has carried over into multiple facets of art and popular culture, that conservative politicians cannot easily declare "war" against a concept that has such a wide reach with its tentacles that permeate most if not all aspects of U.S. mass existence. The counterculture had seeped into many forums, and the distinctions between it and the opposition were now blurry and cause for confusion. Ginsberg was in the *mix*, and the origins and endings were difficult to define now, unless you were Gingrich or Helms. Neo-Bohemia was apparent *because* of this confusion. Because of this blend and mixture. I guess older politicians are always the last to know.

Which speaks to the bewilderment Ginsberg has in “Thirty State Bummers.”  
 Given the neo-bohemian landscape, he questions how out-of-step the U.S. government  
 can be, how the same logic that “declares war against a counterculture” can also cause  
 disastrous global ramifications. The easy binary oppositions do not exist, Ginsberg  
 implies, but the U.S. government remains steadfast in holding on to them:

President Clinton, President Dole  
 Number three you're in a hole

...  
 Richard Helms Angleton live  
 We were lucky to survive

Jesse Helms & dirty pix  
 Dance your fate with his party mix

Idi Amin General Mobutu  
 Were paid by me & you

...  
 Death squads in El Salvador  
 We paid D'Aubisson to score

Guatamalas by the dozen  
 Pat Robertson was country cousin

...  
 Drug Czar Bush gave Company moolah  
 To Noriega Panama's ruler

...  
 Then we sold the guy in Iraq  
 Money to bomb Iranians back

...  
 25 is Afghanistan  
 Fundamentalists armed by The Man

...  
 Smoke our dope to be Favored Nation  
 Nicotine cancer next generation

Who's pushing this new dope ring?  
 Senator Jesse Helms the Moralistic King

...  
 Work hard for a little bit of honey

But USA takes all the money<sup>243</sup>

Ginsberg lists his “bummers” a couple months before his death, noting the hypocrisy of a government that gives drugs, money, and weapons (for examples) to world dictators and militant regimes while also declaring “war” on its various homeland countercultures.

Ginsberg here, as the aging/dying bohemian poet, illustrates both that he still has causes to fight for and that some of his complaints have come full circle, even in the great *merge*. The American government, for one, was *not* neo-bohemian. This comprised one of the poet’s myriad doubts.

#### 6.6 City Lights City: The Posthumous Ginsberg and the Contemporary Traces of Bohemia

A June 18, 2012 *Local East Village* article titled, “Joey Ramone, Allen Ginsberg Show Their Faces on East Fourth Street” begins with “First the ‘Legends of the Lower East Side’ were immortalized in coloring-book form, and now the ‘Saints of the Lower East Side’ have been painted onto scaffolding on Fourth Street, between Bowery and Second Avenue.” The large image of the bearded, bespectacled Ginsberg in iconic red, white, and blue Uncle Sam hat poses besides visages of Ramone, Martin Wong, Miguel Piñero, Ellen Stewart, Arthur “Weegee” Fellig, and Charlie Parker on the famous Lower East Side corner. Ginsberg has become immortalized here in cartoonish fashion, as a “saint” for locals and tourists to see.<sup>244</sup>

These nods and visages are perhaps surprisingly *not* unlike what Ginsberg himself envisaged. In a 1994 poem called “City Lights City,” Ginsberg imagines a city (this time we go west to the other coast to San Francisco) wherein he and his friends have been immortalized via names of street signs and attractions:

On Via Ferlinghetti & Kerouac Alley young heroes muse melancholy  
2025 A.D.

Musicians brood & pace Bob Kaufman Street and practice future jazz  
on Rexroth place

Spiritual novelists sit rapt in contemplation under the street sign at  
Saroyan Place before they cross to Aram Alley

...

Fourth Jeffers Street & Fifth on John Wieners Street the Greyhound  
Terminal stands

surrounded by Bookstore Galleries, Publishers Rows, and Artists lofts  
Sightseers in tourist buses breathe fresh foggy air on Harold Norse &  
Hirschman Peaks—oldies but goodies

...

Whalen Bridge sits meditating all the way to Oakland

Snyder Bridge connects the East-West Gate between S.F. & Marin

Commuters crowd exhausted into the Neal Cassady R.R. Station on  
Corso

...

where international surrealist tourists climb to see the view—  
& I'll take Alcatraz...<sup>245</sup>

Herein Ginsberg imagines placeholders with titles of his friends' names, but more importantly this imagined city maintains a particular culture that includes future jazz, spiritual novelists, bookstore galleries, artists lofts, places of meditation, *and* tourists. He understands such a place carries an attraction of/for tourists—as does a LES corner with a mural titled “The Saints of the Lower East Side”—but such locales and points-of-interest also carry socio-spatial fantasies of bohemianism and artists-in-production for cultural players, which also relates to films that have been made about Ginsberg and his various associates. For, a film, similar to the mentioned mural or even imagined city, can also combine the complexity of the fantasy with the real, of the cartoonish with the saintly human. Ginsberg, after death, has entered into our great merge in new and interesting (even confounding) ways. He is now our “Alcatraz”—that self-styled isolated prison-attraction island for the world to view. And, as I explain, after Ginsberg died he became



the “brand” of Allen Ginsberg. In these above examples, he was posing for the MTV brand and the GAP brand, but his own myth remained in the available and emerging “forms” he chose to utilize and at times manipulate; as Leland writes: “If corporate brands produced marketing that acted like culture, the . . . underground produced culture that acted like marketing”<sup>246</sup>; after he died obviously there were no longer any forms or “culture” that Ginsberg could physically market nor humanly apply himself to his poetry and activism. As with films such as *Howl* (2010), the brand of (posthumous) Allen Ginsberg gets broadcasted to the world. Tellingly, this brand consists primarily of his Beat Generation image and that epoch’s accompanying messages. As I explicate, this brand-via-*Beat*-oriented-film then offers a limited view of the man/poet/myth, one that does not convey the complexities of his later life and neo-bohemianism.

#### 6.7 Howl

In 2010, Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman made a film called *Howl* that stars James Franco as Allen Ginsberg as a young man in the mid-to-late 1950s. I viewed this film in Houston, Texas’s posh Museum of Fine Arts in the neo-bohemian neighborhood of Montrose. Perceivably, affluent older couples were there along with “hipster” youths, and the spectacle immediately struck me as peculiar yet notable. We gulped wine before and after the show. The legend/myth, and now the “brand” of Allen Ginsberg as contemporary poet, notably as represented in his more anonymous and younger bohemian beat realm, had managed to drive a successful Hollywood film that catered to both bourgeois-types and the hipster—to neo-bohemians, the creative class, and the upper class in search of cultural/symbolic capital and/or just a good time.<sup>247</sup> One can easily

argue that a film such as *Howl* has co-opted bohemianism and watered down the substance of Ginsberg's messages, and this is probably true in ways, but one must also remember, as I elaborate on it, that situated within efforts to sell as many products as possible to a mass-culture, this film (ironically and not) still carries valuable commentary about literary (anti) censorship, sexual orientation acceptance, and the value of art—comprising a marketable liberal agenda-laden paradigm that represents Allen Ginsberg both in the flesh and as a unique albeit limited neo-bohemian package of art/commerce. The combination here of the art museum-as-cinematic forum, the mentioned messages, and this particular audience is a revealing one.

*Howl* is not a perfect film by any means, though it has its merits. James Franco earnestly and convincingly portrays a younger Ginsberg—he surprisingly closely resembles the young Ginsberg in physical looks, voice, and mannerisms—as intellectual poet and vocally open homosexual in the confining 1950s. Franco's Ginsberg, however, is less playful and animated than the young Ginsberg in *Pull My Daisy*, and perhaps this is one failure of *Howl*; the creative and sometimes spontaneous revelry-oriented Ginsberg has been traded in for a monochromatic version. The film does not show the young bohemian in a more freeform element, yet instead a subdued Ginsberg that quietly pontificates mainly with cup of tea in hand. This Franco-Ginsberg seems older, more wizened, even though this depiction is supposed to take place before *Daisy* was made (in 1959). The other Beat characters are represented as caricatures at best, as rather flat forgettable representations.

The film oscillates from the 1957 courtroom of the “Howl” obscenity trial to Ginsberg's infamous reading at the Six Gallery in October 7, 1955, to an interview taking

place in Ginsberg's New York City studio apartment away from San Francisco in 1957 while the trial is underway (though, in reality Ginsberg was in Tangiers at the time of the trial). *Howl* (the film) remains true to the words of the poem, "Howl" with a striking fragmented dystopian animated sequence—created by Eric Drooker, a former street artist who also collaborated with Ginsberg on his book of poetry, *Illuminated Poems*—that mirrors the words, and all of the dialogue of the landmark court trial has been taken from court documents of the actual trial itself, holding faithful to the original incident and legal ruling that helped push forward literary anti-censorship legislation. Alongside this, Franco-as-Ginsberg endearingly voices his vulnerability in coming out as a homosexual in the conservative '50s climate, thus pushing forward another progressive message, but at its core, what stands foremost with *Howl* is its treatment of the poetic words and images of "Howl," Ginsberg's most famous and most anthologized poem. We see Franco's Ginsberg read "Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Ashcans and unobtainable dollars! Children screaming under the stairways! Boys sobbing in armies! Old men weeping in the parks! Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of Moloch!" at the Six Gallery to an audience of other writers/poets, including Kerouac, Orlovsky, and Cassady. The scenes of the 1955 reading are in black and white, giving it an archival feel of more authentic nostalgia in comparison to the other scenes in the film in color. Franco-as-Ginsberg stands at the makeshift podium of crates. He starts mildly, but as the reading builds, he unloosens and discards his tie and starts to gesture more animatedly with his hands. The people in the audience, cramped in the dimly lit bunker-like gallery, pass around jugs of wine, and they cheer and nod their heads with Ginsberg's rising enthusiasm. His voice gets louder: "Moloch the loveless! Mental Moloch! Moloch the heavy judger of men!

Moloch the incomprehensible prison!” The film cuts to the young Ginsberg and Orlovsky in an embrace, in a homosexual union—they have recently fallen in love—on a downtown street in San Francisco. They are howling into the air, and Ginsberg then points to a tall skyscraper in the background. We hear: “Well, Peter and I saw Moloch one day when we took peyote and were wondering around the downtown streets. Moloch. It’s a god that you make fire sacrifices to, but, in my mind it was what drove my mother to madness.”

As he says this, the film cuts to Ginsberg on the couch in his NYC apartment in 1957. He is now bearded in a simple studio. Books line the shelves, a record player sits on a dresser, and Oriental tapestries abound. As he explains his method of composition for the Moloch section of *Howl*, the film cuts to an animated sequence. As we hear Franco’s voiceover narration, “Moloch whose eyes are a thousand blind windows! Moloch whose skyscrapers stand in the long streets like endless Jehovahs! Moloch whose factories dream and croak in the fog! Moloch whose smokestacks and antennae crown the cities!” we see a tall building that rises above the darkness and smoke. The top of the skyscraper resembles a demonic bull’s head with fire coming out of its eyes, nose, and mouth. The building then comes alive as a monster bull who is surrounded by fire. We see innocent women, children, and men look up in terror at the bull-like Moloch. Men and women raise up their children, amid the fires, as sacrifice for Moloch. We see the children fall into the cauldrons of fire. Hands of worship raise towards Moloch. Soldiers with helmets and rifles then walk towards Moloch. We see rows of soldiers in identical coffins, along with the White House with a human skull as its dome. Then: more skulls,

oil refineries, smokestacks, marching soldiers, cars falling off cliffs, more smoke, fire, worship, Moloch. “They broke their backs lifting Moloch to heaven.”

In the juxtaposed scenes, we see and hear the heart of the counterculture and the crux of a form of Bohemia with a poetry reading in a rundown art gallery, with cheap jugs of wine, with beards, with sparse lofts, with peyote, with a celebration of a homosexual union, with, most importantly, a rallying cry against Moloch—against the machinery and drudgery that crush the human spirit; and, all of this points to a rebellion, to a protest against conformity, especially as it relates to the 1950s therein Fordist conditions of assembly line and military-industrial-complex related *work*. *Howl* captures these bohemian sentiments/mores/mindsets, and the audience is reminded of this lens and alternative culture as it weaves in and out of context and color. In a last scene with the courtroom trial, we see the dashing Jon Hamm, as the ACLU attorney hired to defend the case, give a heartfelt closing statement against *Howl*'s distinction as *obscene*:

It is not for us to choose the words. Mr. Ginsberg in telling his story is telling the story as he sees it. He is using his words. There are books that have the power to change men's minds and to call attention to situations that are visible but unseen. Now whether *Howl* is or is not obscene is of little importance to our world faced as it is with the threat of physical survival. But, the problem of what is legally permissible in the description of sexual acts or feelings in arts and literature is of the greatest importance to a free society. What is “prurient” and to whom? ... It is interesting that the person applying such standards of censorship rarely feels as if their own physical or moral health is in jeopardy. The desire to censor is not

limited however to crackpots and bigots. There is in most of us the desire to make the world conform to our own views. . . . The battle of censorship will not be finally settled by your honor's decision, but you will either add to liberal educated thinking or by your decision you will add fuel to the fire of ignorance. Let there be light. Let there be honesty. Let there be no running from nonexistent destroyers of morals. Let there be honest understanding.

Ultimately, the judge rules *Howl* as *not* obscene, stating, "no two persons think alike. We were all made from the same form but in different patterns. Would there be any freedoms of press or speech if one must reduce his vocabulary to vapid, innocuous euphemism? An author should be real in treating the subject and be allowed to express his thoughts and ideas in his own words." The film then cuts to Ginsberg again in his apartment. He explains his reasons for including lines about homosexual joy even though he at the time did not want his father or other family members to read these lines. He explains, "The poem is misinterpreted as promotion of homosexuality. Actually it's more like a promotion of frankness about anything." On his couch, with a cup of tea in hand, he states: "Homosexuality is a condition, and because it alienated me or set me apart from the beginning, it served as a catalyst for self-examination or detailed realization of my environment and the reasons why everyone else is different and why I am different." The film then cuts to the black and white Six Gallery reading, with Ginsberg stating "Holy! Holy! Holy Holy! Holy!" to his hipster-bohemian audience.

The film *Howl* focuses solely on Ginsberg as a young man (around 30), as there is no further depiction or even mention of an older, wiser Ginsberg. The film has no room

for Ginsberg's evolution as a poet and then celebrity and activist, but even so, as stated, *Howl*'s main themes carry the main messages of freedom of speech and press, and an acceptance of homosexuality and art forms that express an acceptance of other viewpoints and mores. At the very least, I can imagine that some of the kids (and even adults) in the museum audience after watching *Howl* that day went out and bought a collection of Ginsberg poems. But then I have to question why the hipster kids, et al, have thus bought editions of *Howl*? Is it because this *hip* film has seduced them into doing so? Is it because they are fans of James Franco? Or, is the reason more substantial? Have the film's messages of artistic freedom and social acceptance *inspired* them?

Regardless of the answers to these questions and whether my imagined answers are right or wrong in this instance (I did not take a poll after watching the film in the art museum), the important point is that these questions of complication of audience and motivation for consumption speak to the manifold nature of Ginsberg himself, the man, along with his representations on film as a product/brand of neo-bohemia. These questions also speak to the changing nature and importance of bohemia and Ginsberg's place in this neo-bohemian sphere—i.e. a popular movie and commercial forum for possible acceptance and consumption of its progressive messages that combines with a progressive collection of poems published in 1955 alongside potentially meaningless/superficial and/or substantial hipster consumption. The counterculture (or one form of it) has perhaps merged (a very capitalist notion) with the main culture in this case, yet, again, as mentioned, one has to think (and hope) that some of Ginsberg's original aims and messages remain; Bohemia still exists, but as scholars such as Richard Florida and Richard Lloyd set forth, and as a film such as *Howl* illustrates, it has

influenced and morphed contemporary society in surprising economic and cultural ways. David Brooks has phrased the label “bobos,” or bourgeois-bohemians to highlight such a conception, yet this hybrid has often occurred not without a cost to Bohemia’s elusive authenticity and substantial political and social artillery. Artists in certain realms have converted into a creative class. But/and, one does have to ask: Is the world or mass-consumption culture better or worse off for a film such as *Howl*? Or, for that matter, a music video such as *Ballad of the Skeletons* or a GAP advertisement with Ginsberg in khaki pants? One has to think that some of these mediums’ messages are in fact positive (and perhaps still progressive), even if some of the aura of Ginsberg the man and poet has been lost, and this isn’t to say that this ground could not be made up if viewers of *Howl* were inspired to go out and actually read and become influenced by his poems—or, God forbid, decided to write poetry and/or protest for chosen causes themselves. The main tropes of *Howl* the book constitute a public outcry designed by a private citizen—outcries that were originally censored in the 1950s and then again on the radio airwaves in the 1980s and 1990s. The book and the contemporary film combine for a continuous thread of cultural collective bargaining, moving motifs of individualism, nonconformity, and enlightened political views from post WWII (1955) until now. As I’ve said, my main complaint or caveat with a film such as *Howl* is that it only depicts Ginsberg as young man during his (in)famous Beat days. Films such as this one fail to more holistically show Ginsberg’s bohemianism as he changed and protested against and fit in (in varying degrees) with aspects of his immediate world. His increasing involvement with multimedia, activism, and various out-front platforms are not highlighted in these types of films, and thus he is often now just placed in a Counterculture Museum as Beat



Generation member who wrote *Howl* and *Kaddish*. But, perhaps I am being too harsh. Perhaps the film *Howl*, with its progressive aims and messages, presents a sufficient bridge between aspects of the bohemian-beat 1950s and now, as just one hopeful/fruitful representation for more contemporary inspiration. Perhaps the posthumous brand of Allen Ginsberg actually does more good than harm.

A documentary called *The Source* nicely illustrates this (rosy) continuum, showing that the core of the beats has continued to inspire. The beat poet Michael McClure in this film states:

A young person will come up to me . . . maybe he has a Mohawk or maybe he has one side of his head shaved . . . [or] dreads, and he and I are sharing many of the same thoughts. He's anti-war, or he believes in the environment. And that person will say, "Whatever happened to the beats, or the 1960s? They just get run over by the steamroller of the corporations?" It makes me want to laugh. Because this kid is so much like what so many people from that period made possible. He's standing there in his natural body asking me those things and it's kind of funny because I'm thinking, 'you're us.'"<sup>248</sup>

The young person referenced in this quote asks if the counterculture was steamrolled by corporations, reiterating the common diatribe of co-optation. As Elizabeth Wilson explains, some critics have in fact declared death to Bohemia along with death to the bourgeoisie, stating that cultural opposition has been effectively suppressed: "For when celebrity replaces both aristocracy on the one hand and fame based on talent on the other, and when mass culture triumphs over high art, the possibility of cultural revolt is

extinguished, since ‘any category of the Other in the collective imaginary’ has disappeared.”<sup>249</sup> As McClure indicates in the above quotation, kids with “Mohawks” (et al) serve as a continuation of the “source” of post WWII bohemianism, as another manifestation that has been influenced by (pop) cultural and/or neo-bohemian representations and messages. Many of the messages Ginsberg delivered in 1955 were novel at the time, but in the present day many more people agree with his sentiments. And, in fact many of Ginsberg’s messages have *not* changed over the years, and perhaps this is why a present-day film about a 1955 poem still resonates. More people are listening and taking heart. The “brand” of Allen Ginsberg, as supported by contemporary films made about the poet, is being bought—even at times in earnest and with a relevant hopefulness.

#### 6.8 In Conclusion

I’ve probably beaten a dead hipster horse with this, but it must be reiterated (or I just feel compulsively compelled to reiterate) that Allen Ginsberg, bohemian or neo-bohemian, alive and dead, as no poet before or since—not even the popular modern slam poets and hip hop performers he has influenced—has managed to successfully merge bohemianism with poetry and multifarious forms and popular culture and consciousness. For all of the criticisms of Bohemia’s contemporary demise, one looks to Ginsberg’s life and works and now his readers and fans to illustrate that bohemianism still has a fighting chance of substantial influence because the *ideas* behind it still matter; Allen Ginsberg as an icon, both in print and represented in film, if anything shows that the artist and the unconventional still carry valuable weight, both cultural and economic, in our post-

industrial, globalized technocratic society, especially in particular neighborhoods of major American cities. In 1994, asked about the particular appeal of his and his associates' countercultural efforts, even in the 1990s, especially among younger readers and audiences, Ginsberg remarked:

Basically, because of the sincerity of the works of art, the passion, the feeling of self-empowerment, independent of government, media and social conditioning, the breaking out of the plastic mass into human flesh and blood, vulnerability and tenderness, which is a good model for younger people and which I think they are now being attracted to after 20 years of the Reagan-Bush-Nixonian ugly spirit, put-down of the human spirit, devastation of the planet, assault on mother Earth, desensitization to the ecology, disinterest in expansive consciousness, (and) disinterest in the American tradition from Thoreau, Emerson, Whitman and expansive heart and awareness.<sup>250</sup>

Ginsberg vocalizes the importance and substantiation of “the sincerity of the works of art, the passion, the feeling of self-empowerment” and independence, and one then understands his aims for a lasting, hopeful new bohemianism in our contemporary world that also connects with aspects of Bohemia's past. If one looks to the young Ginsberg in *Pull My Daisy*, one marvels that this is the same man who would live through a series of movements and epochs in the 1960s, '70s, '80s, and '90s, yet on closer examination one notices that this young bohemian who turned a fairly typical rundown Lower East Side apartment into an alternative living and performance space is actually very similar to the man who over the years would continually convert his broad and minor “spaces” (both

physical and ideational) into healthier and more humane and creatively open destinations. Through it all, amid the various emerging forms and manifestations, Ginsberg's core bohemianism remained.

Curiously, even though Ginsberg's poems "Howl" and "Kaddish" especially have been widely anthologized and many films depicting the Beat Generation have been released (with a few being critically acclaimed), there's still a reluctance among some scholars in the U.S. university system to seriously write about and teach Ginsberg's life and work. Professor Oliver Harris echoes these sentiments in his article for *College Literature*: "I am concerned with how to teach the Beats when my colleagues don't care why I teach them."<sup>251</sup> On my own watch, I have certainly been to a few academic conferences in which a Beat scholar has literally apologized for his choice in scholarship—that is, a general defensiveness crops up when scholars talk about studying Ginsberg and the Beats, as if somehow their intellectual pursuits are less worthy. This climate also relates to writers/poets in MFA workshops along with editors in the modern publishing industry who deem Beat writing or Ginsberg-type poetry as sophomoric and artistically "played out." "We've outgrown them," a Random House editor once proclaimed to me. Thus, because the Beats (which of course means Ginsberg) are *still* not taken seriously in certain spheres and are often criticized by a few key literary industries, an interesting dynamic, another neo-bohemian *complexity*, arises when one considers that Ginsberg is still one of the most heavily read and celebrated poets by younger students and other people who buy books of poetry; and, herein a key question presents itself: If Ginsberg is in fact the most famous poet of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century then why are scholars so hesitant to write about him?

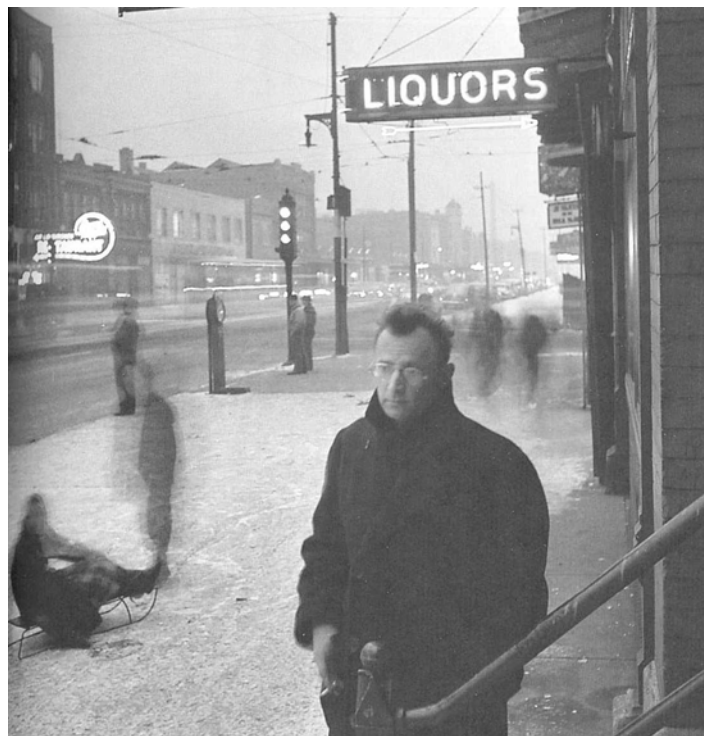
The answer to this question rests at least in part with these related conditions of neo-bohemia and with what I've mentioned here: mainly "Howl" and "Kaddish" are anthologized, and mainly films depicting the Beat Generation in the 1940s and '50s—showing only Ginsberg as a young man—have been made; many scholars (and other people) have just reduced him to his Beat/beatnik image and associations; largely, the Beat Generation and Ginsberg's role in it has been highlighted and glamourized as a moment in time, as a mere historical and cultural soundbite of the 1950s. But, perhaps, if scholars and others were to look at the Beat Generation, or at *Pull My Daisy*, as a *starting place* and not an *end* for (budding) bohemianism, they could fruitfully situate Ginsberg as lifelong poet and activist who both evolved and held true to the best of his epochal underpinnings. I have intentionally not included detailed descriptions and analyses of Ginsberg's earlier more canonized/anthologized poems ("Howl" and "Kaddish" foremost) in these writings because these poems have been written about extensively. Rather, I have focused on an independent film the young Ginsberg acts in, on Ginsberg's less famous later poems, and on popular culture representations of Ginsberg in print and on film.

These later, less scrutinized texts open up a conversation about Ginsberg's neo-bohemian transformation on what I've called his arc-of-gentrification—about his evolution, as he moved through decades and countercultures/subcultures and respective audiences. This *gentrification* of a man speaks to Neo-Bohemia, yes, but it also invites valuable questions about our contemporary spaces (even academic ones) and their modes of production and consumption.

I now look to other unlikely texts, locales, and fantasies that inspire and connect with contemporary bohemian frames and confusions.

**SECTION 3: NELSON ALGREN, *THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN ARM*, AND  
WICKER PARK: PRECURSOR AND PROTOTYPE OF THE NEO-BOHEMIAN  
HIPSTER**

SECTION 3: NELSON ALGREN, *THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN ARM*, AND  
WICKER PARK: PRECURSOR AND PROTOTYPE OF THE NEO-BOHEMIAN  
HIPSTER



**Figure 6.1** Nelson Algren on Division Street, Wicker Park<sup>252</sup>

This section (Chapters 7 and 8) began with a question: How did Nelson's Algren *The Man with the Golden Arm* influence and inspire the neo-bohemian neighborhood of Wicker Park in Chicago? From there, I investigated and analyzed/sifted aspects/details of Algren's most well-known novel and Wicker Park, but I also took a close look at Art



Shay's photos of Algren around the neighborhood in the late 1940s and 1950s, watched Otto Preminger's 1955 film *The Man with the Golden Arm*, and then thought about the interconnections among these texts alongside the realities and fantasies of Bohemia and Richard Lloyd's neo-bohemia. Since Lloyd takes Wicker Park as his main locus as support for his theory (and ethnography) of neo-bohemia, I had an excellently researched backdrop for my selected texts' associations/interconnections.

In Chapter 7, "Inspirations: Early Gentrifiers of Wicker Park," I start with a report of a Nelson Algren birthday party celebration that recently took place in a rundown church in Wicker Park, then move to a brief summation of aspects of Nelson Algren's biography that contributed to his bohemianism. From there I apply an analysis and contextualization of Shay's photographs to set the tone for a literary-historical assessment of Wicker Park and its (neo)bohemian fantasies/inspirations. For, on our arc-of-gentrification, I argue that Algren the artist-writer and bohemian, alongside elements of his novel *Arm*, in the 1940s and 1950s, functions as inspiration for "early gentrifiers"/artists-bohemians of Wicker Park in the 1980s and 1990s. Algren and his fictional depictions capture(d) the arguably *authentic* and *real*: the grit, crime, deviance, excess, hipster, punk, and *dive* appeal of Wicker Park for these future artist-bohemian participants. Furthermore, as Wicker Park became "neo," as Lloyd argues happened in the 1990s and 2000s, so too did Algren and his fictional associates set the stage and foretell elements of the neighborhood during this time as a zone for "grit-as-glamour"—as a place that markets itself and profits from images/representations of the starving artist, criminal misfit/hustler, and rundown/dilapidated aesthetic.

In Chapter 8, “Video Killed the Hipster Star,” I examine Preminger’s film *Arm* as a representation for the last plot point of the gentrification arc. For, as I mentioned in the previous section, Wicker Park is now arguably “played out.” The neighborhood’s reputation is now based on the notion that hardly any struggling artists live there anymore. Rents are too high, and too many outside non-local commercial enterprises have taken hold. Relatedly, Preminger’s film adaptation (has) sold out Algren’s novel. The film has less of the novel’s authenticity and credibility and associated catalysts of inspiration because it does not substantially represent the post-industrial neighborhood, the characters seem cartoonish (the working-class members and hipsters alike seem thin on the ground), and overall there’s barely anything gritty (or *real*) about it. My complaints about this film adaptation then resemble complaints of residents who knew Wicker Park in the 1980s and early ‘90s and now criticize the state of the neighborhood today. The neighborhood has lost something. In sum, using these texts and the given sociological theory and ethnography, I attempt to explain what that “something” is (and I question/investigate if it was ever there in the first place.). After all, the proffers of past bohemia(s) and of the (even) more current neo-bohemia are largely based on fantasies. An examination of its smoke(s) and mirrors directs us.

## CHAPTER 7: INSPIRATIONS – EARLY GENTRIFIERS OF WICKER PARK

“That was why, Frankie guessed, everyone from the neighborhood he knew, from the punk to himself, tried to be something different than what he was. The minute some kid with an accordion began playing for pennies in the corner bars he fancied himself a musical-comedy star. . . . Nobody bred around Division Street ever turned out to be a cheap crook; they were all Dillingers or Yellow Kid Weils to hear them tell it.” - Nelson Algren, *The Man with the Golden Arm*<sup>253</sup>

### 7.1 The Bard of the Stumblebum Hosts a Party

Having taken a round-about trip via elevated train—The El, probably Chicago’s most famous industrial symbol—from a friend’s trendy, “unhip” Wrigleyville apartment (no one culturally aware goes to Wrigleyville, I was told by an acquaintance with far more cultural capital than I have), I arrived at the doorstep of the Wicker Park Art Center for the Twenty-Third Annual Nelson Algren Birthday Party. A Saturday in March, rainy and somewhat cold in Chicago: the Wicker Park Art Center, a rundown church that had been converted into a performance space on North Avenue (part of the Milwaukee Avenue corridor) in the gritty (the walls were peeling off) and hip Wicker Park neighborhood had me questioning the culmination of the literati with the glamorous grunge of Chicago’s hipster, post-industrial touchstone. Seven dollars bought my entry to a constructed world, the bedraggled former St. Paul’s church filled with a slew of unlikely misfits who had gathered to honor the late Chicago wordsmith (he died in 1981), a writer known for his depiction of beatdown Wicker Park along with his acute, *realistic* and harsh insights on the proverbial “City of Big Shoulders.” “Yet once you’ve come to be part of this particular patch, you’ll never love another,” Algren wrote. “Like loving a

woman with a broken nose, you may well find lovelier lovelies. But never a lovely so real.”<sup>254</sup>

This night consisted of cheap domestic beer and a smorgasbord of talent and aficionados; entertainers/participants consisted of legendary Chicago musicians, poets, novelists, friends of Algren, even a “dissident psychologist,”<sup>255</sup> Algren scholars, and a woman with a French accent who read from Simone de Beauvoir’s (a longtime lover of Algren) autobiographical novel *The Mandarins*.<sup>256</sup> A mixed crowd. Some people looked homeless (and some in fact were), many looked “artistic”/artistic, “edgy”/edgy, “progressive”/progressive (enter your ironic quotation-marked adjective here or not) with their piercings, tattoos, secondhand/ripped clothes, lack of hygiene, and pervasive scowls. The central core buzz surrounded the late Algren. He seemed to *embody* something. Musicians sang lyrics taken from his (poetry-) prose, scholars pontificated on Algren’s aside comments about place and art and women and injustice. The night’s flyer reads:

Welcome to the 23<sup>rd</sup> annual Nelson Algren Birthday Party, brought to you as always by the Nelson Algren Committee. Tonight, our goals are to honor the memory of the writer most closely identified with the working people of Chicago, to shine a spotlight on under-appreciated activists and artists in the Algren spirit, to celebrate Algren’s connection with this neighborhood—and to have a good time, as we enjoy the talent and camaraderie of this unique event.

You’ll notice that this party differs in tone from the other big spring social event—the NATO gathering in May. There, official Chicago will prove it is a world-class city by turning downtown into a fortified bunker, thus protecting the military elites of the world’s leading democracies from the people they, in theory, exist to protect. But we believe it is Nelson Algren’s novels, stories and essays that are Chicago’s real claim to world-class status. He remains a literary figure honored more abroad than at home.

What is this world? Has Ernest Hemingway, also a writer from Chicago, ever inspired a gathering such as this? In fact, Nelson Algren wasn't always "the writer most closely identified with the working people of Chicago." His second novel *Never Come Morning* (1942) about a Polish-American boxer and criminal in Chicago was denounced by the predominately Polish-American community (the area that is now called *Wicker Park* in Chicago) as pro-Axis, pro-Nazi, and anti-Polish-American; and, Algren's novels resultantly were even banned from the Chicago Public Library.<sup>257</sup> Critics of Algren as early as the 1950s would further deride Algren for the "working people" sensibilities in his fiction. Norman Podhoretz couldn't understand why Algren "finds bums so much more interesting and stirring than other people," and Leslie Fiedler called him "the bard of the stumblebum" and a "museum piece—the last of the Proletarian writers."<sup>258</sup>

It would take a while (over 30 years) for Algren's proletariat leanings to get officially celebrated by activists such as those at the contemporary reunion party. By the 1980s, all of Algren's books were out of print, and this partly as a result jumpstarted the Nelson Algren Committee in 1989, which now puts on his annual birthday celebration.<sup>259</sup> In their birthday flyer, Algren is lauded for his connection to this activism and to the neighborhood itself as a site of such activism. The "bard of the stumblebum" has come a long way. The night's flyer mentions the NATO gathering put on by "official Chicago" in May in downtown in "a fortified bunker" to show in contrast this night's more earnestly progressive/*authentic* and open-form aims: a celebration of the working class and of a favored all-but-forgotten writer and his perhaps more (in)famous neighborhood.

As I further explore in the following sections, Wicker Park as a locality of what Richard Lloyd calls "neo-bohemia" showcases the bohemian tradition of the *outsider*

with leftist politics and *alternative* agendas, contra-distinguished against an industrial complex such as NATO, to show the authenticity of these protesters' causes. This gathering at this church was touted as a "purer" form of protest, a message for/from the progressive-idealist and/or contemporary hipster, and Nelson Algren as "Chicago's real claim to world-class status" with his record of allegiance to the Chicago working class and the edges of society serves as a perceivably sincere figurehead of such a neo-bohemian movement and spectacle.

Algren's work, his legacy, and influence on Wicker Park have also added to the amazing amount of profit and publicity that Wicker Park has garnered more recently as a hipster site of cultural production, as this birthday celebration indicates. At its neo-bohemian inception, in the 1990s Wicker Park was lauded as "the Windy City's burst of bohemia," and in 2002 *The New York Times* travel section declared it as "Chicago's bohemian hub of funkiness and creativity."<sup>260</sup> The Algren birthday celebration serves as a testament to these loaded distinctions, even as some other hipsters-artists with cultural wherewithal controversially claim that Wicker Park's most authentic and best artistic days are now behind it. Bohemia and commerce have always been complicatedly interwoven, and neo-bohemia or "post-hip" shows the complexity of Wicker Park's current condition—as a neighborhood currently on the last plot point of our arc-of-gentrification and in what I consider "late-stage neo-bohemianism." In these chapters, I investigate this unique hybridized relationship between Algren, his image, his works, the representations of him and his works (in the form of film and photography) alongside the evolution and state of Wicker Park as both a place for and myth of the artist-bohemian, hipster, counterculture member, criminal, outsider, *and* contemporary consumer.

## 7.2 Grandfather's Son

Nelson Algren (originally named Nelson Ahlgren Abraham) once commented on his affinity for his eccentric, wayward grandfather whom he had never met. In an interview, after telling his grandfather's life story, Algren stated, "Anyhow, I've always felt much closer to this guy, to this grandfather [rather than to my parents]."<sup>261</sup> Nels Ahlgren, later to convert to Judaism and rename himself Isaac Ben Abraham, grew up in Sweden and after his religious conversion as a young man, he sailed to the United States. It was in the U.S. where he was "good on the con."<sup>262</sup> The elder Ahlgren would often find shady, half-baked schemes to earn a buck. As an orthodox Jew, he left his family in small-town Indiana to travel to San Francisco. He would reunite with his wife and spend some time in the Holy Land in Jerusalem, only to return once again to the farm in Black Oak, Indiana. Yet, Isaac Ben Abraham would leave again, to travel the country, and not return for over fifteen years, only to flee once more. "He was an intellectual before his time," Algren once stated. "He was doing everything he could not to work and he always had this con thing going because he was a Zionist."<sup>263</sup>

Grandfather Ahlgren would eventually abandon his Judaism for socialism and then Methodism and travel as "a sort of mercenary missionary who'd adopt any faith that would send him somewhere and pay his expenses,"<sup>264</sup> only to die many years later as a vagabond and pauper in Florida. It is easy to believe how/why Nelson Algren related more to stories even fantasies and the *legend* of this unconventional grandfather rather than his parents that he deemed too simple and conventional. Algren (the family dropped the 'h' in their name before Nelson was born), born in 1909 in Detroit, moved with his family—his two parents and two older sisters—when he was three to a South Side Irish-

Protestant neighborhood of Chicago. Algren's father worked tirelessly as a factory machinist and garage mechanic, yet Algren's mother, a housewife, would often berate his father for his lack of ambition and economic prosperity. As Algren tells it, this domestic and financial instability would have a lasting impact on him. When Algren was twelve-years old, the family moved to a neighborhood on the Northwest Side not too far from Wicker Park, and he would remain in this sector of Chicago for the majority of his remaining years.

Alongside his identification with his wayward grandfather and his discomfort with his parents' domestic and financial troubles, what's also most revealing about Nelson Algren's biography leading up to his writing of *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1949) are Algren's streetwise reminiscences of his childhood and young adulthood, his formative years. Only a fair student, Algren was fascinated with his neighborhood as a teenager. Instead of studying, he often preferred to play pool and gamble pettily with his neighborhood buddies. Some of his most vivid memories include the drunken fistfights outside of a bar close to his house. In college at the University of Illinois, majoring in journalism and copiously reading literature and studying sociology, he took special interest in the underclass (what Marx calls the *lumpenproletariat*), honing his chops for the astute observations of the human condition he would become famous for.

After college, during the Depression, he rode boxcars and hitched rides, going down to New Orleans before settling in West Texas for a stint, during which he served three months in jail for stealing a typewriter. Again, beginning with his fascination of his eccentric grandfather and carrying over to the working-roughnecks of his childhood Chicago onto the hobos, drunks, and itinerant criminals of Depression-era America,



Algren made it his main life and career purpose to document the downtrodden, befallen, and forgotten. He saw himself as a writer—a journalist-sociologist hybrid—of human suffering. Knowing all this about Algren’s background while reading his *The Man with the Golden Arm*—a novel that consists of wayward, down-on-their-luck lushbums/hipsters/junkies/strippers (et al) in a fading neighborhood—it becomes (inter)connectedly easier to picture and comprehend the author as an ironically idealistic atheist of Jewish ancestry, a college-educated man who distrusted academic elitism, and as a successful writer of middle class/bourgeoisie-celebrated literature who chose mainly to live in the slums of Chicago while completing the majority of his novels and other writings. One anecdote from Algren’s friend, the photographer Art Shay, proves telling:

A hitchhiker with ‘HARD LUCK’ tattooed across his knuckles had murdered a whole family after they had picked him up. ‘Nelson looked at the picture,’ Shay recalled, ‘and said, ‘That poor sonofabitch.’ My wife wanted to throw him out.’ Later, when a writer in the Chicago papers had questioned Nelson’s humanity, Shay thought, ‘Nelson’s humanity. He could see what could drive a man to something like that. Only Jesus Christ himself could have that kind of attitude.’”<sup>265</sup>

From the beginning, from his childhood fascination with his grandfather and the luckless, Algren was a sympathizer/empathizer, a man with a unique understanding of and compassion for the lower classes and often voiceless mass. Calling him Christ-like is perhaps hyperbole, and certainly a phrase the atheist Algren would have shunned, but the insinuation is noteworthy. Nelson Algren’s extraordinarily humane sensibilities helped him function as a bridge between social/cultural worlds of post-WWII Chicago and

America, and he performed the majority of this bridge-work while living in Wicker Park. He first officially moved to the neighborhood in 1940 to live and write, he left for a two-year period as a private in the U.S. military during WWII in France and then returned to Wicker Park to live in a small, cheap, cold-water flat at 1523 W. Wabansia Ave., a residence that would anchor his most prolific writing period from 1945 to 1955. It was in this Wabansia apartment that Algren kept an openhouse for junkies, prostitutes, and other characters on the fringe. He noted of his process during this time: "I've chosen for myself the life best suited to the sort of writing I'm able to do. Politicians and intellectuals bore me; they seem to be unreal; the people I see a lot of these days are the ones who do seem real to me: whores, junkies, etc."<sup>266</sup>

It was foremost in this period, mainly while living on Wabansia Ave., then that Algren settled into his bohemianism, the kind that's depicted in Frank/Leslie's *Pull My Daisy* and the modes/epochs that Elizabeth Wilson, Nicholson, and others have described. Algren, as a bohemian writer and person who lived unconventionally, lived on the outskirts of traditionally established society. He had rejected bourgeois attitudes and lifestyles, and he shunned the "straight network" of the American middle class, the emerging suburbs, and academic elitism. His preferences were the cold-water flats, the dive bars, the humble Polish diners, the Division Street neighborhood streets (of what is now called Wicker Park) with its back alley poker games, hipster conmen, drug addicts, bums, and prostitutes, but also its at-the-time working-class primarily Polish men and women who were struggling to get by. In this chapter, as I analyze the complexity of Algren's (perhaps unknowing) contributions to the gentrification of Wicker Park, I now look to Art Shay's photographs of Algren during this time (the 1940s and '50s) as

appropriate snapshots for this (struggling) artist/bohemian-misfit's *chosen* (preferred) way of life.

### 7.3 Photographic Inspiration

“You never know how good it can be until you’ve found out for yourself how bad it can get.” — *Nelson Algren*<sup>267</sup>

Looking at Art Shay’s (in)famous late-1940s and 1950s photographs of Algren in *Chicago’s Nelson Algren* (1988) and *Nelson Algren’s Chicago* (2007), one quickly understands the (neo)bohemian-hipster appeal of Wicker Park’s most famous and now most beloved writer—the newly coined “patron saint of neo-bohemian Wicker Park.”<sup>268</sup>

Bespectacled, in shabby clothes—his “frayed rope belt and Salvation Army jacket”<sup>269</sup>—with cigarette smoke in a sparse basement poker game or on a snowy Wicker Park street, Algren comes off as a professor who decided not to attend faculty meetings, who perceived tenure track as a rat race. Algren viewed himself as a self-taught sociologist who happened to write literature. This attitude came not because he didn’t care or because he was often hungover but because in his mind he had more important things to do.

Preferable pursuits captured by Shay include Algren typing at his typewriter in his \$10/month cold-water apartment with Wicker Park out the window, Algren at the horserace track, riding his \$4 used rickety Schwinn bicycle down an alleyway, eating at a Polish deli, drinking 20-cent Schlitz beer; hamming it up with the homeless, crippled, and unemployed; speaking to his “mentor”—an old woman and former prostitute; talking to a former heroin-addict turned tattoo artist, along with a strip-tease artist; watching a junkie put a syringe into his arm, Algren witnessing a police line-up, observing men getting

arrested by the police on the sidewalk; looking to bullet holes in a front door, at trash fires, dumpster divers, broken windows, rotting wood, abandoned shacks, mattresses amid a lot of junk and wreckage; playing dice at a seedy bar, looking at a naked Simone de Beauvoir in his bathroom, watching a boxer practice at the gym, playing pool, and holding up his National Book Award plaque for *The Man With the Golden Arm* (among many other images). He would eventually sell his National Book Award gold medal and plaque to a pawn shop for 150 dollars.<sup>270</sup>

Shay's episodic photographs of Algren display various chapters of *grit*, of Algren gloriously slumming it, and of his celebration of the *less likely* and often times unnoticed and forgotten. This stance—on the part of Algren and Shay—was offensive and controversial and misunderstood by some who couldn't fathom why Algren would choose to put himself in these types of situations and then, of course, profit from them. "Rather, what may impede an appreciative understanding of Nelson Algren is difficulty understanding his attachment to America's permanently down-and-out: his passionate fascination with how they live from day to day," Brook Horvath writes, "why they make the choices they do, what the rest of America has done or failed to do to create and perpetuate this underclass, and what one's response to such truths should be."<sup>271</sup>

Rather, Horvath writes, "To understand Algren is to see him, start to finish, as someone who, to paraphrase the poet Leonard Cohen, loved the country but couldn't stand the scene."<sup>272</sup> In an interview in 1964, Algren explained this mentality; he said he wrote "to catch the emotional ebb and flow and something of the fear and the terror and the dangers and the kind of life that multitudes of people had been forced into with no recognition that such a world existed." He insisted that American literature should

concern itself with “the woman in the courtroom who, finding herself undefended on a charge, asked, ‘Isn’t anybody on my side?’” Algren stated: “literature is made upon any occasion that a challenge is put to the legal apparatus by conscience in touch with humanity . . . the hard necessity of bringing the judge on the bench down into the dock has been the peculiar responsibility of the writer in all ages of man.”<sup>273</sup>

Algren’s motivations for Shay’s photographs and for his writing were clear in his mind: to connect with humanity and to hold those who are accountable for the dehumanization of society’s unluckiest members. *The Man with the Golden Arm* starts with the Kuprin quote: “Do you understand gentlemen, that all the horror is in just this—that there is no horror!”<sup>274</sup> Algren sought to convey that there is no “horror” in America, only people who deserved to be given their due—their own pictures and their stories, if not some cash. “For Algren, as for Kuprin,” James Giles writes, “there was a strictly socioeconomic dimension to ‘the horror.’ He never wavered in his commitment to the lumpenproletariat, society’s despised outcasts.”<sup>275</sup> For this, to humanize the dehumanized, to broadcast the typically unnoticed, he (and Shay) turned foremost to his Wicker Park neighborhood: “I mean the neighborhood I was living in,” Algren stated, “and these people, were a lot more real than the army was.”<sup>276</sup>

In one particular photograph, the image that begins this section, Algren is captured at twilight on a snow-filled Division Street in Wicker Park, dead of winter, among blurry shadows of other people in the neighborhood, surrounded by neon lights, a street light, a “LIQUORS” sign, a blurred person on a sled, Wicker Park buildings fading and blinking in the background. Algren in the foreground has a subtle frown on his face, he wears a heavy winter coat, and this countenance and apparel work with the gritty

urban allure of the neighborhood. Cold and perhaps suffering (at least shivering), he is of the neighborhood, of the excitement and neon lights and freneticism; he cares about his neighborhood because it has given him a bare soul, a calloused hand, a cheap beer and a huddle around a trash fire on the street, that neon beer sing—but also a good con, some cash to give out, and some coin to take home with him. Wicker Park now loves Algren, and this is because he confronted it with open eyes, with an honesty—and a romance with the underbelly, with a gambler’s nod.

Yet, notice I say “romance.” As it usually goes with any romantic tale, there are debates as to the aims of the heart. After Algren won the first National Book Award in 1950, there was a brief flurry of attention for what was considered the last of the Chicago “naturalist” writers. Some critics lauded him in the aftermath of his award. Malcolm Cowley dubbed him as the “poet of the Chicago slums.”<sup>277</sup> Hemingway said he was “probably the best writer under 50 . . . writing today.”<sup>278</sup> But others such as Leslie Fiedler criticized him, stating Algren is “almost a museum piece . . . whose fictional world is at the ultimate remove from any reality his readers know.” He was also called “the man with the golden beef” by Norman Podhoretz, who stated in Algren he found nothing but “bums and whores, hoboes and pimps, con men, and other outcasts,” that these characters and subjects “weren’t worth the bother of following anyway.”<sup>279</sup> For, by the 1960s and 1970s, Algren had lost a lot of ground and notoriety among the literary establishment, and he would move out of Wicker Park in the early 1970s. Wicker Park’s loss of notoriety took on a similar trajectory of decline, if on a grander scale (Algren always had a place to live and steady income).

As Algren picked up on and compellingly depicted, especially in *The Man with the Golden Arm*, Wicker Park after WWII was a neighborhood in “decline,” a locale carrying a postlapsarian sentiment after its more economically prosperous days of industrialism. Wicker Park went through a dramatic transformation in the twentieth century, especially after WWII, what Carlo Rotella in *October Cities* has described as the formation of the postindustrial neighborhood as a result of the demise of the industrial city. Rotella writes:

‘In the years just after the Second World War,’ observes Robert Beauregard, ‘the trauma of the country’s large central cities could hardly be avoided.’ That ‘trauma’ was most evident in the cities of the Midwest and Northeast, and it was, most immediately, the result of ‘15 years of depression, war, and inflation’ in which specifically urban problems had been pushed to the back burner: factories, civic buildings, and especially overcrowded neighborhoods were physically deteriorating; cities’ economies, especially factory production and downtown retailing, were showing signs of long-term erosion; pollution was increased . . . city governments were denounced as weak and corrupt, while federal government was potently committed to suburbanizing the nation.<sup>280</sup>

Central city trauma hit Chicago as much as any other in mid-century, and Wicker Park as a central neighborhood served as a microcosm of the larger urban problem(s). “The lower Milwaukee Avenue corridor [now called *Wicker Park*], just northwest of the Loop and uncomfortably close to the Near North Side, lay within the giant half-circle of blight identified by city planners in the late 1940s and 1950s. To the redevelopment-minded

eye, the Milwaukee Avenue corridor at midcentury fit the profile of the obsolescent industrial-era landscape.”<sup>281</sup>

The neighborhood was a predominately Scandinavian one in the late 1800s on through the beginning portion of the twentieth century. As the first half of the century developed it became mainly Polish and predominately working class, known as the Polish Triangle and Polish Downtown, the biggest enclave of Polish in the United States at the time. After WWII, many of these residents moved to the peripheral city suburbs along with other areas of Chicago.<sup>282</sup> According to Rotella, Algren’s writings during the late 1940s and ‘50s represent the “October city”—the city or neighborhood in industrial decline. As a prosperous industrial neighborhood leading up to WWII, in the 1950s it started to show signs of glory days long gone. As unemployment and crime increased while the number of residents in the neighborhood dwindled, Wicker Park shifted from predominately Polish to Mexican to Puerto Rican residents in the ‘60s-‘70s-‘80s, and gained a designation of “blight” and as a neighborhood in disrepair. Algren, the college-educated and capable writer, was ripe for the middle class world, yet he chose a life of modesty and simplicity during his time in Wicker Park, which foregrounded the decisions the struggling artists/bohemian hipsters would make in the neighborhood in the ‘80s, ‘90s, and perhaps even today (albeit probably to a lesser degree). In the 1980s, struggling artist-bohemians noticeably started to move into Wicker Park. Likewise, Algren’s novels which had been out of print through the 1970s and much of the 1980s were now starting to get reprinted in the mid-to-late 1980s, starting in the 1980s scholars were beginning to write serious books about his work,<sup>283</sup> and Art Shay’s first book of Algren photographs



finally (after much delay) came out in 1988—garnering Algren more notice in and around neighborhood especially.

Thus, the synergy was right. The timing was right for Algren's resurgence and for his emergence as the neighborhood hipster patron saint. One can make the argument that he was the neighborhood's first hipster, at least of record, and that his life and his work were then primed after renewed scholarly and popular attention to set the tone and stage for Wicker Park bohemian-artist-hipsters in the late 1980s and 1990s, and even arguably for today. This dissertation does not include a formal ethnography of Algren's influence on the neighborhood, I have not taken polls and conducted extensive official interviews, but it is clear that Algren's image, memory, and work have inspired contemporary bohemians and hipsters in and around the neighborhood. The participants at the Nelson Algren Birthday Celebration serve as wonderful examples of this. In 1993, the owner of a local Wicker Park bookstore stated that the best-selling paperback for that year was the 1989 biography by Bettina Drew, *Nelson Algren: A Life on the Wild Side*.<sup>284</sup> Steve Pink, actor/director and screenwriter of the film *High Fidelity* (2000) starring Chicago's own John Cusack, was one of the artists that moved into the neighborhood in the late 1980s because of Algren. He states,

I was interested in Wicker Park mainly because I had read [Algren's novel] *Never Come Morning* . . . I saw [Art Shay's] book. He took the famous pictures of Nelson Algren. He had all these great pictures of Algren walking down Division and stuff . . . Just the neighborhood seemed so interesting based on that, it just seemed so historically significant, and I think [Algren] was the first winner of the National Book

Award . . . so it seemed kind of interesting, kind of a literary figure that I liked because [his work] was about drugs and gangs, and I read about drugs and gangs and hardship and art.<sup>285</sup>

Similar reactions to Algren's ethos and mythos have been articulated. Mark, an older gentleman and photographer/political activist, who knew Algren while Algren lived in the neighborhood provides confirmation of this. Mark, who still lives in Wicker Park, asserts: "Yeah, Algren did *inspire* folks, and some did move here because of his books. Maybe that movie had some impact too, I can't testify to that. These young kids, some artists know about Algren and have read him, and I agree, even some that haven't read him, just by looking at them you would assume they have. Algren had something to do with the looks of this place, though I am sure he wouldn't want to live here now. He wouldn't like it." I then asked him *why*? "I think he would have been upset with the fakeness. He wanted to get away from that."<sup>286</sup>

Julie Parsons-Nesbitt, the then director for the Guild Complex, a Wicker Park nonprofit that caters to local writers, stated:

Nelson Algren was really influential in Chicago writing. He really marked or imprinted Chicago literature in a very particular way. He was a very purely working-class writer. I think that's very much reflected in our work and in sort of literary stance of Chicago. He wrote about the immigrants who lived in Chicago. He wrote about the poor people, the junkies, the prostitutes. That was a very particular kind of literature that exists and is valued in at the Guild Complex. I mean not that we have readings about prostitutes or anything but that what we do reflects people's real lives. The

real lives of many different kinds of people. Including people that are often invisible in art, in American culture. And I think that influence has a lot to do with Nelson Algren's work.<sup>287</sup>

Parsons-Nesbitt's explanation of the Guild Complex's writers' aims to depict "people's real lives" highlights the attitudes of Wicker Park bohemian-artists' desires to look for and embrace the "real" Chicago and the *real* neighborhood, and she tellingly mentions Algren—"a very purely working-class writer"—as a key catalyst for getting others in the neighborhood to maintain comparable sensibilities and to follow similar pursuits. Steve Pink's testament that Algren's depictions of "drugs," "gangs," "hardship," and "art" speak to this appeal as well. For, in this lens, Algren inspired the struggling artists/writers/bohemians to move into Wicker Park in the 1980s and '90s in search of more *authentic*, more "real" surroundings—an environment that envelopes the sores and shit and human wounds/flaws in broad open-eyed purview. Rents in the 1980s were low and the neighborhood is in close proximity to the heart of Chicago, the Loop, but other surrounding neighborhoods revealingly did not take a similar (neo)bohemian course. Uniquely, Algren was the forerunner of depicting Wicker Park as a "cool"/cool or "hip"/hip area; his perceived beatdown lack of pretentiousness in attitude and image attracted gritty and hipster artist-types to the neighborhood—a condition that alludes to the fantasies of Bohemia, of longstanding representations of the artist on the edges and in the shadows of the suffering city who hold great appeal and stock for subsequent imitation/duplication. Art Shay's photos capture these conditions. Richard Lloyd writes: "The image of Algren on Division Street evokes long-standing bohemian archetypes: Baudelaire's *flaneur* and Mailer's existential hipster. Here we see an exemplary instance

of the interplay between fantasies of the gritty street and the construction of a creative persona in the nascent stages of a young cultural producer's career . . . His work adds to the allure of Wicker Park for those who wish to follow in his footsteps, and it contributes to the cumulative texture of the local culture."<sup>288</sup>

In one photograph, Algren in his cold-water flat on Wabansia Ave. in 1949 is sitting down at his battered Royal typewriter, proofreading an early rough draft of what would become his novel *A Walk on the Wild Side*. To his left we see a shelf of books, one written by Ben Hecht. As Shay explains, Algren once wrote an introduction to Hecht's reprint of the novel *Ed Dorn*, stating what he could very well have said about his own novels: "Hecht's people come alive when he looks at the city through their eyes."<sup>289</sup> Behind Algren, in this photo, through the window we see a 1940s Ford parked in front of a typical hang-out Wicker Park dive bar, what was the inspiration for the Tug & Maul bar of *The Man with the Golden Arm*. This photograph captures the seeds of the writer in the neighborhood in the late 1940s and 1950s. He only had to look around his grungy apartment and walk across the street for inspiration for his work. Algren felt he was in the world but that he wasn't necessarily of it. As a kind of bridge between Wicker Park during this time and the middle/upper classes away from there, he felt it was his duty to tell these stories. To write for the people who were not writing for themselves, and he did so in his bohemian flat—a space that has resonance for other similarly conditioned aspirers. Also noticeably remarkable about this photograph are the tattered curtains, Algren's ruffled hair, his crumpled pages. The hard labor and struggle of the writer becomes clear here, a tried toil inside an apartment that matches the weary and time-worn

nature of the place across the street—an unlikely though unfettered synthesis for narrative inspiration.

We then walk around the neighborhood with Algren. We see a line of men on Skid Row, waiting for food and employment. Some sit on the curb with trash and debris and cigarette butts at their feet, and many of them lean up against a large Budweiser sign on a brick building wall. “Budweiser wasted that sign on them,” Algren stated. “No one gotta tell em to drink beer.”<sup>290</sup> The men in this photo look tired, forlorn, as if it’s been a long while since a good sleep and shower. Many have their heads down or are looking away. Shay writes:

In the local middle of his city’s rusty heart . . . Nelson showed me Baudelaire’s “infamous city” and Dostoevsky’s insignificant “specks of humanity” getting up from “all night and all night and all night” as Nelson put it . . . They congregated in Skid Row from alleys where they awoke looking at the cats. They came here for the first drink or handout of the day from the urine-smelling flop houses and all-night bars, preachy missions and stale-food restaurants of a grungy neighborhood Row soon to be plowed under for high-rent office space. These bums were largely veterans . . . living on meager disability, social security checks, begging and alcohol. All of which fed their hopes of someday living again, the way they did in uniform. Losers mostly, smelling of piss and alcohol.

”Budweiser wasted that sign on them,” Nelson said. “No one gotta tell em to drink beer.”<sup>291</sup>

In Algren's typically humorous/even hilarious and partial summation, he lets us in on the joke. He doesn't necessarily want us to feel sorry for these gentlemen on Skid Row. He wants us to understand their stories, how they have arrived here; and he wants us to laugh with them, at the absurdity of the situation—of waiting in line for food and work, perhaps while hungover, only to be glaringly reminded via a large advertisement that they should think about drinking beer, even though they realistically probably can't afford it and nonetheless never need a reminder to get drunk. Algren, with his comment about the Budweiser sign, does not capture the *horror*—he speaks to the *absurdity* of this arrangement and thus makes these men more human with a joke. These men are “mostly losers,” but they are losers in the sense that they've lost the keys to their original dreams, perhaps have forgotten the point of it all, and meanwhile society always has a large sign around broadcasting what you cannot afford and perhaps what you do not need but think you should buy. Knowing this, just understanding there are men subjected to this, we then all lose. We lose something. Yet we want to celebrate this Algren Budweiser line as much as we are appalled by it, so we laugh. Because to be appalled is to give a shit and to laugh is to celebrate, to realize there is truth in jest and absurdity in the real. In this reel. To laugh is the only way to keep one's sanity, as is looking down and away from the camera. To not believe they have become part of the sideshow. They do not want your pity. They want to laugh and drink beer, without unnecessary reminders and condescension, as is only humanly possible.

Just as Liz Jobey writes in an essay about a 1966 Diane Arbus photograph, “The fictions we make about photographs are as unreliable as they are unavoidable,”<sup>292</sup> I look at Shay's photograph of Algren riding his used bicycle down a rain-slick Wicker Park

back alleyway and wonder where he is going; I ask my questions and create my own fictions. Is he going back to his cheap flat to write and/or drink, or to his favored dive bar or diner—to one of his revered police line-ups or back to Skid Row? Is he riding without a purpose?

The writer-bohemian on a used bicycle, long before alternative energy vehicles were part of the popular vernacular/reality, gets around—and he does so not on the main thoroughfares but on the back streets, the more unlikely and less visible alternative routes that only a familiar local knows about. The background in this photo is misted and grey, as Algren's middle class associations are also muddled, and the foreground is clearer with metal bars over a first-floor apartment window and Algren's slightly descending gaze for the road ahead. His bicycle's basket is empty, only awaiting the used books, Polish deli meats, cigarettes and cigars, bourbon, and beloved leftover neighborhood wreckage for Algren to put inside of it. His Salvation Army coat does the trick too, for he doesn't want to physically stand out from the neighborhood's other residents. As a writer, he is perhaps foremost a spy in the neighborhood. A hipster spy and bridge for folks elsewhere, the first of a Wicker Park tradition in this mode.

Unlike Arbus and the many divergent “freak” subjects of her photography, Shay focuses on one main subject (Algren) in this collection as his subject intertwines and interacts with his neighborhood's rations and accomplices. Algren and his associates rarely look at the camera. Unlike Arbus, Shay seems to work behind the scenes, even in hiding. He says as much, stating he often did not want people knowing he was there. Arbus received criticism and attention for capturing her freaks in full view, who often smiled or at least looked into the camera. However, with Shay's photos as with Algren's

work, it feels as if Shay and Algren are laughing alongside their subjects, somehow sharing the same absurd cosmic joke and con. Arbus and her subjects meanwhile seem more serious, still waiting for the punchline to arrive. Like Arbus, Shay arguably takes advantage of his subjects for the sake of compelling photographs and financial profit, but Shay's photos more so seem to come with a mutual understanding that he and his subjects are both good on and with the con, on the hustle of a scene—whether there's a photographer around or not. Shay knows the deal, and they know the deal as well. They want to earn some bread, and so does Shay—so all is fair game. Just don't make me unnecessarily sacrifice my dignity, at least not for free or for too low a price. These are not freaks—these are hustlers waiting for the next deal, Shay and Algren included, no apologies; men on the make and take, all laughs and nods aside intertwined. We understand this because these men are not posing and smiling for the camera. They are waiting in line, expecting their day's due, along with so much more.

In another Shay photograph wherein Algren is in a "Division Street basement joint,"<sup>293</sup> he sits at a round table with three other men playing poker. There are no windows, just the light of a lone hanging bulb for these men amid the gray stone of the basement walls and the ceiling that is partially peeling off. A sparseness dominates the room as the men, two with fedora hats, one with slicked hair, alongside the eyeglasses-sporting bookish-looking Algren, who are looking down at their scattered chips and cards and cigarettes. A cigar.

"Algren was addicted to poker," Shay writes. "Here, in a Division Street basement joint he is dealt to by the original 'Man with the Golden Arm'—a friend of his named Hackett. A masterful poker dealer, Hackett was always trying to escape his heroin



habit. Nelson abominated the way Sinatra played Hackett in the ‘Arm’ movie, especially ‘the way he kicked heroin as if it were a summer cold.’ Nelson would have much preferred Marlon Brando in the part.”<sup>294</sup> I can only guess as to why Algren would have preferred Brando in the role of Frankie Machine in the film. Maybe it has something to do with Brando’s method acting, his ability to more realistically/truthfully inhabit a role without the excessive dramatization. There’s an efficiency with Brando’s acting, just as there’s an efficiency in this photo of a basement poker game. One light, nothing on the wall, only men simply playing cards. They don’t seem to be posing or acting out, as Sinatra does in the film. The only unnecessary ornaments here in this basement seem to be the fedoras of the two men. And maybe Algren’s cigar in his left hand. This scene begs for basic hipster emulation. Basic motivation to play cards and smoke without any of the unnecessary decorations. So goes the Wicker Park dive bar or diner/coffee shop and/or sidewalk that is stripped down and primed for taking existential chances. One man, with his back turned to us, is in blurry mid-card flip on the table. This action takes on an archetype; Algren, here, looking down at his own cards, contemplates his next move—in conjunction and retaliation of the gambler in this localized movement.

These photos have their stories and suggestions. I look to Algren at night on Division Street among the beer and neon and confusion. I see him during the day on the same street(s) with the weather and weathered in plainer view. Rather than looking at him in these photographs as a gentrifier or colonizer, perhaps it’s more accurate to view Algren here as a tour guide, a modern-day Charon. He shows us the other side without much judgment, but rather with a bit of understanding and maybe a few laughs. In another photograph, Algren watches as his friend Hackett holds up his left arm, fingers

outstretched in the dark shadow. His right hand holds a needle filled with heroin, and he is about to perform the damage. Hackett's face is turned away from us, but we see the face of Algren—a look of serious yet subtle concern as he looks at Hackett's arm. He's not exactly laughing this time, but we know there's a joke in there somewhere to ease the pain. A tall fully stocked bookshelf is against the wall behind him. There's that cigar for the anxiety, the eyeglasses for better clarity. In Shay's caption of the two photographs on this page, he states, "I asked the man on the left, Yellow Jack by name, how heroin made him feel. He said (approximately), 'If you put seven beautiful movie stars naked on seven beds—like Ann Sheridan, Joan Crawford, Rita Hayworth, and them—and put one ampule of heroin on the eighth bed, you'd see this nigger crawling over them seven girls to get at that fuckin ampule. That's how it make you feel Mr. Picture Man.'"<sup>295</sup> Therein we get the joke, and yet again, with these photos and this anecdote we have the seriousness and sadness, but we also have the absurdity and the humor—the preferred way of handling these conditions. The joke's on us, and the joke's on them: the Picture Man and Hackett and Yellow Jack and Algren and us in our multifarious con, our sad absurdity where these things happen and we may or may not choose to look away. We understand, perhaps for the first time, that there is no horror. Just people taking chances; some bet the house and lose their asses. Some survive for another hand or photograph.

These photographs then work, if successfully, as catalysts—as springboards for stories and jokes and *choices* to look away or not. To gamble or not. Algren and Shay had their stories, their subjects and tall tales and punchlines, and we see them and try to duplicate the narratives and exchanges, all ensuing controversies and backlash therein. The fantasy. These fantasies provoke and condition us for this. Nelson Algren's late

1940s/1950s Wicker Park, combined with Shay's images of Algren, fall into that bohemian tradition of a bohemian/Bohemia as a catalyst for a scene of fewer inhibitions and less conventionality—albeit perhaps in a new way and form here in Chicago, post WWII. In the preface to his book of photographs, *Chicago's Nelson Algren*, Shay writes: “After conferring with John O’Hara, the Rolls-Royce-driving, spats-wearing Bard of Barflies, the chief literary critic of the *New York Times*, Havey Briet, quixotically observed, ‘American writers don’t *look* like writers.’ ‘Nelson Algren,’ Breit added, ‘doesn’t even sound like one.’”<sup>296</sup>

And/yet, this is also the point. Nelson Algren, after all, perhaps could have been *anybody*. In an earlier forward to Shay's book of Nelson Algren photographs around the neighborhood that never got off the ground, Algren wrote: “*If You Don't Like These Pictures, Get Your Own Damned Camera . . .* It's a town where the writer of class and the swifter-type thief approach their work with the same lofty hope of slipping a fast one over. ‘If he can get away with it, I give him credit,’ it is said here of bad poets as well as of good safe-blowers. Write, paint, steal the town blind, or merely take photographs of the people on its streets—so long as you make your operation pay off you'll count nothing but dividends and hear nothing but cheers.”<sup>297</sup> Algren as an Everyman wrote this ditty, and I can think of no better billboard for neo-bohemia, that sphere where art and the hustle and money-making con and scheme come together with “dividends” and “cheers” alike. So fuels the way of the neo-artist and the two-bit criminal alike these days.

In Shay's original pitch to publishers as a young *Life* magazine staff reporter who wanted to make a photo-essay about Algren, he said about his intentions for “the prose poet of the Chicago slums. I'll wander around with him and show him with his friends

from the lower depths of Chicago, gamblers, whores, drug addicts, losers, thieves, cops . . . night people.”<sup>298</sup> In his preface of his finally published book of photographs on Algren, Shay explains how they had such a difficult time getting this thing published. It wasn’t until 1988, a while after Algren had died in 1981, that the book made its debut. But just in time, as it turns out, for a Wicker Park hipster/(neo)bohemian resurgence. The artists-as-cons had returned to the neighborhood.

In another unpublished pitch to publishers, Algren wrote of the book: “A city of nobodies who never sleep but sit between the red juke and the white: sometimes they stir the bourbon, sometimes they chunk the ice. All those who come, with their green years wasted, to beat on the bar with swizzle sticks: to measure their night-blue hours. Weary old weirdies and zigzagging zanies, roam-the-night nomads and break-of-dawn kooks. Some on the nod and some on the hunt, come to the bars of wilderness under a paper moon wrapped by DuPont. . . . The book will also try to show how men and women succeed in staying human under the most dehumanizing circumstances.”<sup>299</sup>

Jobey says about Diane Arbus’s photographs: “In this new universe, losers could be heroes, freaks could be beautiful, ordinary people could be celebrities. If Arbus saw herself as an advocate for ‘freaks’, for people who were ‘different’, who were ‘further out’ than most of us are, she didn’t feel it was her mission to introduce them into the mainstream.”<sup>300</sup> There’s a difference between Arbus’s photographs and Shay’s Algren-oriented photographs. Shay and Algren didn’t see “freaks.” They wanted these “nobodies”/ these “old weirdies” and “zanies”/ these “nomads” and “kooks” “on the nod” and “on the hunt”/ these “men and women [to] succeed in staying human under the most dehumanizing circumstances.” They wanted them to fit in with the mainstream, to be

noticed by them—to connect with them. They wanted everyone to be in the mainstream, in on the mainstream joke, and perhaps this also shows Algren’s own earlier (socialist) influences. He viewed *everyone* as a freak, which meant, better yet, again: there are no freaks, and there is no horror. We are all grotesque misfits on parade, just trying to find our own cons to get by on, just trying to stay human. Maybe Algren knew this better than anyone. People in Wicker Park, at least, have taken note.

7.4 *The Man with the Golden Arm Goes Underground and Aboveground: Algren’s Appeal to the Middle Class Bohemian-Hipster. Algren’s Imagined Neighborhood.*

In understanding the neo-bohemian gentrification of Wicker Park since WWII—through the 1980s wherein struggling bohemian artists started to congregate there, and on through its neo-bohemian heyday of the 1990s and its late-stage highly commercialized neo-bohemian climate today—Richard Lloyd explains the reasons for this transformation:

The construction of the Wicker Park scene drew upon both local history and the accumulated mythology of the artist in the city as important resources. Young artists frame elements of the local landscape that many would find alarming as instead being symbolic amenities. Particularly in the nascent stages of the scene’s development, moving to Wicker Park meant negotiating the sidewalks with colorful denizens of city streets who alarm suburbanites . . . But artists are committed urbanites, and they fold the representation of neighborhood decay into their picture of authentic urbanism, even as their presence contributes to the reversal of many of its effects. In fact, the afterimages of decay, aestheticized in neo-noir

entertainments, heroin chic fashions . . . are imprinted on the cultural offerings produced in and through this new bohemia. In this way, the figurative representations of disorder are translated into the beacons of a new symbolic order in the neighborhood: “Welcome to Wicker Park.”<sup>301</sup>

Lloyd explains, “In part, artists’ interest in locating in marginal neighborhoods whose majority population is poor and nonwhite involves the desire to occupy inexpensive space adequate to their needs . . . Participants in Wicker Park’s art community profess an ideological commitment to race and class diversity, although . . . the practical definition of diversity is complicated and often fetishistic.”<sup>302</sup> This “fetishism” (arguably) diverges from Algren’s predominate ethos, as I’ve explained, one that celebrates and humanizes, even laughs with, people on society’s margins. But as is the neo-bohemian way, sometimes liberal affectations and sympathies do not come without their share of patronizing and additional albeit (usually) unintentional displacement of these marginal populations. Regardless though, as Lloyd states, bohemian artists such as Algren and others after him gravitated towards “the sidewalks with colorful denizens of city streets who alarm suburbanites.” These attractions provide “symbolic amenities.” The images of decay, the drugs, the shadows of Algren’s world and other representations combine with the “accumulated mythology of the artist in the city,” which then often separates them from middle class suburbanites—perhaps putting these artists in liminal spaces in between the suburbs and original urban residents.

As Lloyd indicates, more recent bohemian artist-hipsters felt a nostalgia for this urban milieu of grit, edge, and danger—even “as gentrification increasingly eased the sense of real danger.”<sup>303</sup> He writes, “through the circuits of fashion and media, such

styles are spread from the gritty urban milieu, evoking only an enticing *fantasy* of grit and danger in more sanitized locales.”<sup>304</sup> Within this template, I have inserted Algren as a main catalyst for this fantasy. As a writer who represented and depicted the “real”/real and “authentic”/authentic Wicker Park, he fits with the longstanding traditions of bohemian artists in urban settings. “Bohemians have long drawn inspiration from elements of the urban underworld, aestheticizing the activities of criminals and addicts in their cultural projects,” writes Lloyd.<sup>305</sup> Algren continues this “tradition” of glamourizing the underworld and highlighting/“aestheticizing the activities of criminals and addicts” in his writing.

Since, again, I have not conducted an official ethnography of Wicker Park for this dissertation, as I walk around the neighborhood, I can only largely *imagine* how Algren’s photographs and books have inspired subsequent residents and patrons of Wicker Park over the years, all patronizing sentiments and controversies/debates about gentrification and authenticity and earnestness intertwined and in tow. This section focuses mainly on Algren’s most known and celebrated novel in this light, as I parse out the elements of *The Man with the Golden Arm* that illumine the old neighborhood’s appeal and foundations/fantasies of (re)design for bohemian artists/early gentrifiers, among others. These and their fantasies connect with my fantasy, as this dissertation is about fantasy after all, on our arc-of-gentrification (and our arc-of-the-imaginary).

Algren’s propensity for his version of the “real” shines most in his treatment of his characters in *The Man with the Golden Arm*, and in reading *Arm*, one becomes familiar with many of the motifs Algren would become famous for: drug usage, prostitution, hustling, the underbelly, grit, grunge, the lumpenproletariat, the criminal, the

down-and-out, and the like. John Leland in *Hip: the History* writes, “If white supremacy is America’s original sin, the white negro is a character born after the fall, conjured to imagine a return to grace without sacrifice. As Greg Tate put it . . . the wigger as cultural emissary takes everything but the burden. Like many characters in this book, the white boy whole stole the blues is a trickster of sorts: self-serving, indeterminate, navigating between two worlds.”<sup>306</sup>

Nelson Algren did not navigate between the “white” and “black” worlds, at least not primarily. His was a navigation between the upper and lower classes, yet Norman Mailer may very well have put Algren into the White Negro category; Algren remained cool while slumming it, a common hipster rite-of-passage. The Urban Buddha makes a voyage into the beast’s belly, tries the honeyed mead, propositions the street-girl/boy-for-hire, and experiences a few other outlets the middle classes care not to admit actually exist. Interestingly, Algren’s college background and literary notoriety would gain him admittance into academia and the intellectual elite along with posh bourgeois social scenes, but he throughout his life would distrust these upper echelons, instead feeling safer more himself amid the down-and-out have-nots and related characters on the fringe with fewer resources and pedigrees. He felt the lower depths were more trustworthy and simultaneously more real and “hip.” Yet Leland subsequently asserts, “The hip traveler, like Kerouac or Robert Johnson, does not step into the road to get to the other side. He’s in it for the ride, most himself when he is in the middle.”<sup>307</sup> Indeed Algren felt most himself in the “middle” among prostitutes, backroom gambling, and petty criminals, and this “ride,” this urban carousel known as Wicker Park, helped him better understand his



identity, his life process, and especially where he had come from. *The Man with the Golden Arm* showcases this ride.

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James R. Giles in “Making Nakedness Visible: Narrative Perspective in Nelson Algren’s *The Man with the Golden Arm*,” argues that “Traditional literary naturalism privileges narrative distance, perspectives from outside and above characters, perspectives that further objectify socioeconomic victims. Nelson Algren revolutionized American literary naturalism by deliberately undercutting that privileged narrative perspective.”<sup>308</sup> Giles surmises that while “traditional” literary naturalism gives middle and upper class readers a privileged “distance” from the literature’s subject matter and characters, Algren’s *Arm* most notably succeeds in breaking down these class barriers—in making the middle class reader a “part of the audience” with his “comic absurdity”<sup>309</sup> and his “awareness of the essential humanness” of his subjects, and perhaps foremost, Giles argues, Algren succeeds in making the audience feel “guilty” for their complicit role in the characters’ suffering and misfortune. “Algren’s middle-class reader,” Giles writes, “lives in a ‘third person’ society but is still a first-person human being trapped with all the others in a facticity that leads inexorably to death.”<sup>310</sup>

In connection with Giles’s assertions, Ian Peddie in “Textual Outlaws: The Colonized Underclass in Nelson Algren’s *The Man with the Golden Arm*” views the characters of *Arm* as “islanders within a larger society,”<sup>311</sup> and uses “some of the initiatives postcolonial criticism has provided as a guide not so much to suggest that the degrees of oppression across colonial lines are simply comparable but, rather, to explore the reasons that the techniques of domination usually reserved for export can and do have

remarkable influence.”<sup>312</sup> By extension, in viewing Algren’s novel as a key catalyst for inspiration of (neo)bohemian and the gentrification of Wicker Park (in the 1980s to today), I both maintain and extend Giles’s and Peddie’s theses. Algren and his image and work (*Arm* especially) succeeded in alluring/luring middle class participants to move into the neighborhood and attempt to duplicate and resemble these texts’ authentic struggling underclass and/or artistic bohemian-hipster style and actions—the dive bars and apartments, the diners, the sympathy for the down-and-out and misfortunate. As Giles points out, Algren closes the “distance” for these readers, making them feel a part of the scene, close to the humanity—and closer to the jokes and flesh wounds and *guilt* of being middle class (or better) in a society that allows places such as Skid Row and even “stumblebums” to exist.

Relatedly, in the lens of Peddie, if we can view the post-WWII Wicker Park residents as “islanded” people who are trapped and oppressed by the system, in connection to other oppressed peoples who have been colonized, we can then view Algren’s work as a way/sphere for the “colonizer” to sympathize and connect with the “colonized” in their shared guilt and responsibility of a precarious situation. These conditions then explain, at least partially, why mostly middle class bohemian artistic-liberal/leftist types move into these types of “blighted” neighborhoods (and unwittingly start the gentrification process). The guilt is there with these middle class participants, as is the sympathy and at times the penance via intimacy/longing of/for human connection. Similar to the situation of the hippies in the 1960s in the Lower East Side, as Christopher Mele writes about, who sympathized with the plights of the working class and/or struggling ethnic groups in the neighborhoods (both to these residents’ benefits and

detriments at times), originally middle class bohemian artists felt compelled to *relate* to the then more longstanding Wicker Park residents of the 1980s (and on forward).

Algren's *Arm* helped bring these middle class readers/bohemian artist-hipsters into the gritty and fantastical fold. Furthermore, his novel highlights and speaks to many of Wicker Park's (neo)bohemian conditions. These conditions perhaps would have occurred without Algren and his novels, but notably he and *Arm* at least symbolically yawp volumes about contemporary Wicker Park Hipsterdom.

Carlo Rotella furthermore writes that "*Arm* captures the delicately balanced feel of a transitional postwar moment, as dramatic movements and people and capital began to shape the long urban crisis associated with postindustrial transformation."<sup>313</sup> He writes that "*Arm* takes place in an interim between the beginning of the end of 'the old days and the old ways' and their final passing. This interim fits neatly with the situation of midcentury industrial urbanism."<sup>314</sup> Rotella then argues that *Arm* functions as the prototypical transcript for a "city of feeling": "*Arm* takes place in an imagined place and time: a city beneath the El, lit by arc lamps and neon, gridded by the El's iron framework and criss-crossing wires; a city where it is always October, somewhere between the first chilly intimations of the year's decline and the dead of winter."<sup>315</sup> Rotella's thesis makes sense to me; I do see *Arm* as a successful representation of "interim"/ "October" conditions before (or at the beginning of) "decline" and even eventual gentrification, but I also see Algren's award-winning novel as a catalyst for "Spring time"—as a template and springboard for the resurgence and (re)flowering of the gritty as glamorous for the bohemian hipster-artists in Wicker Park, beginning in the 1980s. For, beginning in the 1980s (and perhaps ending in the early 2000s) the flowers of communal Bohemia were in

bloom in Wicker Park. I see Algren and his imagined neighborhood characters/ settings/ constructed “feelings” and their tragic plots as an appropriate inspiration/crucial forerunner for contemporary Wicker Park.

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When one reads *The Man with the Golden Arm*, it becomes easy to harbor/understand this grim distinction of an “islanded” neighborhood with glory days long gone, and perhaps less obviously one can also see/understand how this novel could inspire contemporary (neo)bohemian hipsters. A breakdown and description of Algren’s characters and key settings—the novel takes place from 1946 until 1948—are important in understanding the representation of decline of the neighborhood in mid-century along with its potential/fodder for inspiration of more modern-day participants:

**Key Characters:**

**Frankie Machine:** WWII veteran, backroom card-dealer, morphine addict, aspiring drummer.

**Fate at the end of the novel:** He hangs himself in a flophouse while being hunted by the cops for murder.

**Sparrow Saltskin:** Dogstealer, steerer of back alley poker games, petty thief.

**Fate:** He goes to jail for accomplice to murder.

**Sophie Majcinek:** Wheel chair bound due to a drunk driving accident caused by Frankie. Longs to go back to the old days and/or leave the neighborhood.

**Fate:** Is put in the mental hospital.

**Molly O:** Girlfriend of Frankie, hustler, stripper.

**Fate:** Remains a stripper.

**Drunkie John:** Abuses Molly, goes to jail, and rats out Frankie.

**Fate:** Remains an alcoholic.

**Violet:** Sparrow’s lover and wife of Stash.

**Fate:** Marries Jailer and becomes a Jehovah’s Witness.

**Stash:** Working man and husband of Violet.

**Fate:** Dies after falling out of a window trying to read a thermometer's temperature.

**Jailer:** Owner of the apartment building Frankie and many of the other characters live in.

**Fate:** Marries Violet and becomes a Jehovah's Witness.

**Antek:** Owner of the dive bar, the Tug & Maul

**Fate:** Remains the owner of the dive bar.

**Swiefka:** Leads back alley poker games. He pays off the police to allow him to do so.

**Fate:** He still runs illegal poker games.

**Nifty Louie:** Drugdealer.

**Fate:** He is strangled to death by Frankie.

**Blind Pig:** Helps run drugs for Louie.

**Fate:** After Louie, he becomes the main drug supplier in the area.

**Record Head Bednar:** Police chief. Plays the Pontius Pilate character to the Division Street damned. Is disillusioned because he has seen it all.

**Fate:** Has lost belief in himself and his role as police chief.

**Main Settings/Wicker Park:**

- Dive Bar
- Rundown Apartment
- Jail
- Division Street

As any reader can deduce, practically *all* goes wrong at the end of this dark, grim novel filled with misfortunate characters in the late 1940s Polish neighborhood of Wicker Park. Algren's novel starts off as a picaresque tale of the hero Frankie and sidekick Sparrow yet ends in gloom (i.e., Frankie hangs himself and Sparrow goes to jail, among other casualties), and so one does have to ask: What is the appeal of this world? What has inspired readers of this novel and other Algren fans to be interested in and/or move to Wicker Park over the last six decades?

For starters, this is a quintessential neighborhood novel, a Wicker Park novel—depicting its (former) streets, bars, backrooms, police line-ups, bowling alleys, strip-clubs, low-rent apartments, jails, addicts, bummers, prostitutes, bookies, paid-off boxers and cops; quacks, hustlers, strippers, dreamers, and “losers.” The opening scene of *Arm* shows the Polish-American Frankie “Machine” Majcinek, a backroom illegal poker dealer, aspiring drummer, war veteran, and morphine addict in the Wicker Park area (Milwaukee Ave. corridor) jail with his sidekick Solly “Sparrow” Saltskin, a two-bit homeless dog-stealer, peeping Tom, half “Hebe” (as he refers to himself), and all-around petty criminal who is having an affair with a married woman. On closer examination, these two offbeat characters represent two imagined sides of the “Wicker Park patron saint” Nelson Algren himself, a man who was often in debt, with gambling problems, down-and-out in a ramshackle studio apartment, with aspirations and addictions that often clashed (not to mention his hookers and married women alike as mistresses). Frankie’s sidekick Sparrow, often called a “punk” in the novel, extends this unorthodox sainthood with his refusal to tow any normative line—he sleeps on the street and in other people’s beds, and has never had a tax-paying job. Frankie’s wife, Sophie bound in a wheelchair in a rundown apartment pines for the good old days. Her nostalgia fits with the perpetually mournful resident of the neighborhood—the kind that is nostalgic for days long gone of dancing and family tradition, et al. As is the tradition of (neo)bohemia, the present is never as good as the past. We then see the other tortured characters—the people who can’t catch a break. The alcoholics and deviants who are often filled with guilt and delusions and longing for a better world or at least a little change. We feel sympathy for these characters, we feel for them, even sometimes laugh for them—and if

you are a Wicker Park hipster you perhaps felt so much for them that you decided to move into the neighborhood. This real and imagined neighborhood felt right to you.

Also, we have the objects in the novel that have taken on symbolic status in the neighborhood: the cheap drinks, the cigarettes, the “funny kind of cigarettes,” the cards and pool sticks, the craps’ dice, the jailbird’s iron bars and electric chair, goiters, bowling shoes, syringes and quarter-grain fixes; drum sticks, the drunken mutts that walk around the bar/apartment lapping up spilled beer, and Sophie’s “Scrapbook of Fatal Accidence.” But foremost we have the unfairness and the absurd jokes: about homelessness, addiction, betrayal, harsh jail time, murder, and suicide. All in our “declining” neighborhood, the *real* and *authentic* neighborhood that is readied for nostalgia and duplication and even sometimes co-optation. A look at and analysis/application of some direct quotations from the novel will hopefully clear up and enliven some of these issues/elements:

**“Do you understand, gentlemen, that all the horror is in just this—that there is no horror!”<sup>316</sup>**

I, again, begin with this opening quotation. Algren has been called the bard of the grotesque, the documenter of the forgotten man and his “horrors,” a celebrator of the downtrodden grit the artists and hipsters would come to ruminate and relish, the idea that the rough and dirty can be replicated, used for authentic and more generic/commercial purposes. Enter the dive bar that Frankie Machine lives above here, the more modern-day Wicker Park hipster’s propensity for cheap beer (“no martinis.”<sup>317</sup> No TVs.), maybe a heroin needle prick, even supercilious secondhand hats, vintage Frank Sinatra or Willie Nelson on vinyl or the jukebox, maybe cigarettes, a beat-up car or bike. Nostalgia and kitsch. Irony and sincerity. These are the tenets of the hipster, the neo-bohemian. Horror

or the horrible can sometimes be a fetish, a commodity fetish or a cultural fetish (for better or for worse), a place to hang your hat and drink in, and also a place to talk about nostalgically once it is gone as Sophie does. And, *grit* is not just the dirt granules on the wall or the camera lens. It's the characters of years' past who have lived in the dirt, celebrated the messiness, glorified the wreckage of mistakes. Characters that have inspired the modern-day players to duplicate and Photoshop the grit with at times fewer risks now, yet with some edge and danger all the same. Any hipster who has gone to rehab or has had bed bugs in his secondhand mattress will tell you that. There is no horror. That's just how it is.

**“That was the way things were because that was how things had always been. Neither God, war, nor the ward super work any deep change on West Division Street.”<sup>318</sup>**

Nothing changes on Division Street in *Arm*. The mechanism of corrupt local politicians, criminals, and police runs the show. Frankie and Sparrow know their places in this mechanism, in the institution. Yet, this idea even fantasy of timelessness is what they and the Wicker Park hipsters have come to embody, a created scene based on memory and an elusive credo, shied away from religion, military, and authority figures all around. They have lost faith in the mechanism and institution, yet the neighborhood doesn't exactly change because you can't change the usable past, which makes hipsters feel and appear more familiar, the streets and venues emotionally safer, even cozier—their stories and representations *on repeat* in their subtle rebellion against the system(s). For, on the sly, just a shadow away from the established institution(s) and authority figures, this is what the hipsters aspire: to belong on their agreed upon terms. To walk



into Phyllis' Musical Inn or the Rainbo Club (two Wicker Park hipster shrines), have people know their names, the stories behind their tattoos, what independent music concerts they will be attending, which art installations, and which indie films/novels/albums to consume or steal next. It's underworld consumption at times, maybe (sub)cultural consumption, sometimes even criminal consumption, which takes us to Frankie and Sparrow on the street, in a flop house, at a strip club, at a bowling alley, in a dive bar—and in jail together at the beginning of *Arm*. They have been locked up for bogus reasons—because their boss Zero Schwiefka was late in his payoff to the police for his running of illegal poker games—they are misunderstood, and even though they/we are dealing with a petty criminal and a morphine addict, the reader celebrates them, empathizes with them, celebrates them more than the cops and judges and suits because Frankie and Sparrow seem more real, less compromised, even authentic—low on the system's chain, yes, even as they are outside the law or norm. They appeal to the hipster's sense of bottom dwelling, of a lack of inhibitions, and a streetwise notion of justice and desire to go it alone. The creativity of a street such as Algren's Division Street merges with the fascination of the artist to make for constructed rebellion against the police and other authorities—the mainstream, the squares, the suburbs, the yuppies, the preppies—stereotypical groups that get air quoted tirelessly in the lingo of hipster neo-bohemian dualism; for, the hipster is a stereotype so long as the yuppie is. Frankie and Sparrow know this will not change, they know (on some level) their roles will not change. They know who they are—just hustlers on the wrong side of the billboard, in the backroom, above the bar, holding not one face card between the two of them. But they try.

Frankie **“never drinks. Unless he’s alone or with somebody,”**<sup>319</sup> sneaks up to get his needed dose of morphine from Nifty Louie, who lives in a room above the Club Safari. Frankie embodies the hipster in his faded and ripped army jacket, his penchant for booze from a dive-bar tap, and his steady morphine addiction—looking “heroin chic” before it became a pop-cultural fashion phrase. Frankie is an aspiring drummer, and plays his tubs at night, while talking smoke about how he is going to join a “Big Band” one day. For, it is the hipster’s style to be aloof, on the nod, a bit grungy. Hence the dress and attitude of intentional nonchalance. The hipster also talks the language: **“N the next time Zero don’t pay you off come tell Frankie Machine. That’s me—the kid with the golden arm,”** Frankie states. **“It’s all in the wrist ‘n I got the touch—dice, stud or with a cue. I even beat the tubs a little ‘cause that’s in the wrist too. Here—pick a card.”**<sup>320</sup> Frankie Machine as the prototype of the more modern-day Wicker Park hipster plays dice/craps and stud (poker), shoots pool, and plays the drums. The myth often involves the hipster, as aspiring artist or musician, in his down time playing pool in a divey bar, smoke filling up the room, smoke in his own mouth, dangling—a game of pool (maybe for money), tall tales and exaggerated stories fill the room. His drinks are many but cheap—cheap beer, well whiskey, the currency of the red-nosed older men one usually sees in such places. His talk is about what he is going to do: what kind of album his band is going to make, what he plans to inspire with his next canvas, that great American novel. The great pretenders who while re-appropriating the past, somewhat dwelling in the past, make grandiose claims for fame/fortune in the future. **“That was why, Frankie guessed, everyone from the neighborhood he knew, from the punk to himself, tried to be something different than what he was. The minute some kid with**

**an accordion began playing for pennies in the corner bars he fancied himself a musical-comedy star. . . . Nobody bred around Division Street ever turned out to be a cheap crook; they were all Dillingers or Yellow Kid Weils to hear them tell it.”<sup>321</sup>**

Yes, Frankie and Sparrow are criminals, but they are fairly harmless two-bit criminals with big creative dreams, as is the hipster way—more bark than bite usually, the appearance of criminality has become more important than the crimes themselves. Hence the carryover: sometimes the appearance of the struggling artist has become more important than the art itself. The scene needs its players, they surmise, and then hopefully the production will come. Frankie of course goes to jail a few times and is then hunted by the cops for manslaughter at the end of the novel. The hipster doesn’t necessarily think it’s that cool to actually spend time in jail, but s/he knows s/he gets credibility if s/he looks the part. These aesthetics sometimes carry over to the chances s/he takes with her art, with his lifestyle associations, and deviations from the norm—to dabble with drugs, get drunk, and create something outside of the Top 40 expectations. To defer and deviate.

**“I don’t know,’ Frankie sympathized, ‘it’s just that some cats swing like that, I guess.’**

**Whatever Frankie meant by that, Sparrow skipped it to supply his own explanation. ‘It’s ‘cause I really *like* trouble, Frankie, that’s my trouble. If it wasn’t for trouble I’d be dead of the dirty monotony around this crummy neighborhood. When you’re as ugly as I am you got to keep things movin’ so’s people don’t get the time to make fun of you. That’s how you keep from feelin’ bad.’”<sup>322</sup>**

Sparrow likes “trouble,” and reference to his ugliness points to the paragon of hipsterdom, of punk; for, beauty is in the foul, in the grotesque and odd and off, anything

that might break up the “crummy monotony.” *Arm* is as much a punk’s book as it is a book about the October City, wherein the punk embraces the season before the season of death. The hipster’s situation is one of insecurity, of having not fit in at some point in time—as part of an undesirable past—so he celebrates the alternative, what others have spit at and ignored. Sparrow gets repeatedly called a “punk” in *Arm*, and that’s what he is. The “punk”—“an inferior, rotten, or worthless person or thing”<sup>323</sup>—is the hipster’s rotten cousin, the nihilist, the hedonist who is hip because he so loudly rejects any straight notions of *cool* and right. He’s defensive because society has made him this way, has put his back against the whitewashed wall and caused him to snarl, and so lies the defensive nature of the punkish Sparrow alongside the cooler hipster that is Frankie Machine, and together they join countercultural forces to give the finger to the authorities at the Division Street jail.

**“The great, secret and special American guilt of owning nothing, nothing at all, in the one land where ownership and virtue are one. Guilt that lay crouched behind every billboard which gave each man his own commandments; for each man here had failed the billboards all down the line. No Ford in this one’s future nor ever any place all his own. Had failed before the radio commercials, by the streetcar plugs and by the standards of every self-respecting magazine.”<sup>324</sup>**

The current American Wicker Park hipster is a special case, one that has a shadow that measures itself in dollar signs, where capitalism’s gritty fangs come down on any artist/observer exchange, spitting out a producer/consumer deal that leaves artist and consumer questioning the authenticity of the deal itself. Within this exchange remains the guilt of the struggling/starving artist for not taking a more typical, safer career path—

guilt for worrying his parents, for perceivably wasting her education, and for intentionally putting herself on the fringes of society. Richard Florida can write all he wants about the Creative Class in various American industries, but the Truth is that thousands of untold artists/musicians/actors/writers still toil away with their career pursuits, often taking meager wage jobs in retail and hospitality alongside their more creatively inspired relatively profitless endeavors. For, the graphic designer might be creative, but he is not an unrestrained artist who is taking many risks—at least not in the truly bohemian way. The more earnest neo-bohemian artist waits tables and paints in her cheap loft apartment when she can. The (neo)bohemian artist, like Allen Ginsberg before him, shops at Salvation Army and frequents the dive bars Frankie Machine and Sparrow made so infamous. Yet, the guilt still remains.

For the Wicker Park bohemian hipsters the guilt is at least two fold: Guilt for not taking a more normative path but also guilt that their originally middle class route had largely taken them outside of the neighborhood of Skid Row, homelessness, addictions, and destitution. The bohemian artist then moves into the neighborhood to immerse himself in the fringe at least partially out of guilt. When Frankie first meets Sparrow in *Arm*, who is sleeping under some newspapers in an alley, Frankie out of guilt gives him money for a place to sleep. Likewise, Frankie feels guilty for not providing his wife Sophie with more security. He feels guilty for needing that hypo in his arm, for not actually making it with a big-name band. In this same vein, Captain “Record Head” Bednar, the chief of police at the Division Street jail, feels guilty for what he has to do to these misfits and misfortunates. **“Alone below the glare lamp in the abandoned query room, stifled by a ravaging guilt, [Captain Bednar] knew now those whom he had**

**denied, those beyond the wall, had all along been members of himself. Theirs had been the common humanity, the common weakness and the common failure which was all that now could offer fresh hope to his heart.**

**Yet he had betrayed them for so long he could not go to them for redemption. He was unworthy of the lowliest—and there was no court to try any captain for doing his simple duty. . . . He had been left to judge himself.”**<sup>325</sup> The guilt sits on each side of the billboard for Frankie, for Bednar, and the contemporary Wicker Park bohemian alike—for not fitting in with the straight world and for other people outside that world as well. The liberal sympathy is there, and the guilt is there for the taking and for the earnest.

Frankie’s cellmate in jail, Applejack Katz expresses his inability to fit in with the regular world: **“For two years I was off the booze,”** Applejack states, **“off the women, off the horse, off the dice. I even got engaged to get married in a church. All I done that whole time was run a freight elevator up ’n down, up ’n down. It scares me when I think of it now: I come near losin’ everything.”**<sup>326</sup> Applejack fears the typical 9-5 grind, says with his wife/church/job he came close to “losin’ everything,” and then Frankie embodies our guilt for us—for choosing his alternative. Applejack’s alternative. Frankie too knows he is not designed for that straight world, and this is not an easy realization to make. The hipster who can’t hack it feels this too, so s/he resorts and moves to a neighborhood where s/he can smell her own. The place where you can still try to make it but outside the norm. The guilt remains though, for in the end bohemianism will always carry a modicum of guilt—the kind that gets manifested in art, maybe an

addiction, a bar tap, and/or even a voyeur's glimpse of the luckless and the damned. Even guilt behind the laughter and these absurdist jokes.

**“On Skid Row even the native-born no longer felt they had been born in America. They felt they had merely emerged from the wrong side of its billboards.”<sup>327</sup>**

If the billboard is a coin then it has art on one side and commerce on the other, the starving artist on one side and misguided co-optation on the other, the Wicker Park of 1940s-1980s and the Wicker Park of the 1990s and early 2000s on dual sides, Algren's Wabansia apartment with its cold water and bathroom on one side and the high-rise condominiums that were built in its place on the other. Gentrification often (at least eventually) sounds the death knell of hip. Skid Row is there first, but the gentrification is coming. People want to help the neighborhood but they also hurt it sometimes in the process all the same. To make money off the downtrodden, the struggling and declining, and the less fortunate is to make that billboard larger, to make both sides easier to read.

**“And yet they spoke and yet they laughed; and even the most maimed wreck of them all held, like a pennant in that drifting light, some frayed remnant of laughter from unfrayed years. Like a soiled rag waved by a drunken peddler in a cheap bazaar who knows none will buy, yet waves his single soiled ware in self-mockery—these too laughed. And knew not one would buy.”<sup>328</sup>**

The starving/struggling artist hipsters would/could/can laugh despite the economic struggle because she and her friends had cultural capital, symbolic capital, because of the urban street—because of what they've seen. The celebrated characters in *Arm* can hold their liquor (at times), stay up all night playing or dealing poker with a steady hand, shoot pool straight, drive a needle in, strangle a seedy dope dealer, sweat out

the withdrawals, and come out a local hero despite the rundown gruff façade. The currency is in the experience, in the journey itself with the body odor, with the debris and residue, sweats and shakes, iron bars, and cold Chicago winter without much heat. Amid this, all you can do is laugh. Yet perhaps no one will completely buy this except for bohemian hipsters. But/and they are coming, through the cracks and through the cold, online and back stage, through the mail and on the rooftop in the flesh. Frankie and Sparrow know this, if on some level.

**“These were the luckless living soon to become the luckless dead. The ones who were fished out of river or lake, found crumpled under crumpled papers in the parks, picked up in the horse-and-wagon alleys or slugged, for half a bottle of homemade wine, in the rutted tunnels that run between the advertising agencies and the banks”<sup>329</sup>**

Not every artist-hipster makes it. Some overdose, some die some other way, some give up, sell out, “grow up,” and/or ship out. Take Frankie Machine for example. But he’s the martyr. Our martyr. The next waves of hipsters will come to make it right. Will come to live without the hangings, mostly.

**“Take my advice, buddy. Don’t die broke.”<sup>330</sup>**

These spoken words of wisdom to Sparrow while in jail no less speak to the advice of the parents and school counselors of the seemingly luckless, to quit fancifying romantically about Beauty, Truth, and Stardom, even the Easy Con—but to buy into the working man’s American Dream, a myth that often comes with a punch clock and two-week paycheck, maybe a mortgage, and a BBQ on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.



**“It all depends on the neighborhood,” Frankie told him out of his wider knowledge of the world. “You take a patrolman up there in Evanston, he’s just walkin’ around smilin’ ‘n tippin’ his cap, sayin’ how nice the lawn looks this morning, Mrs. Rugchild—he’s like a watchman is all, up there. He’s got to be polite ‘cause that means good tips, it ain’t like down here in hustlers’ territory where they got to line up guys Schwiefka by pinchin’ guys like us before they can pick up anythin’ on the side.”<sup>331</sup>**

Yes, it all depends on the neighborhood. Frankie describes the safer, nicely manicured lawns of suburban Evanston versus the dangerous uncertainty of Division Street and the Wicker Park neighborhood. Artists have not moved to the suburbs but to the life/reality they perceive as more authentic with its social and cultural diversity. Lloyd writes, “While artists have long dismissed the suburbs as sites of culture death and conformity, this view has now extended along with the bohemian ethic to affect ever-larger swaths of the populace. And the new amenity that the suburbs are said to be so sorely lacking is precisely the sort of lively, culturally diverse sidewalk life that Jacobs gleaned in Greenwich Village, America’s proto-bohemia.”<sup>332</sup> Frankie’s streets might be more dangerous and even noxious, but at least they provide the hipster a visceral reality that is so perceivably lacking in the overly sanitized suburbs. People outside the neighborhood have caught wind of this and want a piece of it, if only for one night. To go longer than one night might be pushing it. In truth, Frankie’s many nights have culminated in an existential crisis that has left him stuck in the neighborhood, feeling he has no way out, and/but that’s also the appeal.

The neighborhood in the '80s and '90s was appealing because of its cheap rent, proximity to a city hub, but also because the Wicker Park neighborhood carried/carries an enclosed and confined mythos of danger/blight/edge, which for the artist translates into vulnerability, uncertainty, a primal need with one's back against the wall to *create* against a life deadline. The middle class suburban kid moves to a Wicker Park pre-2000s urban enclave to feel like she is in a moment of danger that requires the utmost creative outlet and resolution. This artist in the U.S. seemingly is a person of extremes, or so goes the myth. He either goes to Provincetown, lives on a stipend, in a cushy apartment on Cape Cod with its natural beauty and not a care in the world, or she moves to the slums/ghettoes/undesirable nooks with their junkies, prostitutes, criminals, dilapidation, blight—i.e. endless material for replication, duplication, imitation, creation. Jesus-types heal the poor, which brings us back to Algren.

Algren as a middle class white male who slumped it in the Polish ghetto represents the legions of educated young kids and artists who moved from their parents' suburban basements and cozy dorm rooms to post-industrial buildings in a crime-ridden neighborhood. The *experience* was sought after, the experience and fantasies of Frankie Machine, Sparrow, and this cast of derelicts in the smoky, cheap, Antek's Tug & Maul Bar, that egalitarian place where people stop, a "third place"<sup>333</sup> on the way before or after work, the studio, or the cold-water flat. The experience/fantasy of playing drums during a cold late forgotten Wicker Park night—of getting dealt to by a man named Bird Dog. Of thinking about shrapnel in the liver for keeps, using a neck tie as a tie-off, seeking out a quack doctor and/or a shady lawyer; entertaining prayers under the El—hobo gamblers, Fix Time, flop hotels, and shooting craps in the yard. This is Algren's imagined

neighborhood, the real neighborhood for inspiration and revision. The chance to get it right in the land of wrong.

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Yes, artists/hipsters have continued to move into the Near North Side Milwaukee Avenue corridor because they have become captivated with the grunge/grit/grime/blight image and aura of the neighborhood as depicted by the images and writings of Algren. The old Bohemia-storied irony here, however, is that many of these contemporary participants did not come from poor families, and they did not aspire to get addicted to drugs or partake in criminal activities. Tellingly though these artists/hipsters worked very hard to maintain the appearance of being poor, beatdown, street hardened, and on drugs. Unlike the characters of *Arm*, many of the more recent residents of Wicker Park had the option and privilege of upward social and financial mobility if they wanted them. This is backed by 2010 U.S. Census Bureau data of the artists and residents of the neighborhood.<sup>334</sup> The number of college educated in Wicker Park proves relatively extremely high, and many of the residents have migrated from the more affluent suburbs and surrounding areas. They have chosen to become and live lives as artists, and subsequently they have decided to be poor and look down-and-out. This trend is a common one in our current popular culture, and it clearly coincides with the postmodern, neo-bohemian simulacra of the downtrodden as depicted by Nelson Algren. For, as it stands now, Wicker Park serves as a type of Disneyland for the gritty, beat industrial neighborhood.

One can see while walking past the dive bars, grunge-y music venues, and thrift stores that grit has been in fact been turned into glamour. The look of a heroin addict has

been turned into chic, and websites/internet games such as *Hipster or Homeless?* have become commonplace. The middle and upper class fascination with the poor or the slum has found a pervasive niche in the American popular consciousness, and the story/games is as old as Bohemia. Henry Murger's 1848 *Scenes de la vie de boheme* (*Scenes from the Bohemian Life*) first showed the penniless vagabond artists who live in Paris slums although they come from middle class and upper class families. These artists, from 19<sup>th</sup>-century Paris to current day Chicago have *chosen* poverty for their art, and this myth of the artist has perpetually combined with the myth of a neighborhood to produce the various historical avant-garde bohemian and culturally artistic scenes—scenes that eventually, with artistic production, become locales for investment, commerce, and consumption. Alvin, a writer and artist who has lived in Wicker Park for over twenty years states: "I have seen many kids over the years move here. Some are artists. Many others just pretend they are."<sup>335</sup> Bohemia as the narrative has historically unfolded is a revolving door of dual-class (the old love-hate of the proletariat/bourgeoisie) fascination and representation, and the story of Wicker Park serves as a brilliant symbol of this rotation. *The Man with the Golden Arm* has done a great job of keeping this mechanism in motion, hence celebrations such as the Algren Birthday Party. On closer examination of *Arm*, one sees the implied nuances of the hipster fascination with the gritty. The appearance or aesthetic of grit somehow feels more real or truthful. I refer back to my original categories of Bohemia as a blueprint for an analysis of *Arm*:

Some repeated tenets of bohemia include the following:

- ART (art), the artist and artistic, and an interest in and patron of the creative arts (writing, music, visual art, theatre, etc., and any variation thereof)
- Illegal drug and excessive alcohol usage

- Counter cultural, nonconformist, rogue, unconventional, weird, outside of society or the mainstream
- Independent, anarchic, revolutionary
- Acceptance of diversity and diverse viewpoints. Ideological openness. “Progressive” values
- Someone who “marches to the beat of a different drum”
- Someone who distrusts the government and corporations and doesn’t care (relatively) about money. Antiestablishment
- Questions societal norms of all types (from marriage to hygiene)
- Gritty appearance. Downtrodden. Secondhand. Grungy. Edgy
- [Any/all hybrids or offshoots of the above may apply]<sup>336</sup>

The main characters and settings of *The Man with the Golden Arm* check off most of the tenets on this Bohemia/Hipster list. Going deeper and deeper into Algren’s 335-page novel, the reader gets introduced to morphine addiction, illegal gambling, hustling, shoplifting, prostitution, the luckless, the damned, the urban streetwise, fringe characters, aspiring artists (Frankie wants to be a drummer foremost), and a kaleidoscope of other gritty colors that carry the narrative. *Arm* presents a romantic world for the aspiring hipster to temporarily participate in and then duplicate himself/herself in a perhaps safer more watered-down fashion. Self-proclaimed rebels and outsiders (they would never call themselves *hipsters*) have found a home, an entire neighborhood in fact, yet this time there are fewer prostitutes and criminals now. Only more art exhibits, tattoos, ripped clothing, hybrid cars, piercings, and the like.

Yet, what’s perhaps most striking about Algren’s novel is that he depicts this grit and decline with a (painful) sense of humor, with a wink that we—and the middle class reader and/or Wicker Park hipster—are in on the con. He constructed this world, and we buy it. We believe it actually exists and can be (re)appropriated and duplicated, if only somewhat (in reality). Algren has been called the last of the naturalist writers, but I see *Arm* as the work of a neo-naturalist—because of the absurd humor. We laugh with him.

We also sympathize with him and his characters as we find our own drums to march to and golden arms of our own. The neighborhood is ripe for our own con, our own myth-making. Humor is only one type of coping mechanism, for actually there's nothing that real about Algren's tone and plot in this novel. It just feels real enough. The jokes cut to the bone just enough for us to understand and want a piece. As a supreme joke and a con and a key, it works just well enough to allow us in to our own imagined worlds in the neighborhood.

## CHAPTER 8: VIDEO KILLS THE HIPSTER STAR

Gentrification of contemporary Wicker Park has caused a substantial amount of backlash and criticism. A fairly recent *Chicago Reader* article “cataloguing growing anti-gentrification sentiment, titled ‘The Panic in Wicker Park,’ makes clear that most” of this “panic” had to do with hipsters/bohemians believing their neighborhood was starting to lose its “edge” as a result of gentrification. “For to be on ‘the edge,’ with all the valences that attach to this term, is crucial to neo-bohemian identification,” Richard Lloyd writes. “This space of the edge is narrow, resists crowds, and entails a precarious balancing act. To slip too far to one side or the other is to lose it. Through identification with the gritty neighborhood, participants reassure themselves of their legitimate claim to edginess, though the neighborhood itself also teeters uneasily on the verge. Historically emergent themes of bohemia inflect the experience of the local street, in which a range of normative associations take shape: hipness, intensity, diversity, authenticity.”<sup>337</sup>

As Lloyd explains, even as Wicker Park “became more popular and more expensive [especially after 2000], the local aesthetic continued to display the image of grit as glamour.”<sup>338</sup> As it goes, “such yearnings were in fact a significant part of what drew artists . . . to the neighborhood in the first place, when it was depopulated and crime-ridden, providing a set of conceptual associations that allowed the gritty district to be interpreted in terms of the bohemian fantasy.” These images/fantasies have a wide

allure, “however, and the 1990s brought not only a deluge of artistic aspirants, but also increasing numbers of white professionals hot to get in on the cachet of the hipster neighborhood, especially after the first wave had, perhaps unintentionally, helped to pacify its wilder elements. . . . Typically, local artists in the 1990s took Wicker Park’s cachet to confirm the value of their subcultural capital at the same time that they complained it was ruining the neighborhood.”<sup>339</sup>

Distinguishing census information in 1990 and 2000, “we can see a staggering increase in median rents, median home values, and median household incomes”<sup>340</sup> This “necessary compromise involves young artists being pushed to surrounding neighborhoods . . . that resemble Wicker Park in their composition. [Yet these] artists continue to avail themselves of the Wicker Park bars, coffee shops, and display venues that have a firmer hold in the neighborhood.” Hence the neighborhood “remains a central organizing space for new bohemian activity in Chicago even as many artists can no longer afford to live there. . . . The new residents filling more upscale rehabs and condominium developments are the easily spotted culprits in neighborhood change and are blamed by artists for ruining ‘their’ scene.”<sup>341</sup>

Nevertheless, even with increasing rents and white young professional residents, Wicker Park businesses “are often decorated by murals or hanging pieces created by local visual artists. Interiors are typically kept deliberately unpolished and are decorated with retro furnishings like old couches and lamps. Usually, they are dimly lit, with lighting strategically deployed to produce the shadowy, chiaroscuro effects associated with film noir. Moreover, the connection to the arts community in these bars is displayed through



the personae of the bartenders and wait staff, which disproportionately consists of young cultural producers and aspirants.”<sup>342</sup>

Albeit Lloyd explains that as the 2000s roared on, residents and Wicker Park participants lamented that “this neighborhood balance is fragile, and potentially vulnerable to the homogenizing tendencies of gentrification . . . distressed [for example] by the recent opening of Starbucks” in the main center of the neighborhood. These “fears echo those of critics who see the [neighborhood] being transformed into a theme park by soulless capitalist interests who undermine place identity with generic consumption offerings, of which Starbucks is only the most familiar example. As rents increase, it becomes harder to sustain nonprofit organizations like the Guild Complex or venues such as independent art galleries with cultural attractions that are more esoteric.”<sup>343</sup>

Lloyd himself recounts his “almost unbearable nostalgia” upon his return to contemporary Wicker Park for the “old days.” He mentions key signals of bohemia’s ultimate demise in the neighborhood: the “enhanced corporate sponsorship of ‘Around the Coyote,’ the closing of Urbus Orbis (or the Busy Bee, or the Hothouse, or Mad Bar, or whatever), the opening of Starbucks, the arrival of MTV.”<sup>344</sup>

While walking around Wicker Park now myself, I also notice that Starbucks, along with the generic Burger King, Urban Outfitters, Bank of America, CVS, American Apparel, even the Native Foods Café, et al—all corporate chains that have caused greater homogenization and contributed to decreased authenticity of/for the neighborhood. Immersed in a delicate balancing act, Wicker Park seems to have lost its edge. As I stroll, I also witness the expensive boutique retail shops and high-end restaurants alongside local businesses that capitalize on Wicker Park’s reputation as an artists’ zone. There are

local tattoo parlors, bong shops, dive bars, vintage stores, used book shops, and independent music venues. There's a self-consciousness that exists with these places though now, as their owners and patrons more than realize and understand their precarious positions among the gentrified neighborhood. For, there's a "battle" now in the neighborhood among young professionals and hipsters, and the range of businesses in the neighborhood also conveys the clash of sensibilities. I ask an employee of a commercial bookstore in Wicker Park if they have any of Nelson Algren's novels, and she says, "No," replying: "It's not like he's coming out with anything new. It might be different if you go to a used bookstore." Aspects of the old neighborhood image and order, in my mind, are dying, but I keep walking. On one music venue's marquee is a notice that the band *Kate Moss and Smiley Tillman* is playing on Saturday night. I take a mental note of the band named after Kate Moss, the fashion supermodel who brought the term *heroin chic* into the global consciousness. At the corporate chain Native Foods Café, "America's premiere fast-casual vegan restaurant," I notice the array of beards, flannel shirts, North Face jackets, and young parents with babies in their own North Face jackets in their strollers. Even though Wicker Park is too expensive for struggling artists to afford to live in, in the backroom of Native Foods is a sign that says: "Starving Artist Gallery." Under one of the paintings, the artist Jessica has posted her "manifesto," which in part states: "I moved from the town of Grand Rapids, Michigan, to the big city of Chicago." I notice that Jessica does not mention she lives in Wicker Park. As I'm leaving the café, I overhear: "I decided to have a trivial tattoo day."

I walk down Milwaukee Avenue, past Buffalo Exchange (a corporate vintage clothing store) and some local vintage stores to a dive bar called the Beachwood Inn. The

Beachwood, a bar that has been suggested to me as a “bohemian spot” by a local, contains a combination of a cash-only bar, paper dragons and multi-colored eagles hanging from the ceiling, a buck’s head on the wall adjacent to framed photographs of Albert Einstein, Frank Sinatra and the pop icon Madonna; along with posters for *The Planet of the Apes* and Jimmie Hendrix, a retro Miller Lite mirror, a lit-up Old Style lamp, old school “Go Bears” pennant, TVs playing Chicago sports—a relatively old jukebox with CDs (a Nirvana song currently playing), a pool table in back surrounded by Chicago sports’ pennants, a shelf of board-games. A mixed crowd, old and young, one guy with spiky hair and tattoos talking to an older man in a suit about the film *High Fidelity*. Used t-shirts, Buddy Holly glasses. CNN on a TV in the corner above a broken wooden telephone booth. This kitschy place could be your Chicago grandpa’s basement, a high/low affair. A man with an Atari Space Invaders t-shirt. A middle-aged man plays a song by the Cramps on the jukebox. The guy with the Atari t-shirt mentions the “capital industrial complex.” A Ramones song starts playing. I look to Einstein’s sad eyes and contemplate the pastiche and blend of this place, while thinking: Where are the artists?

I walk, then enter the Jackson Junge Gallery for an opening reception. “Free liquor,” the man at the door says. I first look at an oil painting of a dog’s face: “Aerial Alice #1.” \$2200. A mixed media piece of dollar bills and mega million lotto tickets, called “Idolatry” goes for \$2400. A photograph of what looks like an Indiana cornfield is billed at \$845. A painting depicting the “River North El Train,” \$1550.

I keep walking past a Polish restaurant and a BBQ joint and a couple coffee shops into Phyllis’s Musical Inn (the bar where Nelson Algren used to come to regularly), across the street from an upscale sushi restaurant. A Grateful Dead cover band is about to

take the stage. MTV is playing on one of the televisions above the bar. A hipster-looking guy with horn-rimmed glasses, skinny jeans, and an ironic t-shirt loudly remarks: “I think we should get Peruvian tattoos when we are in Peru. And then I want to go pick Malbec grapes.”

I sigh.

After walking around the neighborhood by myself a while longer, it occurs to me that Wicker Park is in a bit of an identity crisis—its seemingly bohemian glory days long passed. Tired and a bit jaded, I return to the Wicker Park hostel I am sleeping in. On a chalkboard in the main foyer, I notice the written message: “Art is a lie. Nothing is real.” In my hostel bunk bed, before falling asleep, I feel like Oedipa Maas in Pynchon’s novella *The Crying of Lot 49*—a character who is on a never-ending bizarre search yet who thinks she has found interconnected clues at every turn. Clues that may or may not come together to make logical sense. I fall asleep dreaming of neo-bohemia and my (dis)connected fantasies that are making me crazy.

The next day, slightly revived with coffee, I stop in at a used bookstore in the middle of Wicker Park. There’s a section in this store dedicated to Nelson Algren. “We don’t hold on to him for long,” an employee of the store explains to me. “There’s a new biography about him coming out, so we’re going to get more of his books.” For a brief moment, I am feeling better because of this interest in Algren in the neighborhood. However, as I leave the local bookstore, I see that Burger King again, and I think about what Wicker Park means to people now. I think about the *Wicker Park Seafood and Sushi Bar* at the Chicago O’Hare Airport—a restaurant that bills itself as a dining establishment that “will provide travelers with healthy and innovative international food choices that

reflect our City's multi-cultural population."<sup>345</sup> I think about MTV on the television at Algren's former dive bar. About the parking lot in the place of his old apartment, and I think that the dream is dead. The fantasy has stopped. Or at least it has moved to a different zip code.

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On the last plot point of this arc, in the context of overly gentrified Wicker Park's increasing loss of bohemianism and designation as a place that no longer primarily caters to struggling artists, I now look to Otto Preminger's *The Man with the Golden Arm* as what I consider the first actual *sell-out* of Algren's bohemian vision. Preminger's film adaptation, as a symbol and metaphor for what has happened in/to the neighborhood as of late, represents and speaks to the current climate of commercialization/co-optation and the disintegration of the bohemian-artistic even hipster ideal.

Preminger's 1955 film adaptation of *Arm* starring Frank Sinatra as Frankie Machine opens with Sinatra-as-Machine getting off a bus onto the street of his familiar neighborhood. Chicago is not mentioned. Wicker Park is nowhere to be found. Frankie Machine (the Polish last name of Majcinek has tellingly been dropped for the film) looks healthy and clean-cut in coat and tie. He says, "I kicked it," indicating he is off the junk. Gone are his dirty and ripped army fatigues in the novel along with the ruffled hair and downtrodden looks. Vanished is the novel's opening wherein Frankie and Sparrow are in jail. Rather, we see a renewed Frankie Machine in his nameless neighborhood. The streets are clean and well-lit, the sky is clear, and there's nothing rough-looking or dangerous about it. The edge is gone. The grit is gone. Skid Row has disappeared; we do not see any trash fires nor worn mattresses amid the debris and wreckage. There are no

cockroaches, no goiters, no broken bottles, no men riding rickety bicycles down alleyways with bars over the windows. Preminger's neighborhood looks upscale, perfectly set up for his star Frank Sinatra to safely dabble in onscreen addiction. Life is cushy, and we are primed for a happy ending.

As the film goes on, Frankie Machine goes on and off the junk until he is finally able to beat the "40-pound monkey on his back" at the end of the film. Notably, for dramatic cinematic effect, the novel's drug of choice, morphine, has been changed to heroin. And, Algren's 35-pound monkey has gained some weight; five pounds to be exact. Even though this was one of the first representations of drug addiction on the big screen and was touted by a few critics as cutting-edge subject matter for its time, Algren hated this adaptation and considered it watered down and too safe and a reflection of Hollywood's need to commercialize—sacrificing his novel's hard truths and grim urban realities of addiction and struggle. I assume a raw depiction of Algren's novel would not have been nearly as profitable, for Preminger's film adaptation of *Arm* coincides with many over-the-top Classic Hollywood-period films of the 1950s—a time when production companies were losing viewers to television and were (over)compensating with sensationalist spectator films. Algren's gritty realism though, in his mind, had been compromised.

*Algren*: I mean this guy [Preminger]—I think he's the most ridiculous man I ever saw. I said I thought *he* was kidding. "But," I said, "I don't take *him* seriously and I *can't* do that [write a script like Preminger wanted]. If I took *him* seriously," I said "then I couldn't take *myself* seriously."<sup>346</sup>

*Algren*: I wasn't deeply disturbed, but I didn't like it [Preminger's film version of *The Man with the Golden Arm*]. I thought it was sort of comical. It had nothing to do with drug addiction. I thought it was cheap. . . . [But] I liked the music. Sinatra looked dramatic. I was sorry that it was a Chicago story that had nothing to do with Chicago. . . . The book very specifically took place at a certain time, at a certain locale, and the movie took place nowhere. It was unframed, it was very murky, and there were just plain idiotic things in it. About ten guys crowding over a poker table as though it were championship chess, following the movies. And the girl, Kim Novak, collecting, picking up all the sharp instruments, all the knives, all the houseware, because he might start stabbing people. You know, real nutty.<sup>347</sup>

*Algren*: There's just one thing: Get the Dough into the Bank. That's what I mean when I said that the whole thing was done out of contempt for the book and the people in it. There's no respect for the book or the people in it. It's just a chance to make a fast buck. That's what I felt about the movie.<sup>348</sup>

In order to “get the dough into the bank,” in Algren's view, Hollywood had sold out the novel and the neighborhood here as early as 1955, and this co-optation/corporatization would eventually reach fruition with Starbucks, Burger King, MTV's *The Real World* house, the Wicker Park Seafood & Sushi Bar at the O'Hare Airport, alongside other indicators. It is safe to assume Algren would have been as furious with the more recent depictions of his neighborhood as he was in 1955. This was/is not the neighborhood he

had in mind—the authentic hardnosed, no-nonsense urban enclave that created criminals and prostitutes with hearts of gold that he touted so much in his novels and through Art Shay's photographs. Unlike the beginning of the novel, wherein Frankie and Sparrow are in jail for falsified reasons, Frank Sinatra as Frankie Machine has recently just gotten out of jail and rehab, has sworn off heroin and backroom card dealing, and with his hours of practice on the drums during prison/rehab is now vying for an audition with a big band and the fastest way to *leave* the neighborhood. This Preminger adaptation embraces the star power of Frank Sinatra as a famous musician who plays a struggling musician in a generic neighborhood of an unnamed city. This added attention to a star-turned-struggling-musician reduces Algren's emphasis of Wicker Park/Polish Downtown as a character and setting, for now the dive bars and streets of Algren's Division Street neighborhood resemble a well-kept Hollywood set that could ostensibly be any middle class neighborhood in any U.S. city.

The distinguishable urban reality has been cleaned up and compromised, and the primary focus on Frankie's legit drum career takes away from his more derelict dealings with petty criminals and other outcast characters. Though Preminger was praised for his novel treatment of addiction on screen, the wholesome Sinatra illuminates the terrors of heroin addiction and criminality without any of Algren's intended complications: that addiction is interwoven with domestic guilt, guilt about the war, and a dissonance about being on the wrong side of America's billboards. Algren's Frankie uses morphine to escape his trauma of the war and his foster parents and his unlucky lot in life. Sinatra's Machine, as a cool-guy civilian (he is not a military veteran in the film) just seems to be



slumming it for a while before heading off to the suburbs and the 1950s heteronormative good life.

One look at Antek's Tug & Maul bar in Preminger's adaptation shows a cartoonish cast of unbelievable characters who watch baseball on the bar television, when in actuality Algren's Antek's bar did not have a television, which speaks to the added wealth of Preminger's constructed environment. Algren describes his barroom characters with less gloss and refinement: "There were only boys with bad teeth, wives with faces still dented from last night's blows and girls whose hair was set so stiffly it looked metallic. There were only drooling lushbums with faces like emptied goboons. There was only a long line of faces that had passed straight from the noseless embryo into the running nose of senility."<sup>349</sup> In the film, we do not see bad teeth, senility, nor battered wives nor lushbums nor any of the beatdown characters of the novel. We do not see one misplaced hair. Frankie's apartment is tidy, new, and clean, and so is his favorite bar. These places look *nice*. In the film, Nifty Louie, Frankie's drug supplier, wears top dollar suits and speaks in formal English, implying a higher class. In fact, many of the characters miss the Chicago urban slang that Algren was known for, the characters instead using stilted language perhaps better suited for a stodgy stage. Even the cinematic version of the punk Sparrow character seems poised more for hokey laughs than the complex absurdist sometimes even hilarious anguish that Algren accompanied with his tragic/comic character. If Algren's novel resembles *On the Road* or *Pull my Daisy* in its perceived gritty authenticity then Preminger's film looks more like *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, the early 1960s American TV sitcom that featured Bob Denver (Gilligan from *Gilligan's Island* no less) as television's first goofy beatnik. Preminger's second-

rate depiction of Frankie Machine and Wicker Park coincides with the familiar story of the media (or culture industry if you want to get paranoid) co-opting the bohemian character and turning him/her into a clichéd buffoon. Conversely, one can imagine a film version of *Arm* that resembles a Martin Scorsese-type *Mean Streets* (1973) or *Taxi Driver* (1976), but perhaps this is asking too much of Preminger working in the 1950s. He took the gamble of depicting the then taboo subject of heroin addiction on the big screen, and thus as a resulting compromise his other cinematic depictions (namely *Wicker Park*) became watered down (or even unrecognizable). Perhaps this is the difference between the Classic Hollywood and New Hollywood visions. As Kurt Vonnegut once claimed, Algren “broke new ground (in American literature) by depicting persons said to be dehumanized by poverty and ignorance and injustice as being *genuinely* dehumanized, and dehumanized quite *permanently*.”<sup>350</sup> Perhaps 1950s Hollywood wasn’t ready for such a radical stance.

Many differences occur between the novel and film, which is typical of an adaptation, but what’s most telling is that Preminger’s *Arm* has taken the imperfect hipster bohemian out of Algren’s novel and replaced him with a struggling musician who achieves a normative happy ending, which is related to why Preminger’s *Arm* has repeatedly been used as a safely digestible film for high school kids as a caveat against drug usage. The film proves that if you kick the stuff and keep your nose clean then you can have a nice life:

*When I was in high school in the 1980s, they showed us this film as a warning against the evils of drugs.*

If one looks to the comments after Preminger's *Arm* on youtube, that common (pop) cultural internet video site, this is what one will find, commentary on the usage of the film's anti-drug message. Frankie does not hang himself with chicken wire at a flophouse in the film as he does in the novel. His wife, Sophie, faking being in a wheelchair most of the film, gets outed at the end and jumps to her death, leaving the somehow justified and clean Frankie's/Sinatra's reputation intact as he walks down the street with his new girl, the younger and more beautiful Molly (played by Kim Novak) on his arm, off presumably to a new life with fewer deceptions and complications. The Hollywood ending sends the message that Frankie needs to get out of the neighborhood in order to live a more respectable, square lifestyle. The trope of his wanting to make it as an artist speaks to the hipster narrative, but his wanting to flee the grit and criminality does not, for the more genuine bohemian hipster meshes her art with these edges. She derives inspiration from this grit, she does not perceive the grime as a hindrance as Sinatra's Frankie does.

The neo-bohemian viewer may watch Preminger's *Arm* and appreciate the jazz music and applaud vintage Sinatra in 1955, but he will awkwardly laugh at the square anti-drug and pro-suburban '50s lifestyle messages of the film alongside the hokey aesthetic that does not resemble an edgy urban neighborhood. In one telling scene, Frankie exits the Musicians Union Building, having received his union membership on the legit, to walk arm-in-arm with Molly past store windows. In this sequence Frankie points to a Chrysler convertible in a store window and remarks to Molly that maybe he could buy her one of those "in green," and then points to the next storefront and remarks maybe he could buy her a color television. Frankie and Molly stop in front of the

subsequent storefront window, which contains a model of a modern '50s kitchen with refrigerator and stove and space to cook and eat. A mannequin of a dutiful aproned wife stands in front of a sink, and a mannequin of a suited husband sits at the kitchen table reading a magazine. After Molly remarks, "Pretty, huh? . . . He must make a nice dollar. Look at the way he dresses her, and a kitchen like that," Frankie and Molly reenact the scene, improvising the dialogue between the husband and wife in their new modern kitchen.

*Frankie:* How have you been? How did it go today? What's for supper?

*Molly:* Steak. Steak's for supper, and everything went fine today.

*Frankie:* Steak, good. Now, how about you and me stepping out tonight after we eat?

*Molly:* Why don't we just stay home, turn on some music?

*Frankie:* Yeah, I like that better (He leans in and kisses her.).

In this scene, which is definitely *not* in the novel, Frankie and Molly enact a fantasy of domestic bliss between husband and wife in a perfect suburban home with steak, color television, and music on the radio. This fantasy shows how badly Frankie and Molly seek to get out of the neighborhood, the complete inverse of the hipster migration to Wicker Park a few decades later. The hipster bohemian of today rejects the 1950s influence and seeks out and thrives on something alternative, something else for inspiration. Frankie here, having officially received his stamp of musicianship from the union, hopes that drumming will provide his ticket out of the neighborhood and into the suburbs and square world—a modern hipster's death wish. The true hipster, as the romance goes, lives life in

the moment, in the now, and hasn't bought into the 9-to-5 game, as Algren writes of the criminals behind bars in *Arm*:

But [Frankie had] gotten to know some of the boys who were neither trying to be good soldiers, like himself, nor bad ones like those upstairs.

These were the ones who just wouldn't work. Yardbirds who couldn't quite be trusted in a bakery or laundry. They never disobeyed an order directly nor made trouble nor talked back. But time off for good conduct means little to men with no place to go and nothing in particular to do when they get there. They were men and youths who had never picked up any sort of craft—though most of them could learn anything requiring a mechanical turn with ease. It wasn't so much lack of aptitude as it was simply the feeling that no work had any point to it. . . . They neither worried about the future, regretted the past nor felt concern for the present.<sup>351</sup>

The characters of the film *Arm* convey none of this existential dissonance for work nor distrust in fitting in to a system or institution that is stacked against them; for, to *not* work (in the film) would be sacrilegious to the dream of class mobility and a financially better life. Sinatra-as-Machine remains hopeful and readied for a functional and prosperous life wherein all is fair. He magically positions himself on the right side of the billboard.

Yet, Preminger's *Arm* does *not* merely have to be read or decoded as solely an anti-drug film or as a testament of the square American Dream for upward social and financial mobility. Even if a studio has an agenda for a film (or a publishing company for

a book), they cannot completely control how varying audience members will respond, and this relates to bohemian creators and consumers; for, Bohemia, at its strongest and most relevant, is a Bottom-Up enterprise and not a Top-Down one. One looks to an oppositional reading of Preminger's *The Man With the Golden Arm*, and to the mentioned viewer's response: "When I was in high school in the 1980s, they showed us this film as a warning against the evils of drugs." But/and, I look to the last sentence of this viewer's response: "All it did for me was make me more interested in jazz." *Arm* was intended as a social problem film, but not all viewers were persuaded against drug usage. After all, the vintage Sinatra as Frankie Machine fairly easily kicks his habit and leaves the neighborhood with a beautiful blonde woman on his arm, giving new meaning to "golden arm," so how terrible can heroin usage and addiction actually be? Films such as *Trainspotting* (1995) and television shows such as *Breaking Bad* also glorify usage of drugs and their accompanying addictions, but alongside these depictions comes an element of cool and hip, of outsider criminals and junkies that are somehow in the know. So, one can only assume that Sinatra and *Arm* serve a similar effect, that on some level, if only unconscious, the film presents heroin usage as cool, as forbidden yet hip fruit for its younger viewers. Alongside this, as the above commentator indicates, is the element of jazz, which adds a double hipness to the drug motif, for jazz after all certainly does not have a drug-less past. The modern-day hipster may not appreciate this film for its square social message to stop using drugs and find a legitimate way to leave the neighborhood, but she might celebrate the music, Sinatra shaking with withdrawal pains, and/or (unintended) campiness and clownishness of the film's laughable characters.

In perhaps the most well-known scene of the film, Frankie (Sinatra) has been locked in Molly's room to kick his habit once and for all. He shakily drinks water out of a pot, tries to tie his arm off with a string, breaks the bed, throws a chair against the door, puts a towel on his head, and then collapses onto the bed shaking with cold. He falls to the ground, still shaking, before opening the window to jump out of it before Molly comes in and saves him. Remarkably, Frankie is off the junk and seemingly cured a few days later, giving the audience notice that heroin addiction can be beaten in a few days in a locked apartment. Algren despised this scene, "the way [Sinatra] kicked heroin as if it were a summer cold."<sup>352</sup> The audience sees Sinatra in an unbelievably dramatic role, in an angst-filled almost punk rock fashion, leaving them perhaps not so much appalled by the horrors of heroin, but more impressed with Sinatra's exaggerated acting chops and uber-rebellious gusto. The broken bed, the chair thrown against the door in anguish, the cold shakes—all nice acting touches that display Sinatra's range and arguably detract from the complexities of addiction. A teacher who shows this clip as an anti-drug message may not agree with this take, but certainly her teenage hipster students may take an oppositional approach, perceiving the vintage Sinatra as surprisingly punk or hip, or post-hip due to the normally tough guy's vulnerability on screen, his dire moment that needs the savior of a beautiful nurturing woman. This is the *only* way I can find redemption and credibility in this film.

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Film adaptation studies, including the common bridge from literature to film, consists of an area of scholarship that has been present since at least George Bluestone's *Novels into Film* (1957).<sup>353</sup> For my purposes, I am not primarily interested in how

filmmakers have gotten selected pieces of literature “right” but rather in the “quality” of bohemian neighborhood representations as depicted by novels and films of the same names.

For, what remains hip about Algren’s depicted Wicker Park neighborhood is multifaceted, a cool onion that can be peeled away. Frankie as a main character chooses the hipster myth of reinvention, turning himself from a working-class war veteran to a backroom card dealer of the underworld, who uses junk to seem cool on the nod, a drummer who practices late night in a cheap apartment. Frankie’s appearance of nonchalance—“some cats just swing that way”—that typical mask worn in the hip neighborhood, resembles the usual posturing of hipsterdom, as Leland writes, “this affectation is an attempt to stretch masculinity into the world of urban leisure”<sup>354</sup>—and all of this in a “displacement of [masculine] rage.”<sup>355</sup> *Arm*’s plot and characters are not too far off from the noir film or the pulp novel with the steely private investigator-type as anti-hero who hides his emotions behind a cool mask. The bars of Algren’s *Arm* will always have stools for such stoic characters, played by Frank Sinatra or not. Wicker Park as depicted by Algren poses as a place for perceived nonconformity, as a place for creative bop and drug usage, a locale for the Yardbird Parkers and Chet Bakers, the mixture of talent, glitz, and addiction, a nanosecond (at least) ahead of the mass media and culture. And, Wicker Park of the 1940s and 1950s/even 1980s and ‘90s held a place for the trickster—for punk rock-sounding names (and people) such as Frankie, Sparrow, Blind Pig, Nifty Louie, and of course Algren himself. As Leland writes, “Tricksters are hip’s animating agents: the con men and hustlers, the fools and rascals, whom the culture



invents to undermine its own rules. They work the gray areas between moral certainties, pulling the nation along in their wake.”<sup>356</sup>

The rules are expected to be broken in this world, whether the rules of fashion, music, chosen vices, or marriage. Algren’s *Frankie Machine* marches to the beat of the drummer that is himself, as a proto-hipster of vintage Wicker Park, as an original outsider on the inside who opens channels for exchange. “In the criminal underworld, which is one trickster realm, there are overlords and underlings, kingpins and masterminds, but only the confidence man is an artist. The con artist is a trickster who blurs the categories of villain and victim, crime and commerce . . . Where most criminals try to leave no evidence, the con artist builds a monument to his creativity and wit. The better the story he leaves, the better the con.”<sup>357</sup>

In this case, *Arm* as Algren’s story for Wicker Park works effectively as a con, as a hard but effective sell that the neighborhood holds merit, that its luckless should be celebrated, that artists/hipsters of like mind and soul should also move there, and thus Nelson Algren as Wicker Park hipster patron saint was christened. Similar to bop musicians and beat writers of around the same time, Algren taunted middle class white America, luring and tricking them into an alternative worldview. Leland writes, “To the extent that laws exist to hold a society produces its outlaws for the same reason it produces hip: to foment noise and conflict, the engines of evolution. . . . Yesterday’s crime has consistently proven to be tomorrow’s recreation. In between it is hip.”<sup>358</sup> The Wicker Park outlaws of Algren’s *Arm* inspired 1980s/1990s Wicker Park hipsters. The hipster slang, the mannerisms, the attire, the music, the art, all derive from this notion of the outlaw or criminal; for, in a nation culturally founded on the mythos of rebels and

vagabonds, a place such as Wicker Park (in its [neo]bohemian heyday) serves as their training ground, rest stop, and spring board.

The hipster as a vicarious form of outlaw moves forward, evolves, and then eventually in the form of say Otto Preminger's *The Man with the Golden Arm* begins to tread water—because in the end a prolonged intimation of crime does not resemble the crime itself. A clean-cut Frankie Machine in a nice middle class neighborhood, with a few heroin shakes before a happy ending, just doesn't suffice. Hence, the shape of Wicker Park today, a safe alternative for wealthy investors. A place that has lost the majority of its former edge. Struggling artists now have to take the train in to party there. Leland writes: "In its rhetoric, hip looks down on the drudgery of making a living. But as a broad force, hip shapes itself to economic needs. It forms a kind of consumer avant-garde, not necessarily the first to buy the new product but the first to shape the desire."<sup>359</sup>

The desire has been shaped in Wicker Park these days, people want to live and consume the struggling artist motifs and brands in Wicker Park, and the mass culture lag has eventually caught up. The hip and straight world have merged there—one listens to the Smashing Pumpkins on her iPod while sipping a Starbucks mochachino, then switches to a PBR beer while watching *The Sopranos* on Netflix. Walt Whitman's "great merge" has occurred, and the pseudo-bohemian consumption ethic has prevailed in the neighborhood. Viewing Frank Sinatra just seals the deal. When asked what he thought of Preminger's film, Algren replied: "What's that movie got to do with me?"<sup>360</sup>

## 8.1 Return to the Fray

Fantastically or not, Algren was living and experiencing what he considered real Chicago and America, which takes me back to the Wicker Park Art Center in March of 2012. The key irony here of this spectacle is that Algren probably was “responsible” for the neighborhood shift as much as anyone on many fronts: its image, its residents, its gentrification. The Wicker Park Art Center, a.k.a. a rundown church, sits in the middle of extremely expensive buildings that constitute one of the most desirable neighborhoods to live in the city. The “dire” church’s property value is off the charts, and in fact is soon (as of this writing) to be converted into a posh entertainment venue. I drank cheap beer and listened to activists speak about Algren’s legacy. A later portion of the birthday flyer reads:

Our party is dedicated to the brave people who occupy Wall Street, LaSalle Street and the other HQs of the one percent. Algren—who saw the writer as someone who occupies public consciousness against deadening media clichés—would approve. We also mourn the passing of Hull House, which for a century and a quarter fostered culture and connection in a city better known for graft and violence. And we salute the centennial of Studs Terkel, a fighting spirit without peer and a great friend and ally of Nelson Algren.

A highlight of every party is the Nelson Algren Committee Awards, given to community members who display a “conscience in touch with humanity,” while flying under the radar.

Perhaps the attendants of this celebration have not questioned why the neighborhood’s Hull House, a place that “fostered culture and connection,” has closed down. Nor why Studs Terkel no longer lives in the neighborhood. Further, the irony of “flying under the radar” is that many of the celebration’s showcased participants are successful as writers, scholars, photographers and so forth; they weren’t exactly flying under the radar, but they

were noticeably attempting to display a “conscience in touch with humanity.” Perhaps not realizing they were hammering the final nails of our gentrified coffin, they were there fighting the proverbial good fight in hopes of improving the neighborhood and the world—perpetuating the “hip” allure of the neighborhood, and/but as we know these days “hip” sells. Looking like the dispossessed sells tickets, and in our uber-capitalist society the hustler and artist have merged. As sociologist Richard Florida and others have documented, more people are making money off of art and creative pursuits than ever before. Breaking the monotony of conventionality sells t-shirts, and the image of the “saint” has become “hipster” as seen on trucker hats (enter Che Guevara) and most everything else. In *Arm*, Frankie anguishes about the “35-pound monkey on his back,” his alter-ego, what Algren calls Private McGantic. Yet, on hipster turf there doesn’t have to be an actual morphine addiction. One just has to play the AWOL military bit (donned in army boots and a faded ARMY t-shirt) to get the appearance of the 35-pound monkey-as-backpack. As Algren once stated, “The role of the writer is always to stand against the culture he is in. The writer’s place today is with the accused, guilty or not guilty, with the accused.”<sup>361</sup> Cox and Chatterton go on to write, “*The Man with the Golden Arm* is Algren’s most comprehensive expression of his conviction that America’s great middle class should be made to recognize the personal worth and dignity of the socially disinherited who do not live the spurious lives of the ‘business cats’ and the country-club set, neither of whom has been willing to recognize the ‘world underneath.’”<sup>362</sup> These days this “world underneath” isn’t as solitary and without financial reward. Suburban kids now pay a fine premium for entrance into this “world.” So the story goes. The world and “world” have changed both somewhat and drastically, both artistically and

commercially. So goes the more sinister side of the duality of the Neo-Bohemia Thing, in modern-day Wicker Park at least. For me, this Nelson Algren Birthday Party has occurred much too late. These participants' opportunities for substantial social change in the neighborhood are minimal; their collective cachet only enhances property values in Wicker Park, and their church will soon be turned into a dance club. And, I now look to a different (neo)bohemian neighborhood—one that perhaps still has a fighting bohemian chance.

SECTION 4: *TULSA CONNECTIONS*. SPEAKING OF GENTRIFICATION: THE  
DIRT AIN'T THE ONLY THING THAT'S READ\*

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DIRT AIN'T THE ONLY THING THAT'S READ\*

\*S.E. Hinton's Young Adult Novels *The Outsiders* (1967) and *Rumble Fish* (1975), Francis Ford Coppola's Films of the *Same Names* (1983), and (even) Larry Clark's Book of Photographs *Tulsa* (1971): The Conversations These Texts YAWP About the Realities and Myths of Tulsa Cool. How They Have Had Tuff Influences On and Have Hip Connections with Contemporary Neo-Bohemian Tulsa, Oklahoma.

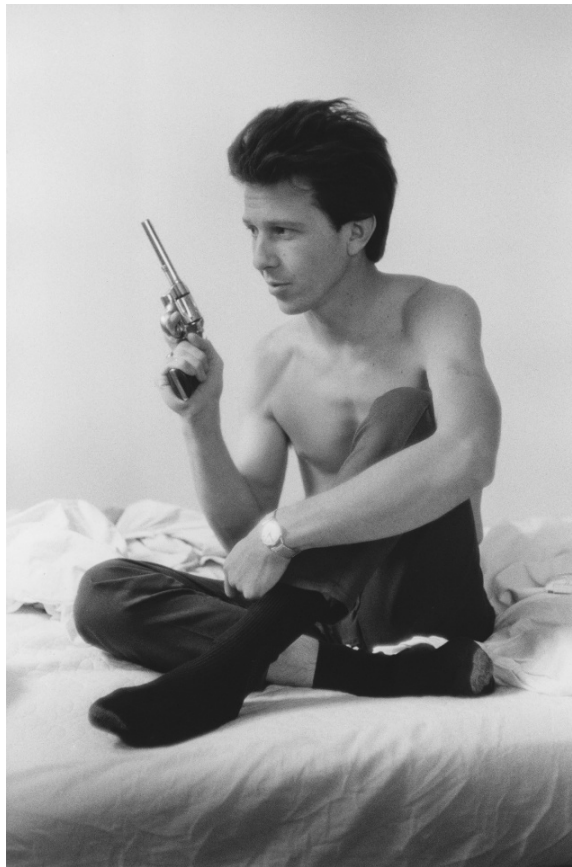


Figure 8.1 Larry Clark's *Tulsa*, Cover Page<sup>363</sup>

### Soundbites from the Zone

“I love [this neighborhood]. I love the energy. I love the revitalization. I think it’s beautiful. And I love this building and I love my landlord.” –Hope, Blue Dome Zone farm-to-table restaurant owner<sup>364</sup>

“I have lived in Tulsa my whole life, and I am finally beginning to feel we aren’t only growing as a city but a community. Many people in our city are working hard to keep the continued growth and beautification happening in Tulsa, in a good way.” –Shannon, coordinator for the Guthrie Green<sup>365</sup>

“I love seeing Tulsa continue to blossom into an arts-and music-driven city with a booming urban center.” –Justin, owner of the independent record label, Okie Tone Records<sup>366</sup>

“The Blue Dome District is evolving into a cultural hub where people can spend an evening enjoying great food and art, and listening to incredible local music.” –Mary Beth, local “green” business owner and founder of the Blue Dome Music Series<sup>367</sup>

“I am loving the growth that’s going on [in the Zone], and I’m so excited to feel like I’m a part of it. Chris and I have owned Arnie’s for nine years, and when Arnie’s moved from [Midtown] to the Blue Dome District in 2000, [this area] was a ghost town. It has been transformed...” –Jo, dive bar owner<sup>368</sup>

“At [the] Blue Dome, I’m not just selling my art, I’m selling me. People get to meet me, I get to meet people. ... It may be [more] important to Tulsa ... because it’s all local. And, you know, the art is a whole lot cheaper. Most people I know aren’t interested in a \$7,000 pencil drawing. The most they’ll probably pay at Blue Dome is a few hundred dollars.” –Price, local artist<sup>369</sup>

“My characters grumble about how bleak Tulsa is [in the 1990s]. But I wanted to note how much downtown has changed, in the Brady District, the Blue Dome District ... My characters would be amazed.” –Benjamin, local writer/novelist<sup>370</sup>

“The closest thing Tulsa has to New York’s SoHo is the arts-oriented Brady District ... and the Blue Dome District, where eateries, taverns and even sushi restaurants have sprung up.” –John, local writer/journalist<sup>371</sup>

“Seems like there’s a huge portion of people happy to have an Urban Outfitters and Fuddruckers, then there’s a small population section that’s starving for authenticity. *Hip* is to stay in town and be cool and make something.” –Brian, local coffee shop owner<sup>372</sup>

“An exciting place. There are teenage kids going into Cain’s and doing a poetry slam about the Tulsa Race Riot.” –Natasha, local patron<sup>373</sup>



“The [Zone’s] scene belongs mostly to a hip, diverse set of Tulsans ... Considering the city’s size and off-the-beaten trek location, Tulsa hipsters constitute a bigger demographic than you would expect. According to Richard Florida ... Tulsa has an impressive ‘creative class’—a tribe of musicians, artists, writers, designers and other free spirited souls. Using his ‘creativity index,’ Florida ranks Tulsa tenth in his list of the most creative medium-sized American cities.” –Gary, local travel writer<sup>374</sup>

“It’s like SoHo in 1969 to 1971. There’s this budding creativity, not caring about a specific idea, just a notion to do something.” –Nora Guthrie, local resident, daughter of Woody Guthrie<sup>375</sup>

“What you find here now is an eclectic mix of new and old: artsy hangouts that show Tulsa’s thriving hipster culture as well as well-preserved historic gems that harken back to the oil boom of the early 1900s. As somebody who seeks out both highbrow art and underground subculture, I love this about Tulsa.” –Hillary, local patron/writer<sup>376</sup>

“Punk rock lives in Tulsa.” –Sam, local musician

“We love the Motorcycle Boy here.” –Mike, local bar owner<sup>377</sup>

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In the red dirt and politically red land of Oklahoma sits one particularly progressive-minded neo-bohemian zone. In truth, in all of Oklahoma, there’s perhaps only one truly neo-bohemian *zone* of note. Aside from maybe a few streets in Oklahoma City and perhaps Norman, Tulsa’s Blue Dome Zone, about a 40-city-block district east and north of downtown Tulsa shuttles/harbors hopes and fantasies—along with comfort and solace—to/for the majority of liberals and rebel artists and cultural dabblers of Sooner Nation.

This area in the second half of the Twentieth Century was sparsely populated and largely abandoned; leftover warehouses and other dilapidated buildings peppered this urban setting around the train tracks. The first half of the Twentieth Century witnessed a mostly oil-related boom in this part of Tulsa, bringing business and patrons and residents.

By mid-century, most of the oil money had dwindled, White Flight had taken over, and many of the residents and businesses increasingly fled the city's core. Yet, more recently in the beginning of this century, in the last ten/fifteen years or so, an artistic/creative (neo)bohemian boom has taken place in the area. The "once-rundown swath of concrete and abandoned warehouses carpeted with weeds and syringes [just] cried out for a second act," writes one journalist.<sup>378</sup> In this zone, which has maintained many of the original/historic red-brick buildings and former warehouse spaces close to the (once called) Santa Fe Railroad tracks, one now finds converted loft living spaces, (seedy) dive bars, bohemian-inspired coffee shops, independent music and performance venues/spaces, local farm-to-table restaurants, art galleries and museums, tattoo parlors, and a list of other hip/alternative/liberal/creative/local businesses and non-profit organizations intertwined with wayward/misunderstood Tulsa artists and grit-oriented/creative patrons/consumers of the arts in a collective localized Oklahoma rebel yell.

Like Wicker Park in the 1990s, the Blue Dome Zone is now in its neo-bohemian heyday. There's no sign or *intrusion* as of yet of fast food chains or multinational and/or outside influence. As it is now, it's all homegrown and locally created and creative, and struggling artists/bohemians can still afford to live there. According a localized neo-bohemia—a nexus for Tulsa rebels—that is currently capturing conceptions of the independent/alternative on the arc-of-gentrification and on our arc-of-the-imaginary, the Blue Dome Zone is primed for fantastical (inter)connections—which is where S.E. Hinton and Francis Ford Coppola and others come in. For, using S.E. Hinton's award-winning Tulsa-based novels *The Outsiders* (1967) and *Rumble Fish* (1975), Francis Ford

Coppola's films of the same names (1983), and Larry Clark's *Tulsa* photographs (1971), the following paragraphs/sections/chapters contextualize, flesh out, and speak to a primer I've termed *Tulsa Cool*.

As *neo-bohemia* sometimes is, Tulsa Cool can be an elusive term, but what I mean by it is this: Tulsa Cool first starts generally as an artistic-hipster-rebel attempt, as an alternative to Oklahoma/ Oklahoma City Drudgery and heteronormative conservative conformity, as a political and ideological Blue Dot Escape Zone of/from Oklahoma with relative liberalism and more progressive values but also a place/mind-state with a special Sooner kind of grit and edge—perpetuated by its preserved historic buildings, local businesses, and the physical and psychological characteristics of its art-minded participants. All with an Oklahoma twang. This contains/presents a *rebellion*, a rebellious mindset, against conventional Oklahoma. Within this escapist realm and mode(s) of thought-making we then zoom in to particular neighborhoods and districts, the capitals of which are the Blue Dome District, Brady Arts District and The Pearl District (a.k.a. what I call the Blue Dome *Zone*)—a heightened bastion and epicenter for the Oklahoma hip, independent, alternative, and unconventional styles of dress, ways of thinking, and modes of doing local business; an unlikely eccentric vector for these hipster species in red dirt land that maintains many of our tenets of neo-bohemia: urban Oklahoma residents with artistic persuasions, creative affinities, with nods toward the rebel retro and vintage, with more progressive imagination(s): the local, edgy, gritty, creative, organic, forward-thinking, independent, nostalgic, curious, and sometimes *confused*. A cultural Sooner saving grace—a *greaser* with a heart of gold. A poet with a motorcycle. A junkie with a canvas, a filmmaker who loves the underside of an (post)industrial bridge. A teenager

with an imagination and sense of *conversion* about/regarding her neighborhood. Yet also a zone, at times, for vast marketability and consumption of hip and “hip” and pseudo-hip—the D-I-Y (Do-It-Yourself) independent (indie) and mass (pop) cultural know-how, anyhow.

Tulsa Cool then these days *begins*, and, importantly, refers to but is not limited to this one distinctive Tulsa, Oklahoma, neighborhood/area, our Blue Dome Zone—a neighborhood locale/condition that (inter)*connects* with the mentioned hip Tulsa-oriented texts in heteroglossic and bricolage-like fashions but *also* illuminates how Tulsa (in conjunction with the mentioned New York and Chicago and their highlighted neo-bohemian neighborhoods, the Lower East Side and Wicker Park, among other hip neighborhoods) (inter)relates with modernist and postmodern subcultural/sociological theories *and* speaks to the Reality/Myth/Romance of the *authentic* and/or commercial (neo)bohemian Artist, Hipster, and Rebel. Especially, and surprisingly, in Tulsa. This section is then about the complexities/inspirations of both authenticity and community. Players and place. Key rhizomes of influence and connection include but are not confined to the following: *style/aesthetics, deviance, the unconventional, the rebel-outsider, the insider-rebel, the angsty teenager, art, commerce, consumption, nostalgia, phantasmagoria, bricolage, the ironic, and the hip*. Tulsa Cool in turn as represented by the Blue Dome Zone encompasses, localizes, and mangles these terms and distinctions.

I specifically mention *The Outsiders* and *Rumble Fish* here (and Clark’s *Tulsa* for that matter instead of countless possible other post-WWII literary pieces that comment/contribute on/to the Bohemian Thing) because these texts have played instrumental roles in the construction of Tulsa Cool, especially now, again, in a

neighborhood such as the Blue Dome Zone. By extension, these texts have also contributed to the *gentrification* of the Blue Dome Zone. I say gentrification in the typically understood sense here as it applies to Tulsa as a “city of fact” with its transformed buildings and businesses and cement with their accompanying increased financial costs and investments, raised rents, et al, that have increasingly enticed middle and upper class residents and consumers to partake in what was beforehand a small working class and a generally understood blighted and abandoned area; but, more importantly, I emphasize the process of gentrification as a transformation of thoughts and ideas for cultural rebellion, of enhanced senses of cultural capital and as alternative ways of seeing the world (i.e. Oklahoma) and thinking about a place and its participants and characters—as a place for freedom-making and taking chances, a zone for difference-makers and head-scratchers alike. Representations induce visions, and then these visions contribute to the constructions of physical realities; a mind must be inspired and changed before a neighborhood can. Before a city can.

For, as Allen Ginsberg became gentrified due to his increased celebrity, countercultural cache, and profitable bohemianism, so too has the Blue Dome Zone been put on the neo-bohemian/postmodern/pop-cultural map for/because of these texts’ depictions of famous greasers, celebrated rumbles, confused teenagers, patriotic junkies, (neo)bohemian “third places,” (etc.) and Tulsa rebels of many shapes. This gentrification as it pertains to a “city of feeling”<sup>379</sup> then connects with relevant myths and fantasies of Tulsa Cool, both bohemian and/or neo-bohemian in nature, depending on the referent. That is, the Zone has created a feeling for these Tulsa participants, one of experimentation and free-flow exploration with the body, mind—canvas and stage. With

the street and sidewalk and underside of a bridge. *All in Oklahoma*. As I move forward and backward, these myths/fantasies and inspirations (of the artist and/or progressive-type) and *feelings* allude to and connect with my various mentioned Tulsa subcultures, teenagers, rebels, and *outsiders* of many types, and these texts include representations after the Second World War and on through today.

Hinton's greasers-versus-Socs divide and fantasy of *The Outsiders* fit in with the conditions of the Blue Dome Zone after WWII as a place for gas stations, rundown buildings—for people lower down on the socioeconomic pecking order, and for abandoned lots. For inspiration of the conversions of abandoned lots (and apathetic minds). As investors came into the Zone, they then began to profit off these aesthetics and styles of lowdown greaser types (especially). As an April of 2015 *Governing Magazine* report of Tulsa's Gentrification Maps and Data shows, only three tracts out of a possible 123 have been gentrified in Tulsa since 2000. One of these tracts, the largest of the three, contains the Blue Dome Zone east and north of downtown. In fact, the data shows that this zone has been given more government and private funding than any other area of the city. The median household income in this tract has gone up 28 percent (since 2000), and the number of adults with bachelor degrees has increased by 12 percent. Tulsa, according to this report, is in the bottom ten of major U.S. cities that have gone through gentrification since 2000, at a paltry seven percent of its tracts.<sup>380</sup> What this data proves is that Tulsa is relatively polarized, stagnant in its growth/ renovation/ improvement and sense of initiative-based enhancement and localized vision, and the Blue Dome Zone is/was *ripe* for escape via (neo)gentrification—primed for an application of a fantasy of art and cool and grit. Just begging for it. Because it's nearly

the only place for this kind of departure, or arrival in the city. These conditions then heighten the Zone's status in Tulsa, a city unlike New York and Chicago.

These other cities have histories of this type of *conversion*, have several (neo)bohemian neighborhoods that carry this narrative, which means that the Zone's local narrative is perhaps more remarkable and unique. At the least it's an unlikely story—for Oklahoma. As I've mentioned, Hinton's greasers-vs.-Socs fantasy provides a celebration/glamorization of the pre-gentrified Tulsa neighborhood; *Rumble Fish* then—while also celebrating/showcasing this gritty urban pre-gentrification zone in ways—furthermore obliterates the binary opposites of haves and have nots. For, in our hip zone anybody can *have* it. *Rumble Fish* presents an ideal vision for a postmodern, neo-bohemian application and current condition of hipster art and the profitable down-and-out. Our zone, like *Rumble Fish*, simply, is now a carnival—of styles, fantasies, and ideas in the realm of Tulsa Cool.

Coppola's *The Outsiders* profits, both economically and culturally, from these rebel archetypes with its/his visual depictions—he highlights the turn here for a gentrification—and his film *Rumble Fish* then confuses the mentioned divide/clash of easy socioeconomic even stylistic distinction: a condition that speaks to the Blue Dome Zone now, a condition that contains a hybrid of authentic and commercial rebellious styles and motivations for its various participants. This shift from *The Outsiders* to *Rumble Fish* then parallels the gentrification of the Blue Dome Zone from an unassuming down-on-its luck area/neighborhood to a hipster haven and cash cow for countercultural consumption and a hybrid of styles. A zone for alternative consumption of fantasies and archetypes. A gentrification of a fantasy: We start off easy with the basic binary

opposites of greasers versus Socs, the poor kids versus the rich teenagers in Tulsa, Oklahoma—the East Side versus the West Side in the novel, the North Side versus the South Side in the film, the latter which represents in certain ways Tulsa’s realistic contemporary socio-economic/political stylistic and ideological clashes of cultural difference. The wealthier suburban middle/upper class neighborhood area south of downtown, while the other postindustrial neighborhoods around downtown such as the Blue Dome Zone are north of the river, east of downtown, even across the train tracks to the north—into older buildings converted into dive bars, loft spaces and galleries and music venues. This clash then carries the requisite styles, objects, and tools of rebellion and counterculture. Yet, even though these *clashes* are still there in Tulsa, the distinctions in actuality are often difficult to make, which is where the postmodern variegations of *Rumble Fish* become relevant.

Tulsa as we shall see fits just fine into this mythic arc of gentrification, even *because* of the stark contrasts and mentioned paltry data as a city of unlikely gentrification. These subjects are perhaps too real, too raw at times as in Larry Clark’s *Tulsa*, but/and at times they are cozily countercultural, certainly still nicely subcultural. Enter your gun-wielding amphetamine addicts here. Deviance is also there in our myth—as are our vices and guns and switchblades, but so are the deviant and dissident though perhaps less harmful ways of dressing, acting and thinking. This speaks to our neo-bohemian condition(s) of *outsiders* of people who are permanently and/or temporarily outside of Tulsa society and of people who just want to believe they are rebelling for a night. The Blue Dome Zone presents such opportunities. It presents a fantasy and an escape for the alternative: for cocaine in a bar bathroom, for bicycles, dancing at a punk



concert, slam poetry, loft art parties, for putting on *Hillary Clinton 2016* and *Ralph Nader/Bernie Sanders* bumper stickers and t-shirts, for ironic bowling, binge drinking, vegan meals, gutter punking it/asking for loose change, and sticking up your middle finger to a man in a suit. For doing nothing on a sidewalk, with a cigarette and an anarchic posture.

For painting on a canvas by yourself in your affordable Zone apartment.

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Similar to the role of a city such as Austin in Texas, Tulsa functions as the cultural and artistic (neo)bohemian center of Oklahoma, a perhaps surprising countercultural spot considering Tulsa's industry-symbolizing Art Deco buildings, uber-Baptist Oral Roberts University, and city history as "Oil Capital of the World" and (in)famous site of the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921. Given this context, remarkably, young (neo)bohemians and hipsters in congregating in and around Tulsa have followed the lead of countercultural/subcultural associations/conditions in *The Outsiders* and *Rumble Fish*, and this stems from Hinton's depictions of Tulsa along with her construction of legendary Tulsa Cool characters. Francis Ford Coppola heightened this extension of Tulsa Cool characters along with the hipster aura of the city with his film adaptations made back-to-back in Tulsa in 1983, using much of the same cast and crew.

I mention the Blue Dome Zone as the key representative locus of Tulsa Cool, but as I will elaborate, the Blue Dome does not have a monopoly on this moniker. My mentioned texts merely serve as connective but not exclusive bridges for the ideas and fantasies of Blue Dome Tulsa Cool. For example, in a recent article for *Tulsa World* titled

“Tulsa needs a district Greasers can appreciate,” Jimmie Tramel writes about his S.E. Hinton-inspired, localized fantasy away from downtown Tulsa:

Truth: I didn’t know we had so many districts. More truth: We need another district. This proposed district would be a chunk of acreage a few miles east of downtown. Legal to have a district other than downtown?

This district would run along Easton Street, beginning eastward from 73<sup>rd</sup> East Avenue. This district would, ideally, smell like buttered popcorn.

This district should be named The Outsiders District.

Tramel explains that the Admiral Twin, the drive-in movie theatre used in *The Outsiders* “is so closely identified with ‘The Outsiders’ that the surrounding turf should be declared The Outsider District. Make it a tourist destination,” Tramel writes. “Many Tulsans of course know ‘The Outsiders’ was filmed here. But do out-of-towners know it was filmed here? Put up some eye-catching signs. Create a walkway with informational displays about the movie and Hinton and the actors. If you put nice displays out in the open, there’s a chance they could be vandalized after theatre lights dark. So what? Blame it on the Greasers (you know the rich kids would), repair the damage and stay gold.”<sup>381</sup> Even though Tramel suggests putting this district outside of the inner city as a fairly innocuous tourist zone revolving around an old drive-in movie theatre, which may or may not end up being that cool, his own vision of “The Outsiders District” relates to the ways Hinton’s and Coppola’s texts have captured the imaginations, fantasies/myths, and extensions of this place (i.e. real Tulsa, imagined Tulsa) for its many willing participants. After all, Tramel does suggest that the greasers might vandalize a sign, in keeping with the myth, and then he replies: “So what? ... repair the damage and stay gold,” which is a

reference to the main greaser heartbeat/mantra of the film: “Stay gold, Ponyboy.” Such (re)configurations include the (re)imagining of particular Tulsa neighborhoods, of the city in general, and even of Oklahoma as a state. In a recent *Tulsa World* poll of the favorite book set in Oklahoma, *The Outsiders* took the top spot while beating out *The Grapes of Wrath*. *Tulsa World* writer Ginnie Graham writes, “I’m going with S.E. Hinton’s novel [for the top prize], with themes of social-class bias and youth alienation in 1965 Tulsa.”<sup>382</sup>

As we will see, as we scratch the gritty surface of Oklahoma’s loves and horrors, in the context of neo-bohemia and its associated subcultures, these mentioned (pop-cultural) Tulsa texts elucidate the unconventional and fantastical intricacies, even clashes, of Oklahoma locales—and of one zone most notably.

CHAPTER 9: MODERN OUTSIDERS: THE REBEL IN A TULSA  
NEIGHBORHOOD.

*“Outside of society, they’re waiting for me  
Outside society, if you’re looking,  
That’s where you’ll find me.  
Outside of society, they’re waitin’ for me  
Outside of society”*

*Patti Smith*<sup>383</sup>

“[A]dolescents see the world in absolutes ... in black and white.” – “Banned Book Awareness”<sup>384</sup>

“Sometimes it seems like half the questions we get in person or on Facebook page are about when we’re going to show ‘The Outsiders’ at the drive-in,” says Blake Smith, co-owner of the Tulsa Admiral Twin Drive-In<sup>385</sup>

“At the time,” said S.E. Hinton. “There was no realistic teenage fiction. If you didn’t want to read *Mary Jane Goes to Prom* and you were through with horse books, there was nothing to read.”<sup>386</sup>

S.E. Hinton’s 1967 young adult novel *The Outsiders*, the teenager Ponyboy Curtis’s first-person narrative about his and his friends’ lot(s) in life as poor down-on-their-luck greasers who are ostracized by the more socioeconomically fortunate Socs, set(s) the tone of (neo)bohemian inspiration for Tulsa’s Blue Dome Zone. As an early-gentrification (or pre-gentrification) catalyst of the Blue Dome Zone, *The Outsiders* established the teenage Tulsa rebel narrative of escape, an impulse to seek out alternative forms of identity and ways of living/behaving/thinking. Hinton’s greasers form a modern subculture against a heteronormative mainstream 1950s-type suburban Tulsa society, and

these *outsider* constructions then formed a template for future neo-bohemian participants (i.e., Tulsa Rebels) of Tulsa Cool in a Tulsa neighborhood—one rebel-laden Tulsa neighborhood long before these greasers had a Zone to go to. The following paragraphs clarify and expand on this template—of a teenager who imagined and then provided a stringent blueprint for a hip Tulsa neighborhood decades before the real deal. If only the greasers could see it now.

#### 9.1 Hinton's Fantastical Parameters for a Culture Clash. Tulsa Neighborhood. Tulsa Teenagers

Long before contemporary gentrification, in a time/moment wherein our area east and north of downtown consisted mainly of empty warehouses and abandoned lots, a Tulsa teenager wrote a novel. Susan/Susie Eloise (S.E.) Hinton grew up in a post-WWII working class neighborhood just a mile east of the (now) Blue Dome Zone, and in this setting she wrote her first young adult novel *The Outsiders* as a student at Will Rogers High School in central Tulsa, Oklahoma, publishing it in 1967 at the age of eighteen. As a precocious person in high school, who was perhaps using creative writing as a means to escape her awkward teenage years and a difficult reality of living in a financially strapped home with a father who was suffering from cancer, she wrote about and sometimes romanticized what she had been witnessing and experiencing in her city and her neighborhood(s) at the time, quintessentially making her first book a story about an alternative place and space, about a community of misfit deviants she could relate to.<sup>387</sup>

Since one can argue that the young Susie Hinton used writing in a way to escape these difficult conditions, one can also argue that her escape or fantasy certainly fits, at least foundationally, with the traditions of escapism/fantasies of (neo)bohemian artists,

hipsters, et al, and their relationships with their given neighborhoods, and likewise Hinton's self-place/fantasy fits with specific modern ideas/other fantasies and/or escapist proclivities of business owners and patrons/residents of the contemporary neo-bohemian neighborhoods of Tulsa, Oklahoma, such as, most notably, the Blue Dome Zone. The myth and/or fantasy/reality of Bohemia/art/i.e. *writing* (in this case, specifically) along with the imagined fictional world gets/got used as an escape from more straight (sometimes harsh) realities. The escapism is *there* from the pain of the straight world, as an alternative in this case to the normative *and* abnormal/painful domestic life. For Hinton to *create* on her terms. Elizabeth Wilson writes, "The fully fledged nineteenth-century bohemians, on the other hand, belonged to an identifiable subculture. Bohemia is the name for the attempt by nineteenth- and twentieth-century artists, writers, and intellectuals and radicals to create an alternative world within Western society (and possibly elsewhere)."

In this context, we understand how/why the struggling young Susie Hinton as a writer wanted to create an alternate reality. She wanted to create a more manageable home life and neighborhood through her imagined Tulsa characters. In constructing her rebellious greasers in *The Outsiders*, she fit into a bohemian tradition, at least initially, with a subcultural fantasy that conditionally suited her psyche; Wilson states: "the bohemians created and participated in a social milieu created *against* the dominant culture."<sup>388</sup> Hinton's fantasies then present a familiar dynamic of rebellion and survival, against a dominant culture, especially as it relates to her particular environment of a 1950s-type straight world—an economically prosperous Tulsa at mid-century that those on the fringes of Tulsa society did not necessarily benefit from. "The bohemian search

was indeed a secular Grail myth of escape and redemption, in which the modern industrial city took the place of Camelot,” Wilson writes. “Bohemia was above all a quest, less an identity than a search for identity, less a location than a utopia.”<sup>389</sup> In an interview, Colleen Oakley asked Hinton, “*The Outsiders* is like the Bible to generations of angsty teenagers. Did its success surprise you?” Hinton replied: “In a way. After all, I was just a high-school kid in Tulsa, Oklahoma. But I was desperate for something to read that dealt realistically with teenage life, and I thought others might be, too.”<sup>390</sup> Speaking of the Romantic tradition, Wilson writes: “Art now expressed the originality of the unique creative individual, and the artist’s duty was to realize himself and his unique vision rather than to create works that expressed the dominant beliefs in society.”<sup>391</sup> In her “quest” for an alternate identity, little did she know it at the time, but Hinton was creating a myth for future neo-bohemian Tulsa—and for one neighborhood zone in particular—with her greasers versus Socs rumbles, with her rebellious Tulsa teenagers, with her knife fights, with her turf wars, with her depictions of hip deviance, and with the associated styles of these conditions. She says she wanted to create a “realistic” tale for teenagers to read, but in effect she was searching for her artistic identity in an escapist world that represents the archetypal misunderstood Tulsa rebel. In her mind, she, like her subsequent generations of rebel followers, wanted a more suitable place to go and belong.

These fantasies of an alternate though perhaps realistic life created opportunities for a teenager to create on her terms. *The Outsiders* is a novel that was written by a Tulsa teenager for other teenagers, which is an important distinction; for, historically, the bohemian and the hipster and the rebel have been more often than not associated with younger people. Medovoi writes in *Rebels*,

Another key term was the ‘teenager’; yet another was the ‘rebel.’ By mid-fifties, as these terms came to orbit around an emerging Fordist youth market, they gave rise to a rebel metanarrative. ... Like ‘identity,’ ‘teenager’ is a word whose recent coinage has been largely forgotten. Not only did both terms enter the lexicon at the same moment, but they did so under similar ideological pressures and determinations. According to historian William Manchester, the word ‘teenager’ made its very first appearance at the close of the Second World War.<sup>392</sup>

Hinton was writing in a post-WWII moment, a time in which a teenager’s out-front even public search for identity through rebellion was a more noticeably and relatively novel American idea(1). Richard Lloyd acknowledges bohemia’s appeal to mostly younger participants in Wicker Park as well:

Traditionally, bohemia is occupied by younger artists and fellow travelers, and Wicker Park is no exception. For Ephraim Mizruchi, bohemia is a ‘space of abeyance,’ in which participants forestall adult commitments; he suggests that the age of thirty is the tipping point beyond which such slack existence ceases to be socially acceptable. In Wicker Park, most of the more visible and active scene participants are in their twenties, many of them still students at local art institutions, but a significant minority pursue *la vie boheme* into their thirties and beyond.<sup>393</sup>

In this tradition, even that of “abeyance,” the majority of the current Blue Dome Zone participants are also young in age and spirit, and they aim to maintain and prolong this condition/mindset for as long as possible. Even the minority that comprises the older



(over 30) Blue Dome players are substantially inspired by the young to create and consume on their own individualistic terms. Lloyd writes of this kind of minority, “Despite their age, these individuals continue to evince the styles and strategies typically associated with youth culture; they are more extreme examples of the American trend in which once standard markers of ‘adult’ life, such as marriage and children, are increasingly deferred.”<sup>394</sup> Thus, as a young adult novel almost universally beloved, Hinton’s *The Outsiders* contains a world for both younger and older participants to get lost in, to maintain and perpetuate—to revel in the identities/postures/associations of the rebellious/countercultural vibrancy of the misunderstood teenager long after they are actually teenagers. The fantasy of the teenager as this term relates to the rebel and outsider is important for our bohemian purposes. To escape into an alternate bohemian world often takes the spirit of the young, with escapist propensities that include rebellion against authority, experimentation with deviant behaviors, deviance from the norms of the status quo, along with, at times, capricious consumerism. By extension, totems and tokens of the lure of the teenager can now be found at times in the Blue Dome’s myriad retro and vintage offerings—places (bars, restaurants, coffee shops, performance venues) that host vintage pin ball machines and arcade games, tribute bands, vinyl records on antique players, jukeboxes, (pseudo/simulacra) knife fights and rumbles, et al. A current nostalgia exists for teenage years of all types in the Zone’s many establishments. These images of the rebellious teenager(s)—whether it’s Ponyboy and his *Outsiders* buddies, James Dean, Elvis Presley, or Sid Vicious (etc.)—get fantastically interwoven with ideas of a better even purer rebel teenage past. For our present moment, foremost, Hinton’s

greaser teenagers contribute greatly to the nostalgia of the Tulsa past—a nostalgia that often contributes as one of the buffers from the *horrors* of adulthood.

As Leerom Medovoi indicates, 1950s U.S. broke open possibilities for a rebellious teenager to have a “countersuburban imaginary,” which then included and helped facilitate certain financially and socially deprived, angst-ridden teenagers to turn to deviance and crime—the term “juvenile delinquent” became prevalent during this time among the media and parents—but this imaginary also contributed to many teenagers spending their increasingly disposable incomes on commercially rebellious practices and objects such as rock & roll concerts, motorcycles, greasy haircuts, and cool-looking switchblades. Within this imaginary, Medovoi mentions a “[y]outhful defiance of a suburban mass society”<sup>395</sup> —that “the fifties are schizophrenically presented both as a ‘decade of conformity’ and as the ‘age of the rebel.’”<sup>396</sup> He notes: “If the teenager provided the metanarrative of identity with its character, the rebel provided it with a plot: dissent, defiance, or even insurrection mounted against a social order of conformity.”<sup>397</sup> Regarding the commercialization of the teenage rebel during this time, Medovoi also mentions, “The irony, of course, is that the emergent culture of youth was itself a *vital* part of Fordist mass culture, even when it was paradoxically pitted against it at a symbolic level.”<sup>398</sup> Within his discussion of the economic boom and affluence of the 1950s, Medovoi mentions the teenager’s “right” to have independent-minded leisure activities: “Over the course of the 1950s, moreover, this particular ‘right’ was rapidly translated into the forms of consumer culture, giving rise to a secondary suburban market that stood definitively apart from the primary family market, and which was characterized by its own array of products, codes of advertising, and cultural

imagination.”<sup>399</sup> Relatedly, Hinton’s *The Outsiders* contains greaser teenagers who rebel against the suburban decadence and conformity of Soc society; greasers do not have the disposable incomes the middle class (or upper class) Socs have nor the socioeconomic clout, and, thus they then regularly turn to acts of deviance and crime both out of envy and defiance, sometimes wearing the label of “juvenile delinquent” as badges of honor. The Socs, for their part, with their additional funds and even sometimes despite this extra cash and status, also buy and *buy into* their own brands of rebellion such as fistfights, cool cars, and binge drinking.

The Blue Dome Zone today captures these dynamics, even contrasts. It is a place of rebellion and deviance at times, with its crime and drugs (et al), but it’s also a sphere for *consumed* rebellion: of hipster haircuts, eccentric clothes, independent music/art, of the *appearance* of the criminal and drug addicted, and a multitude of deviant and pseudo-deviant experiences. (e.g. It’s not deviant to graffiti a side of a building if the owner of the building/business encourages you to do it.).

This neighborhood both provides an escape from the Tulsa suburbs, for greasers and Soc-types alike, and is a place that views itself as “counter” to the suburbs. These contemporary Tulsa teenagers (fictionally/mythically and realistically), with their associated styles and attitudes, tout a rebellion against conformity, and they, ironically, at times spend vast amounts of money towards this rebellion, sometimes falling into conformist traps, often in the vein of mass consumption, that resemble the patterns they have been trying so hard to rebel against. Lastly, again ironically, and this is where some of our additional confusion ensues, many of the participants of the Blue Dome Zone derive from the suburbs themselves. They may want to escape the suburbs, but some of

them still live in the suburbs (many with their parents), which relates to Medovoi's ideas about the 1950s U.S. rebel teenager's suburban condition. A countersuburban imaginary remains a crux for a teenage and/or youthful escape, both inside and outside of the suburbs—in this book as it is with the greaser condition, and in our contemporary neighborhood. These kids now want to escape to a place that celebrates the pre-gentrified rundown zone (of grit, grime, and *authenticity*) in a place that has, ironically, been gentrified. For, as Hale mentions, “[b]y the mid-1960s, it was hard to imagine youth culture without this romance” of the rebel youth against conformity, especially in the suburbs. “It echoed through the hippie counterculture” and other postmodern countercultural movements on through to present day.<sup>400</sup> Throughout these manifestations, “White middle class Americans imagined people living on the margins, without economic or political or social privilege, as possessing something vital, some essential quality that had somehow been lost from their own lives.” And, “in the process, they” and the marginal rebels they celebrate “changed the very meaning of ideas like authenticity and community.”<sup>401</sup>

Hinton's greasers then likewise offer a fantasy of an authentic subculture of teenagers within an established neighborhood of deviance and alternative styles. The greasers as rebels that contain a vital *essence* and capital outside of the regularly understood financial and socioeconomic have been mythologized for contemporary duplication among white middle class Americans notably, but also for anyone else who chooses to partake in the rebel fantasy and manipulate it for his/her own needs/justifications of how to dress, act, live, and consume.<sup>402</sup>

*The Outsiders* contains drive-in movie theatres, Cokes at soda shops, Dairy Queens, hot rod drag races, rumbles between rival gangs, rockabilly styles, Elvis Presley clones, manicured suburban lawns, high school football players, cheerleaders, and greasers from the wrong side of the tracks (literally the “bad” side of town.). In relation to these parameters for Hinton’s Tulsa “outsiders,” Grace Hale mentions in *A Nation of Outsiders*: “In the 1950s and early 1960s, the romance of the outsider began to appear among self-conscious white bohemians and in books, music, and movies made for white youth.”<sup>403</sup> Tellingly, though the mid-to-late 1960s is the depicted epoch in *The Outsiders*, the aesthetics and sensibilities of Hinton’s characters and settings suit a stereotypically 1950s milieu—a paradigm that underscores Tulsa (a middle-of-the-country city that perhaps culturally lagged behind such cities as New York and Chicago) during this representation of the mid-to-late 1960s as a place-time of both nostalgia and retro styles, bricolage, and sociologically more modernist (versus postmodernist) and socially more conservative tendencies. This 1950s/1960s dichotomy, along with the associations these decades have for historians and laypersons alike, represents the conditions—i.e. either/or: arguably cool post-industrial city neighborhood/perceivably conservative/lame/law-abiding outer suburb yin-yang—of modern-day Tulsa, especially in the Blue Dome Zone (and more [most] especially in relation to a current WASP-y Tulsa suburb such as Jenks<sup>404</sup>). As Hale mentions, the romance/myth of the outsider and its various textual representations took particular hold of “self-conscious white bohemians” after the Second World War, and this “hold”—this myth/fantasy of the outsider—still carries gravitas today among contemporary bohemians, among others. In subsequent paragraphs, I will elaborate on and analyze these revealing clashes and their auxiliary conditions; meaning,

for example, the clash of the cool urban neighborhood with the conformist and perceivably boring suburbs in notable ways is there in the rhetoric and aesthetics of the Blue Dome and Tulsa, as is the clash between the hipster and yuppie at times; but, as I will explain in an application of the subculturally postmodern, these clashes at times in these places have also been stripped down, confused, and *transcended*. The usages of U.S. decades and stereotypes of residence are sometimes still there in the Blue Dome, but they are not always easily fixed nor isolated. These decades and places are then decoded and applied—sampled and mixed for ironic *and* earnest purposes. They are placed in our buffet of style. The Golden Corral now equals the Style Corral. A Hip Tulsa Corral.

Yet, this was not exactly the case in Tulsa wherein Suzie Hinton wrote/published her first book in the late 1960s.

## 9.2 Greasers as a Subculture. The Grit is in the Subcultural, Escapist Ethos. Modern and Postmodern Ramifications

Ponyboy Curtis, the fourteen-year-old parentless narrator of the novel, a veiled version of the young Hinton, puts forth his existentialist dilemma as a *greaser* who battles with the *Socs* (or Socials) in his everyday modern East Side (Tulsa) reality. Ponyboy and his two older brothers, Sodapop and Darrel (or Darry), form a relatively stable nexus (and *home*), even though their parents have died eight months prior to the opening narrative. The neighborhood and the Curtis brothers' home in particular serve as an oasis for these greaser buddies, on the more downtrodden East Side—a neighborhood that in relation to where the Socials live is more rundown, gritty, and poor. Ponyboy states:

A few guys from school had dropped by to see me; I have quite a few friends at school even if I am younger than most of them and don't talk much. But that's what they are—school friends, not buddies. I had been glad to see them, but it bothered me because we live in kind of a lousy neighborhood and our house isn't real great. It's run-down looking and everything, and the inside's kind of poor-looking. ... Most of my friends at school come from good homes, not filthy-rich like the Socs, but middle-class, anyway.<sup>405</sup>

*Grit* here refers to this rundown house in a “crummy neighborhood,” but also, as one navigates the pages of *The Outsiders*, to a hole in Ponyboy's tennis shoe, his usage of a switchblade during biology class, Johnnycake's jean jacket collar's stain the color of rust, Dallas Winston's cracked ribs, Two-Bit's black eye and his handling of a broken beer bottle as a weapon, a barbed-wire fence, cement for a pillow, the burning of a cigarette into another's fingertip on purpose, the taste of blood through the teeth, the gash of a broken roof, a front door off its hinges, and the general obstinate resistance to a difficult neighborhood and societal lot. A resistance to a father's diagnosis of cancer; the ability to congregate and survive and rely on one's neighborhood despite not having financial abundance and material decadence—to put one's punk greaser middle finger to the world. Ponyboy explains this mindset: “Soda and Steve and I had put on more hair oil than was necessary, but we wanted to show that we were greasers. Tonight we could be proud of it. Greasers may not have much, but they have a rep. That and long hair.”<sup>406</sup>

Inderbitzin writes about this code of *outsider* obstinacy and sense of community that has strengthened due to a shared struggle:

The greasers lived by their own set of rules, prizing loyalty to each other above all else. In their neighborhood, they learned to stick together, to avoid being caught, and to fight fair. They didn't have the best families, the best homes, the best grades, or the brightest futures but they did have each other. In the end, that was what counted most. They would always, no matter what the circumstances, take up for each other.<sup>407</sup>

This recognized unlikely order/loyalty through grit, the economic struggle, and the ability to establish an alternative culture of long greasy hair and the ability to look tuff (et al) that carries its own forms of capital are all in in the greaser ethos—an ethos that still holds true for some of our participants of the Blue Dome Zone, a place that serves as an escape route for modern-day greasers, for misfits, for outsiders looking to *check out*. To ironically/paradoxically *fit in* with their notions and styles of difference and rules that aren't necessarily dictated by socioeconomic constructs of the Oklahoma mass majority. But more likely ruled by hierarchies and communities of attitude, style, and against-the-grain myth and grit-making.

Ponyboy describes greasers as having long hair with a noticeably robust amount of grease in it, as poor kids, below the middle class, mostly from broken homes, and he also cavalierly notes the greaser penchant for *deviance*: “greasers are almost like hoods; we steal things and drive souped-up cars and hold up gas stations and have a good fight once in a while.”<sup>408</sup> Ponyboy states:

We deserve a lot of our trouble, I thought. Dallas deserves everything he gets, and should get worse, if you want to know the truth. And Two-Bit—he doesn't really want or need half the things he swipes from stores. He



just thinks it's fun to swipe everything that isn't nailed down. I can understand why Sodapop and Steve get into drag races and fights so much, though—both of them have too much energy, too much feeling, with no way to blow it off.<sup>409</sup>

This deviance connects with aesthetics and *style*: greasers dress in blue jeans and t-shirts, “or shirttails out,” and wear leather jackets and tennis shoes or boots. They carry switchblades, lift hubcaps, shoplift, and smart off to cops, get drunk, ride in rodeos,<sup>410</sup> participate in drag races, smoke cigarettes, and some are high school drop-outs. Ponyboy states:

Tim was a lean, catlike eighteen-year-old who looked like the model JD you see in the movies and magazines. He had the right curly black hair, smoldering dark eyes, and a long scar from temple to chin where a tramp had belted him with a broken pop bottle. He had a tough, hard look to him, and his nose had been broken twice. Like Dally's, his smile was grim and bitter. He was one of those who enjoy being a hood.<sup>411</sup>

These boys are “tough” (which is the same as “rough”) and “tuff” (which is the same as “cool” or “sharp”)—“like a tuff-looking Mustang or a tuff record”<sup>412</sup>. Ponyboy describes his buddies' significant others as “tough, loud girls who wore too much eye make-up and giggled and swore too much”<sup>413</sup> I find it curious that “giggling” is listed as a countercultural or *outsider* trait. To laugh hard and loud is uncool; yet to giggle a little bit is to show a subtle restraint of emotion in the *know*. Yet, he explains that he and his friends are not as “wild as the boys in the downtown outfits, like Tim Shepard's gang,”<sup>414</sup> which is notable because Ponyboy and his “outfit” seem pretty wild. It should

be reminded that Tim Shepard's gangmembers are *also* considered *greasers*, just greasers in downtown, not on the East Side. But Ponyboy considers them wilder than his "outfit" because they are *too* tough, too far gone; they welcome death with a certain ease and live too close to the edge—an edge that becomes apparent, as I explain in a later chapter, when looking to the amphetamine addicts of Larry Clark's *Tulsa*. This narrow locus-centered lens of Ponyboy's also later becomes relatedly important when discussing *Rumble Fish*, a book that largely depicts downtown Tulsa and its general urbanity, much more than *The Outsiders* does. The latter is more of a *neighborhood* novel. When I mention general urbanity, I mean a lot of night-time, maybe some *shock*, the darker fantastical, the walk through the myriad cement, steel, and frenetic. The capitalization of the Experience. The experience of the Surprise. A steel and concrete surprise. Coppola especially, in his film adaptation, homes in on this setting of steel, dark, cement, and myriad surprise of downtown Tulsa. It is a fantastic frenzied parade in the Oklahoma streets. *The Outsiders* then functions primarily as a depiction of a subculture within an urban neighborhood, a dynamic that surely relates to the contemporary neo-bohemian neighborhood—a place for deviant rebels to act and dress and speak under their own established codes of behavior. However, as I will explain, the Tulsa downtown in *Rumble Fish* then confuses these codes quite a bit. The Blue Dome Zone both embraces some easy cultural clashes (as inspired by Ponyboy's narrative/rhetoric) *and* confuses its own sets of contemporary Tulsa codes, as it also sits complicatedly as an islanded/isolated zone in the middle of the urban downtown. The Zone, in tandem with *The Outsiders* presents itself as this escapist rebel neighborhood, but also in line with *Rumble Fish*, the strict divisions and clear-cut turfs of the place now are often unclear (or nonexistent).

Yet/thus, in *The Outsiders*, in this/his limited setting/scope, Ponyboy presents a hierarchy of wildness and deviance that speaks to his and his buddies' feelings and categorization as outsiders in socioeconomic/socio-spatial and Imaginary/ Romantic/ Mythic terms, which, again, relates to historical, literary, and contemporary (neo)neo-bohemian notions of style-aesthetics, deviance, and/or the actions of and reactions to Authority/authorities and the Normative (i.e. citizens in proverbial Tulsa society: Socs, most adults, parents, cops, teachers, et al) as these notions interlink with (sub)culturally related concepts of Cool/Tuff and Tough/Rough/Edgy/Gritty/and Hip and Urban. These notions as presented in my treatment of *The Outsiders*, along with identical and similar notions expressed in forthcoming paragraphs that discuss *Rumble Fish* and *Tulsa*, comprise touchstones of Tulsa Cool, historically and in a neo-bohemian sense, then and now, as interconnected with these texts' times of publication and the intricacies/inspirations of the current *hipster* Tulsa neighborhood that is the Blue Dome Zone.

Ponyboy Curtis clashes/juxtaposes the greasers with the Socs in a “warfare between the social classes,” describing the Socs as the “Jet set, the West-Side rich kids”<sup>415</sup> (who are *at least* middle class.). They drive Corvairs and Mustangs—Ford notably being the American beacon of factory line and factory-like consumerist industrialization/manufacturing/Fordism/Taylorism. The Socs wear Madras shirts and throw “beer blasts.” “They’ve got all the breaks,” Ponyboy says.<sup>416</sup> Soc girls are described as football cheerleaders, as young ladies who are bright-eyed and have their dresses a decent length, in all serving as beautiful symbols of 1950s heteronormativity. The Socs, to complete this cultural rift in *The Outsiders*, listen to *The Beatles*, while

greasers favor *Elvis Presley*. (As Hinton mentions, neither group likes Hank Williams, perhaps unfortunately. The kitschy/ironical modern hipster desire for Hank Williams tunes would come later.). Ponyboy mentions his perceptions of the Socs as they file out of their cars before the rumble at the end of the novel:

They looked like they were all cut from the same piece of cloth: clean-shaven with semi-Beatle haircuts, wearing striped or checkered shirts with light-red or tan-colored jackets or madras ski jackets. They just as easily could have been going to the movies as to a rumble.<sup>417</sup>

The subcultures that Ponyboy and his friends belong to, *greasers* that rebel against the more stylistically/behavior-wise mainstream “straight” *Socs*—a precursory/simultaneous/subsequent *clash* related to the later *hippies versus squares* AND *hipsters versus yuppies* as well as the earlier/later more general binary of the *avant-garde versus mass market situations*—resemble more *modernist* subcultures studied by theorist-sociologist Dick Hebdige and others from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham, England, in the 1970s. Ponyboy’s mentioned descriptions of the greaser’s physical traits, aesthetic styles, and attitudes resemble rather *closely* those of the 1950s British *rocker* subculture that Hebdige analyzes, and the greasers also share elements of the *teddy boy* subculture of the 1950s and foreshadow aspects of the *punk* subculture in the 1970s. Despite having varying musical tastes and (a)political agendas (and thus varying Hebdigian symbolic capital) from these mentioned subcultures, the greasers’ leather jackets, boots, souped-up cars, penchant for fistfights and being tough/tuff, petty crime, various rebukes of older and/or normative authority figures, et al, duplicate and resemble some components/ symbols/consumed and/or

(re)appropriated items/styles of these other mentioned subcultures. David Muggleton in *Inside Subculture* criticizes (rather harshly) what he calls the sociological “modernist” approach of Hebdige and associates. Hebdige, in his seminal text, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, analyzes Britain’s postwar youth subcultures—punks, teddy boys, mods, beats, rastas, rockers, and skinheads—from class/socioeconomic, race, and historical perspectives as these perspectives interconnect with dominant ideologies, hegemonic constructs, and social normalization via symbols (signs, codes, and ideologies) of resistance, revolt, and “Refusal.” Hebdige explains that/how these symbols consist of various Refusal (i.e. reactionary and/or contradictory/*contrasty*stic) styles of clothing, dance, music, drugs, and make-up/masking—as they relate to the less specific motifs of physical appearance, consumption, and aesthetic choices. Muggleton labels Hebdige and company’s studies as “modernist” because they emphasize and rely (too) heavily on the analyses of white “working class youth cultures”<sup>418</sup> (cue: *The Outsiders*), in effect downplaying other issues of race, gender, and fluctuating individual experience and “[fail] to take seriously enough the subjective viewpoints of the youth subculturalists themselves,” explaining “not everything can be explained by reference to economic factors,”<sup>419</sup> meaning Hebdige’s neo-Marxist approach is limited if one wanted to study say a punk who is upper class and/or a WASP-y female who immerses herself in a British reggae/rasta subculture, or even a greaser with a college degree. Muggleton explains his own methods for a more *postmodern* (rather than modern) inquiry of his chosen subcultures:

The purpose of the interviews extracts presented in this book is to show how members of youth subcultures interpret and make sense of the

postmodern characteristics imputed to them by social theorists. In contrast to the neo-Marxist theory of the CCCS and the analyses of postmodern commentators, my own approach is one that I have termed neo-Weberian, for it is located within the tradition of conventional qualitative sociology that derives from Weber's insistence upon the need for sociological explanations to recognize the subjective goals, values and motivations of social actors.<sup>420</sup>

In his understanding of the postmodern ramifications of his selected subcultures and social actors—punk, goth, skinhead, hippie, etc.—Mugleton aims for a less narrow approach that does not overly rely on strict categories of class status especially or even race and gender. He hopes for a questioning and understanding of “subjective meanings and cultural practices consonant with, even celebratory of, contemporary developments that have been termed *postmodern*,” arguing that the *postmodern* in a sociological/subculture studies sense is “an intensification of aesthetic-Romantic cultural traits ... which find their expression in flux, plurality and heterogeneity,” and not in the *modernist* (CCCS) “characteristics of stasis, homogeneity and demarcation.”<sup>421</sup>

Hence, as I look to the novels *The Outsiders* and *Rumble Fish* of Hinton and then to the representative films of Francis Ford Coppola along with the revealing *Tulsa* photographs of Larry Clark and the myriad styles and manifestations of the Blue Dome Zone, I keep these modern and postmodern sociological-subcultural distinctions in mind, of fairly clear-cut depictions of working class youth cultures and groups of individuals with varying and overlapping fragmented fluctuating experiences—of “an intensification of aesthetic-Romantic cultural traits” in a bohemian mode. In my view, Hinton's *The*

*Outsiders* functions as a CCCS-related modernist treatment of a Tulsa subculture—both in how Hinton approaches/imaginatively constructs her characters and how the reader assumedly receives these characters—because of the novel’s mentioned strict dichotomies/cultural clashes that are loaded with symbolic codes of style, its absence of non-Caucasian races, and the related archetypes and identities/experiences of the traditional-stereotypical subcultural Romantic rebel or outsider. Later in these writings, I illustrate why Hinton’s novel, *Rumble Fish* functions as a more sociologically postmodern work, that of collective though fragmented subjective individual experiences and conditions, and I explain how Coppola’s films represent a *hybrid of* and how Clark’s *Tulsa* depicts a gritty *alternative to* the modern and postmodern in the context of sociological/subcultural inquiry, as they also, perhaps more importantly, relate to issues of neo-bohemia, contemporary hipsters, and the aesthetics and cultural capital in the Blue Dome Zone of present-day Tulsa, Oklahoma, as a gentrified zone that celebrates the pre-gentrification fantasy: That of outsiders in a neighborhood.

### 9.3 Greaser Fanfare and the Smidgeon that is the Breakdown of Consensus.

Looking again to the characters of Hinton’s *The Outsiders*, one quickly notices the easy distinctions presented by the first-person narrator, Ponyboy: greasers versus Socs; “us” versus “them”; the tuff & cool versus the square & straight; rich versus poor; those who have “gotten all the breaks” versus those who have been dealt an arguably miserable hand. Had these young adults and teenagers been subjects of Hebdige and his colleagues in Britain in the 1970s, the CCCS scholars would have rather narrowly focused on the lower-class status of the greaser subculture and in turn accentuated the

“white working-class” greaser styles/symbols of greased hair, leather jackets, switchblades, souped-up older cars, petty crimes committed, fighting, a penchant for Elvis Presley, et al, to show the distinct and fixed greaser tools and codes of rebellion against the wealthier albeit more square mainstream young people, older people and authority figures. “I looked at Johnny,” Ponyboy states. “ ... He still reminded me of a lost puppy who had been kicked too often, but for the first time I saw him as a stranger might see him. He looked hard and tough, because of his black T-shirt and his blue jeans and jacket, and because his hair was heavily greased and so long. ... We both need a haircut and some decent clothes. I looked down at my worn, faded blue jeans, my too-big shirt, and Dally’s worn-out jacket. They’ll know we’re hoods the minute they see us, I thought.”<sup>422</sup>

Ponyboy describes Johnny’s physical appearance, which he deduces a stranger might perceive as “hard and tough” even though in his mind he sees Johnny as “a lost puppy.” These material and superficial differences point to both socioeconomic and (sub)cultural capital distinctions. Using this Hebdigian modernist lens, one can apply such an approach to Hinton’s characters that are both depicted in and representative of certain aspects of Tulsa, Oklahoma, in the mid-to-late 1960s (which, again, more closely resembled the stereotypical conceptions of 1950s US). These strict binaries/dichotomies also connect to and clash with ideas in the previous chapters on Allen Ginsberg and Nelson Algren. Ginsberg’s 1940s and 1950s beats did not perceive themselves as a *reduced* group of slightly artistic innocuous misfits who were merely superficially (and adolescently) rebelling against the squares or dominant mainstream of 1940s and 1950s America, but the mass media certainly did a fine job in reducing the beats to this *stylistic*



(i.e. more superficial/materialistic [i.e. depictions of black turtle necks, bongo drums, et al]) designation (as mentioned in an earlier discussion about reductionist *Life* magazine articles on the beats), which often detracted from the seriousness and earnestness of the beats' more spiritual and literary-humanitarian-political aims of celebrating the beatitude of the struggle, the beauty in the grit and the glory of the spontaneous riff. To stay gold in the *moment* without the usual heteronormative amenities. Hebdige, doing his part, also lumps the beats of Britain during the 1970s into a working-class subculture category alongside other groups such as punks, mods, etc., with distinctive symbolic materials and outward and/or vocalized characteristics/ideas. Likewise, Algren's depictions of working-class and criminal down-on-their-luck Polish residents of Wicker Park also present a particular group or (proletariat) subculture that is compared to and put against the more mainstream middle and upper class virtues of Chicagoan and American white suburbia in the 1940s and 1950s.

Interestingly, it is also *because* of these easy/strict dichotomies that Hinton's debut young adult novel has both been a widely read and celebrated novel in middle school and high school classrooms *and* one of the most highly censored classroom texts of the past forty years. In an American Library Association's Top 100 Most Challenged Books list of 1990-2000, *The Outsiders* ranks as #43, indicating the book has been increasingly banned because of its depictions and *glamorization* of gang violence, underage drinking and smoking, and other "obscene" words and behaviors.<sup>423</sup> It has been challenged in numerous school districts because "drug and alcohol abuse was common and virtually all the characters were from broken homes"; "because the book was seen as glamorizing smoking and drinking and uses excessive violence and obscenities"; "due to

objections and gang fights”; “because their children are being exposed to things they are aren’t prepared for and insist schools pull it from their curriculums; some also say it promotes ‘unchristian values’ and site its lack of adult role models.”<sup>424</sup> The reasons that younger people have celebrated the text and the reasons that older people have banned the text have derived from the same source(s): the reader/recipient either loves or loathes (at least from an educational standpoint) the depictions of tough kids smoking cigarettes, getting into fistfights, and wildly deviating from societal norms.

Dinitia Smith writes about this complicated fanfare:

The mystery of S.E. Hinton begins with her genderless name. Her most famous book, "The Outsiders," about teenage gangs and alienated youth in Tulsa during the 1960's, transformed young-adult fiction from a genre mostly about prom queens, football players and high school crushes to one that portrayed a darker, truer adolescent world. Since it was published in 1967, the novel has sold 14 million copies, 400,000 of them last year alone.<sup>425</sup>

And, Colleen Oakley mentions:

IN 1967, LONG before Harry Potter and Hogwarts, there was Ponyboy and the greasers. Author S.E. Hinton, then 18, didn't set out to be the voice of a generation, but her first novel, *The Outsiders*, about a fraternity of curiously tender young toughs, went on to become one of the most popular young-adult novels of all time, selling [millions of] copies and being translated into 21 languages. She then secured her iconoclastic status and

retained her largely pimple-riddled fan base by penning four more successful books for teens.

Joanne S. Gillepsie, a seventh grade English teacher at a suburban Maryland independent school describes the success she's had in teaching *The Outsiders*. She writes, "The harmful effects of stereotyping are woven throughout the novel. Before I distribute the book, students talk about labeling. Using socioeconomic status, clothing, music, sexual orientation, religion, and so forth, students think of names to describe people. Within minutes, they generate long lists to share."<sup>426</sup>

Further, Tribunella asks some pertinent questions about the appeal of *The Outsiders*:

In 2001 *Publisher's Weekly* reported that S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* ranked second in its list of all-time bestselling children's paperbacks, behind only E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web*. Its relative longevity is fueled no doubt by its frequent inclusion on summer reading lists and its widespread use in secondary school classrooms. This raises the question of why the novel has attained such a prominent place in the canon of instructional fiction. Given that this is a novel written for young adults by a teenager frustrated with the failure of literature to represent the "grittier" elements of adolescence, it might be surprising that it is now safely ensconced on approved reading lists for schools throughout the United States. This fact signals its endorsement by the very adults who embody authority and establishment. What is it about the novel that lends it to this kind of cultural legitimacy and institutionalization?<sup>427</sup>

While many teachers and both some older and younger people have found *The Outsiders* as a heartfelt coming-of-age story about a young narrator who comes to understand himself and his environment (it has won numerous young adult fiction awards and has been celebrated as a groundbreaking text in the *realist* young adult fiction genre; Tribunella writes, “The Outsiders is often credited with marking the emergence of YA literature. It was written by a teenager and was intended to represent honestly the difficult lives of other young adults.”<sup>428</sup>), older and younger people have also censored/celebrated this coming-of-age tale for its perceivably deviant depictions.<sup>429</sup> Stuart Hall, a mentor to Dick Hebdige no less, indirectly explains this contrast in the context of “encoding/decoding.” A “dominant reading” includes an understanding of a text’s more preferable meaning in which Hall writes that these readings “have the institutional/political/ideological order imprinted in them [and] have themselves become institutionalized.” On the other hand, an “oppositional reading” occurs when a reader in refusing the text’s dominant ideology “decodes the message in a globally contrary way. He/she detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework for reference.”<sup>430</sup>

*The Outsiders* has on many occasions been held up as an appropriate coming-of-age story for middle school and high school kids, yet when these kids start to *celebrate* the novel’s fighting, smoking cigarettes, talking back to cops, etc., the older folks then decide to censor and/or disallow further classroom reading of the novel, thus depriving the kids of the uplifting merits of the novel that the older crowd (teachers, parents, administrators, church officials) had originally touted as positive. Each reading—by young and old alike—depends on the symbolic “reading” of the novel’s offerings—how

the reader “codes” and then “decodes” the perceived symbols as worthy of celebration and/or censorship. In this way, the original literary clash of greasers versus Socs now takes on an additional battle of celebration versus censorship, thus duplicating *somewhat* the conflicts in the novel. *Square* teachers and parents have problems with this *cool/tough* iconoclastic book that has been written for younger people. This antipathy alludes to the *bourgeois-bohemian* clash and the at-times inner city-versus-suburbs rift of the contemporary Blue Dome Zone. Related to the subcultural hipsters of modern-day Tulsa, the novel’s rough-around-the edges, deviant greasers with their unconventional ways of dressing and acting serve as threats to various establishments or systems in certain contexts (school boards, parent-associations, church groups, etc.). The unconventionality of the novel’s content provides the meat for what gets censored, and (of course) unconventionality (i.e. grit, crime, and antiestablishment/alternative offerings) is a main tenet of bohemianism and neo-bohemianism. Detractors of the Blue Dome Zone now do not like the neighborhood’s excess, dirty depictions and lack of hygiene (at times), nor the perceivably all-around hedonist Un-Christian values. Tulsa, as a city immersed in the heteronormative buckle of the Bible belt no less, heightens these conditions for our cultural clash. The Zone goes against the Red grain, as Hinton’s novel does.

Hebdige mentions how the emergence of youth subcultures in the post-war period points to a “breakdown of consensus,”<sup>431/432</sup> meaning that, via *style*—“the profoundly superficial level of appearances: that is, at the level of signs.”<sup>433</sup>—various youth subcultures in Britain have refused and rebelled against the dominant hegemony or “myth of consensus” at/of the time. Yet, he also states that these signs are only upon first impressions merely superficial, that with added thought and reflections these chosen

stylistic objects/materials more substantially and authentically serve “[a]s...symbolic violation[s] of the social order” and that subcultures such as the punks with their “humble objects” use[d] “secret meanings” to express a form of genuine resistance, noting that such subcultural phenomena “should be used to test some of the methods of ‘reading’ signs evolved in the centuries-old debate on the sanctity of culture.”<sup>434</sup> One can apply these ideas to Hinton’s *The Outsiders* in a number of ways. There is no mention of outside races in *The Outsiders*; in fact, there is not one reference to a person or character who is non-Caucasian, which situates Hinton’s novel in a *particular realm*—a situation wherein an “us against them” subculture and its adversaries consist only of young white people (predominately males), thus highlighting the distinct “out of sight, out of mind” segregation and *disconnect* at the time from a white male teenager’s standpoint (i.e. Ponyboy may be lower class *white trash*, but his sense of himself as an Other/Outsider does not directly connect with other *outsider* communities and groups in the novel). As a member of a subculture of young white working-class males who have been given fewer “breaks” in Tulsa society, the greasers use their particular symbols to rebel and refuse the Socs’ (and in turn larger white middle/upper class society’s) styles of more affluent life and luxury. But, despite Ponyboy’s obliviousness and naiveté in his separation, these conditions also then put these greasers in a symbolic order for *all* poor people and, further, all people who feel like misunderstood outcasts—despite race, gender, and class status; which, probably contributes a great deal to *The Outsiders*’ status as the second most successful young adult novel. In a modernist sense, this book strictly depicts only young white males, but in a postmodern notion this novel also transcends distinctions in lieu of a celebration for hipster rebels (of many forms) who are just looking for a break

and a place to go. This mindset then connects with the contemporary Blue Dome Zone—a place wherein people of *all types* can escape to and collectively rebel in. Even though Hinton’s greasers in *The Outsiders* were blocked off and isolated, in the current Zone, the greasers would have a place to go, a place that is physically worthy of transcendence. Their transcendence.

At least now Susie Hinton does.

#### 9.4 Clash and Deviance in the Beautiful City. Acceptance.

Tulsa at the time of Hinton’s novel (in both the 1950s and 1960s) had been dubbed “America’s Most Beautiful City” and the “Oil Capital of the World,” and was thus in a period of economic prosperity (right before its economic downturn in the late 1960s and early 1970s).<sup>435</sup> This especial affluence amplifies the clash (as related to class) feelings and styles/symbols of Refusal of the greasers at the time, as they were keenly aware of what they did not have—that is, abundance of material goods and subsequent “respectable” socio-cultural clout in the notably prosperous city. Thus their valued stylistic symbols of greased hair, old leather jacket, switchblade, old souped-up car, cigarettes, et al, then serve as orchestrated collective efforts of resistance to and refusal of the 1950s myth of consensus—the normative consumption practices involving the purchase of large houses with manicured lawns, brand-name clothes such as Madras jackets, and expensive cars like Ford Mustangs and Corvairs. This greaser refusal comes both out of necessity (these lower class kids could not afford such things) and willful aesthetic choices that exaggerate their rebellion; that is, they choose to appear even *more* unwashed, grungy, greasy, and, of course, gritty than they have to be. This added grunge

and grit gets mirrored in contemporary neo-bohemian neighborhoods such as the Blue Dome Zone where some artists and hipsters with reportedly little money and fewer means also choose to appear and act *more* impoverished and unclean than they actually are or have to be.

These are aesthetic choices, and this is part of the stylistic myth and romantic pact of (neo)bohemianism and the “starving artist”/starving artist. Nicholson writes, “*Nostalgie de la boue* made shabbiness seem romantic rather than degenerate—degeneracy was wanting to trick oneself out in frippery and tight collars—and many artists took an honest pride in appearing undisguised.”<sup>436</sup> The *sacrifice* is the symbol and the message (and a medium). This added grunge and grit gives them, Hinton’s greasers and contemporary hipster neo-bohemians alike, distinctive clout among their peers, a self-selected vehicle for establishing their own greaser hierarchies and positions of power, even *confusions* of power—breakdowns of consensus. In this subculture (Hinton’s imagined subculture), the kid with the most grease in his hair or the kid who has won the most fistfights or the tough who has shoplifted the “tuffest” switchblade comes out on top—at least in his neighborhood for the time being, until another consensus arrives.

These greaser styles and objects then fit with a common understanding of the 1950s-type juvenile delinquent, a category and image that both consisted of some teenagers and inspired some teenagers to act out and buy into, but it’s also a designation that appalled many adults and authority figures. As Leerom Medovoi argues, this iconic rebellious image and its conflicting associations have not gone away:

The bogey of the juvenile delinquent therefore did not disappear with the end of the Second World War. Public anxiety persisted through the fifties



that freedom for middle-class youth might devolve into criminality. ... The teenager, however, could not be so easily distinguished from the juvenile delinquent, for s/he had incorporated a degree of freedom from adult supervision previously associated only with lower-class youth. ... If teenage autonomy led to something other than gradual acceptance of adult standards and values, if it merely seemed to enable amoral behavior that led to criminality, then the teenager became, not a democrat-in-training, but a juvenile delinquent. ... At times, as noted, the rebel represented the threat of juvenile delinquency, yet another Cold War menace to the nation that needed containing. At others, however, the rebel served to animate a vital national allegory, not simply for American identity, but for an America which “identity” itself *became* the central feature of the nation’s identity.<sup>437</sup>

Hinton’s greasers in this vein have taken on the designation of “juvenile delinquent,” a distinction that perpetuates their identities as much as anything else. However, as Medovoi mentions, the differences between “juvenile delinquent” and “teenager” are difficult to decipher at times, notably as their associated values of individualism and freedom (and even criminality and amoral behavior) intertwine(d) paradoxically with a vital national allegory—which may explain why *The Outsiders* has held such wide appeal. Many Americans and teenagers especially view themselves as outsiders for one reason or another, but simultaneously with (re)confirming representations such as Hinton’s greasers, these countless American outsiders then feel a substantiation/justification of their identity constructions.

Then, concurrently as “yet another Cold War menace to the nation that needed containing,” Hinton’s individualized greasers-as-juvenile delinquent consumption ethic and accompanying self-serving ethos also then connects with mostly accepted or at least understood notions of defiance and deviance, which as I’ve mentioned also ties in with the unconventional and weird and of course *outsider*, both culturally and commercially. Hebdige references the ideas of Albert Cohen. Cohen, who writes about juvenile delinquent gangs, could just as easily be referring to (neo)bohemian communities: “Cohen stressed the compensatory function of the juvenile gang: working-class adolescents who underachieved at school joined gangs in their leisure time in order to develop alternative sources of self-esteem. In the gang, the core values of the straight world—sobriety, ambition, conformity, etc.—were replaced by their opposites: hedonism, defiance of authority and the quest for ‘kicks.’”<sup>438</sup> Ponyboy and his greaser buddies achieve identity formation both through a reaction/Refusal to the actions and aesthetics of the Socs and also through a feeling as a gang of shared deviant behavior, in conjunction with and rebellion against their *containment*. This point gets illustrated in a telling exchange towards the end of the novel right before the penultimate rumble. As Ponyboy and his friends exit the house with nervousness and excitement for the approaching gang fight, the exclamations fly:

“I’m a greaser,” Sodapop chanted. “I am a JD and a hood. I blacken the name of our fair city. I beat up people. I rob gas stations. I am a menace to society. Man, do I have fun!”

“Greaser...greaser...greaser...” Steve sing-songed. “O victim of environment, underprivileged, rotten, no-count hood!”

“Juvenile delinquent, you’re no good!” Darry shouted.

“Get thee hence, white trash,” Two-Bit said in a snobbish voice. “I am a Soc. I am privileged and well-dressed. I throw beer blasts, drive fancy cars, break windows at fancy parties.”

“And what do you do for fun?” I inquired in a serious, awed voice.

“I jump greasers!” Two-Bit screamed, and did a cartwheel.<sup>439</sup>

These words spoken by the members of the greaser subculture speak to their *awareness* of themselves as deviant “hoods.” As (neo)bohemians celebrate their labels as “iconoclasts,” and “misfits,” these greasers embrace their given community-driven and media-driven societal labels of “juvenile delinquent,” “white trash,” and “menace to society”—these distinctions actually enhance their senses of cultural capital within the subculture—and of course these greasers see themselves as a “response” and refusal of the more privileged Soc (or bourgeois symbols and ways of life. This distinctly perceived clash gives the greasers a concrete picture for identity, as celebrated deviants.

To add some complication and confusion though, the greasers here also reference the deviant behaviors of the Socs; the Socs drink alcohol underage, also get into fights, and they “break windows.” Michelle Inderbitzin writes:

In his *Outsiders*, Howard S. Becker shares a sociological perspective that helps to explain why individuals committing the same acts might be treated very differently. It depends on power, resources, and who feels he or she has been harmed by the act. Rules are created and applied according to the status of the individual; Hinton recognized this and showed us a vivid example in the greasers and the Socs and how the community

reacted to them. Further, Becker argued in 1963 that we needed more research on delinquents and more focused accounts to help us understand their day-to-day reality.<sup>440</sup>

As Howard S. Becker mentions, “Deviance is not a quality that lies in behavior itself, but in the interaction between the person who commits an act and those who respond to it.”<sup>441</sup> In this context, and Hinton’s novel supports this, the Socs get labeled as *deviant* much less often because they do not typically get punished for their deviant behaviors. The greasers in this case get reprimanded and arrested more often for similar behaviors, thus the double standard that then leaves the negatively labeled greasers feeling ostracized and *outside* of Tulsa society and its norms. Becker explains,

Rules tend to be applied more to some persons than others. Studies of juvenile delinquency make the point clearly. Boys from middle-class areas do not get as far in the legal process when they are apprehended as do boys from slum areas. The middle-class boy is less likely, when picked up by the police, to be taken to the station; less likely when taken to the station to be booked; and it is extremely unlikely that he will be convicted and sentenced. This variation occurs even though the original infraction of the rule is the same in the two cases.<sup>442</sup>

Ponyboy anguishes over these distinctions:

“It ain’t fair!” I cried passionately. “It ain’t fair that we have all the rough breaks!” I didn’t know exactly what I meant, but I was thinking about Johnny’s father being a drunk and his mother a selfish slob, and Two-Bit’s mother being a barmaid to support him and his kid sister after their father

ran out on them, and Dally—wild, cunning Dally—turning into a hoodlum because he'd die if he didn't, and Steve—his hatred for his father coming out in his soft, bitter voice and the violence of his temper. Sodapop . . . a dropout so he could get a job and keep me in school, and Darry, getting old before his time trying to run a family and hold on to two jobs and never having any fun, while the Socs had so much spare time and money that they jumped us and each other for kicks, had beer blasts and river-bottom parties because they didn't know what else to do. Things were rough all over, all right. All over the East Side. It just didn't seem right to me.<sup>443</sup>

Ponyboy doesn't feel his life is fair—that he has unfairly been given the “rough breaks” in comparison to the Socs. He mentions the added suffering that he and his friends have been subjected to, and his feelings of injustice only enhance his feelings of isolation—sentiments that current neo-bohemian players will confer. For, modern-day Tulsa Zone rebels embrace their deviance, but the backlash and repercussions for their actions/words in the *straight* world outside of the Zone are often exaggerated and unjustified—which, especially, is why they need a community and place to go to. To understand the “rules” beyond unnecessary ostracizing and lambasting. These hipsters now flock to the Zone then for relative fairness and acceptance, as a place where greasers and Socs are treated with a more even hand.

Yet, among the many realizations that Ponyboy has in the novel, he realizes that Bob—the Soc who tries to kill him before getting stabbed to death by Johnnycake (Ponyboy's best greaser “buddy”) out of self-defense, the defining catalyst of the novel—

is just a boy who never was held accountable or responsible for anything. That Bob sought guidance and established rules, and that he perhaps would have lived had his parents and/or authority figures held Bob more accountable/responsible for his actions. Ponyboy has a revealing conversation with Randy, a Soc and Bob's best friend, after Bob's death:

[Randy:] "He's dead—his mother has had a nervous breakdown. They spoiled him rotten. I mean, most parents would be proud of a kid like that—good-lookin' and smart and everything, but they gave in to him all the time. He kept trying to make someone say 'No' and they never did. They never did. That was what he wanted. For somebody to tell him 'No.' To have somebody lay down the law, set the limits, give him something solid to stand on. That's what we all want, really. One time..." Randy tried to grin, but I could tell he was close to tears—"one time he came home drunker than anything. He thought sure they were gonna raise the roof. You know what they did? They thought it was something *they'd* done. They thought it was their fault—that they'd failed him and driven him to it or something. They took all the blame and didn't do anything to him. If his old man had just belted him—just once, he might still be alive."<sup>444</sup>

Randy mentions that Bob died, at least partially, because no one set rules and limits for him, not his parents and not his Soc buddies. He didn't have a code to follow that Ponyboy does, ironically, and this ultimately led to his demise. Bob possessed a hedonism then that matches Dally's unbridled primal urges, and Dally of course also dies

in the novel. As I delve into Larry Clark's *Tulsa* later, it then becomes clear that too much deviance, too much hedonism can kill a person. With Ponyboy and his other greaser buddies and with our modern-day Tulsa hipsters, they want to get close to the edge, but they don't want to fall off. Bob here drank too much and went too far, and it got him killed. He wasn't an acceptable (or digestible) hipster because he didn't know when to quit. Just as it's never actually cool to go to rehab for drug addiction or to jail for murder. Only the insinuations of these acts get categorized as hip, for established rules even outside the law or society just might save your life. The Zone then carries a balancing act with these understood subcultural rules in hipster land, a place that is just edgy enough to keep you alive and wanting. Some rules of community have been established, but they are not necessarily ones that coincide with law and God. They are local, more personal—even *more* fair. Socs such as Bob could learn a few things and tricks from the Zone.

After this above conversation with “Supersoc” Randy, Ponyboy realizes that “things are tough all over” and wonders if the Socs can see the same sunsets on the West Side that he sees on the greaser East Side, which relates to his concept of “staying gold”—to hold on to his youth and look for beauty outside of the material possessions that money can buy. He also realizes that his older brother Darry who has been very strict since their parents' deaths eight months prior has done so out of love and out of a relatively healthy aim to preserve familial order. Ponyboy realizes that his greaser gang is an extension of this family, an established group that has clear self-proclaimed rules he can follow. He and his buddies' actions and appearances are *perceived* as deviant by general society (including the media and authorities), but these aesthetics/ideals also

follow established rules of the group, which give Ponyboy a strong feeling of identity and *purpose*—key notions that Socs such as Bob did not have the “privilege” of having. In these ways (i.e. strict familial rules for his role in the greaser-Soc clash), Ponyboy surprisingly benefits from the defined (modernist) ramifications of the Tulsa subculture he belongs to, and this identified firm sense of this golden outsider status that Ponyboy and his friends feel as greasers carries over to the neo-bohemian situation of contemporary hipster residents and participants of Tulsa’s key alternative neighborhood: the Blue Dome Zone.

In this neighborhood and its periphery, many residents and participants feel a heightened sense of cultural capital/identity affirmation as a result of their outsider/alternative labels and statuses. Their identities as bohemian-hipsters and (pseudo)independents get enhanced and defined via this Zone, which gives them (sub)cultural clout and standing in their neighborhood communities and sometimes even in the larger Tulsa city/society, for better and worse (i.e. being called “cool” may be good. Being called “weird” and/or “(non)conformist” and/or “wrong” may not always be worth it.) As I explain above and will *connect* more with the place specific, these bohemian hipsters’ behavioral deviance and stylistically implied deviance play a large part in this process and dynamic (and *arc*), not to mention the *confusion* of Blue Dome Zone neo-bohemia as it relates to teenagers/the young-at-heart, the countersuburban imaginary, along with the spectrum/scope of imagined/perceived and consumed societal freedom and fairness. Foremost, the Blue Dome Zone is, as Hinton’s *The Outsiders* is, an escapist realm for people/teenagers/the young-at-heart (etc.) in Tulsa who do not quite *fit in*—who seek an alternative place for identity construction and a sense of belonging, in



many ways outside the norm, harmless/superficial and not. This presents a long understood bohemian trope: the outsider congregates in an imagined place with other like-minded wayward/eccentric souls, in effect (re)designing tangible *insider* status for themselves. Hinton's imagined subcultural neighborhood was there long before our contemporary one.

## CHAPTER 10: COPPOLAS'S OUTSIDERS AND A PRODUCT OF THE GREASER DESIRE

In the gentrification of the imaginary/fantastical I am highlighting here that leads us to the current situation in the Blue Dome Zone, S.E. Hinton's novel *The Outsiders* acts as a starting place for the fantasies/applications of (future) Tulsa neo-bohemian participants with the novel's neighborhood-centric depictions of rundown houses/abandoned lots and teenage gang loyalty, crude clashes of style and behavior, its strict celebration of distinctive gritty greaser aesthetics, and its place on the stereotypical 1950s teenage rebel-myth continuum. These parameters, these socioeconomic/sociospatial depictions, establish Hinton's novel as a sociologically modernist text. Francis Ford Coppola's film, *The Outsiders* contains some of these same conditions, especially the glamorization of the Tulsa greaser rebel against the world—but as a film distributed in 1983, around four decades after WWII, it also showcases a sociologically postmodern visual-psychological mixture of retro fashions, phantasmagoria, and bricolage as these terms relate to the buildings, characters, and images of both a nostalgic Tulsa of the past *and* (more) contemporary Tulsa; in conjunction, as a contemporary pop cultural text (i.e., as a successful 1980s Hollywood film), the film poses additional/perhaps more crucial questions regarding authenticity of the mentioned styles and behaviors. Coppola's film then functions as a hybrid of the symbolically pre-gentrified and gentrified on this arc of the Tulsa gentrification imaginary, a process that gets further gentrified with Coppola's

*Rumble Fish* (1983) and then somehow *bamboozled* with Clark's *Tulsa* (1971), two texts that represent, question, and push the contemporary Blue Dome Zone's neo-bohemian condition(s) even more and further, albeit for differing reasons.

### 10.1 Coppola's Blender

In 1980 Francis Ford Coppola received a letter from Jo Ellen Misakian, the librarian at the Lone Star School, an elementary school in Fresno, California. The young students of Lone Star had read and loved Hinton's *The Outsiders*, and were encouraged to ask Coppola via Misakian's letter if he could turn Hinton's novel into a film.<sup>445</sup>

Coppola's *The Outsiders* (1983) stays close to the main plot, characters, and themes/ideas of the novel. The greaser-versus-Soc clash is there in the film, as is the related depiction of a group of relatively lower-class outsider, teenage male "hoods" who are looking for ways to belong in their neighborhood and greater Tulsa society. The front cover of my *The Outsiders* DVD reads:

*They grew up on the outside of society.*

*They weren't looking for a fight*

*They were looking to belong.*

The back cover of the DVD jacket includes a blurb by the late Gene Siskel of the *Chicago Tribune*: "A film about the teen years that ranks in its own lyrical way with *Rebel Without a Cause* and *American Graffiti*." In many ways, Coppola's *The Outsiders* looks/sounds as subculturally modernist as Hinton's novel reads and as the two 1950s films that Gene Siskel mentions are. As I've mentioned, the glaring binary opposites are there in the film, as are the depictions of working-class white teenage males and their

accompanying symbols, styles, and codes of the rebel (with and without causes) and outsider. These depictions fall on the continuum of young rebel-outsider myth(s) and romance of rebellion and marginality, the same continuum of myth/romance that contains Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Arthur Laurents's *West Side Story*, Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, and, as Siskel mentions, *Rebel Without A Cause*, among others. The list goes on within this continuum of texts that depict marginal yet *digestible* rebel outsiders, but what's key to mention here is that, yes, Coppola's *The Outsiders* successfully captures (from critical and commercial standpoints) the time-honored expectations and representative cultural vagaries of 1950s teenage rebellion, but, more importantly, and subsequently in a more focused sense, Coppola's *The Outsiders* and *Rumble Fish* AND Larry Clark's *Tulsa* serve as more complicated textual representations/imaginings of the Tulsa/Tulsa Cool teenage-rebel myth/romance because of the heightened localized albeit postmodern blends of the retro, bricolage, heteroglossic, and pastiche—as these terms relate to overlapping styles, mediums, and time periods—which, as I will explain, are touchstones of the contemporary Tulsa myth/romance that have both impacted/confused and (almost timelessly) speak to the conditions of the current Blue Dome Zone in Tulsa.

As these binary opposites get visually deconstructed in the film—after the uber hero rebel protagonist Dally Winston (in the 1980s) gets cinematically/visually shot and killed—Ponyboy and his buddies then move on to something else, a place that celebrates “gold” or the essence of youthful integrity and honesty of identity, a golden condition that relates to the neo-bohemian conditions of authenticity and community, that elusive “something else.” Ponyboy states at the end of Hinton's novel:

Tell Dally. It was too late to tell Dally. Would he have listened? I doubted it. Suddenly it wasn't only a personal thing to me. I could picture hundreds and hundreds of boys living on the wrong sides of cities, boys with black eyes who jumped at their own shadows. Hundreds of boys who maybe watched sunsets and looked at stars and ached for something better. I could see boys going down under street lights because they were mean and tough and hated the world, and it was too late to tell them that there was still good in it, and they wouldn't believe you if you did. It was too vast a problem to be just a personal thing. There should be some help, someone should tell them before it was too late. Someone should tell their side of the story, and maybe people would understand then and wouldn't be so quick to judge a boy by the amount of hair oil he wore. It was important to me. I picked up the phone and called my English teacher.<sup>446</sup>

Ponyboy's revelation that "It was too vast a problem to be just a personal thing" indicates there is more confusion at the end of this novel. And, in this film, and in our current neighborhood, now that the binary has been additionally cracked via Coppola's glaring visual spectacle(s), we move on our way to an eventual *shattering* of rigidity that increasingly occurs with applications of these Tulsa texts, as we edge closer and closer to complications of mixed styles/time periods/symbolic intertwining associations. Thus—on this arc of the gentrification of the imaginary—in a global, national, and local sense, teenage rebellion such as in the 1980s' cinematic 1960s-depicted Tulsa of *The Outsiders* then functions as the core touchstone *and* starting place of the hipster neo-bohemian

situation and transformation to a more confused state. Hinton moves over for Coppola's images and innovation during this process.

Leerom Medovoi in *Rebels* (2005) extensively “examines the figure of the young rebel ... including such avatars as Holden Caulfield, the beat writers, Elvis Presley ... and James Dean.”<sup>447</sup> Medovoi explains how, after the 1950s, the terms “identity” and “teenager” became connected to national ideas of “rebel,” as particular American teenagers started to increasingly identify with (and spend their vast disposable incomes on) notions/styles of the rebel. This commentary falls in line with the mentioned rebel myth/romance continuum, what Medovoi titles as “a vital national allegory,”<sup>448</sup> and this distinction/phenomenon is also alluded to by Dick Hebdige: “Oppositional values had been mediated through a range of rebel archetypes: the ‘rude boy’, the gunfighter, the trickster, etc.—which remained firmly tied to the *particular* and tended to celebrate the *individual* status of revolt.”<sup>449</sup> Again, via *styles* these archetypes and myths gained ground, especially, as Medovoi indicates, after WWII. During this time, teenagers loudly established identity through outside appearances and consumption practices, and the teenage characters in Coppola's *The Outsiders* prove no different, at least on the surface, as they represent the 1950s-styled post-WWII teenage rebel/outsider situation. Hinton's greaser construction (and representation in the novel and here on film via Coppola) is first a *product* of the greasers' desired objects and behaviors that (re)present these objects (i.e. grease, leather jacket, switchblade, fist-fighting, shoplifting, etc.). Second (and third), symbiotically they are products of their socioeconomic status *and* their Tulsa environment. Firstly though, and most vitally as far as Hebdige is concerned, there are their *signs* of style:

By simple sleight of hand, the co-ordinates of time and place could be dissolved, transcended, converted into signs. Thus it was that the punks [or the greasers] turned towards the world a dead white face which was there and yet not 'there'. Like the myths of Roland Barthes, these 'murdered victims'—emptied and inert—also had an alibi, an elsewhere, literally 'made up' out of [V]aseline and cosmetics, hair dye and mascara. But paradoxically, in the case of the punks, this 'elsewhere' was also a nowhere—a twilight zone—a zone constituted out of negativity. ... Once inside this desecrated circle, punk was forever condemned to act out alienation, to mime its imagined condition, to manufacture a whole series of subjective correlatives for the official archetypes of the 'crisis of modern life' ... Converted into icons (the safety pin, the rip, the mindless lean and hungry look) these paradigms of crisis could live a double life, at once fictional and real.<sup>450</sup>

It is in these "paradigms of crisis" that the styles of greasers then fit in "once fictional and real" with a continuum of rebel-as-myth, a continuum which also includes and currently ends with the Blue Dome Zone; the postures (leans/nods), the attitudes, the *looks* (real and imagined) all visually/archetypally connect these greasers to other rebels of other places/times in celebrated collective alienation: with punks, rockers, beats, et al, as part of a long list of hipster-rebel-artists-misfits. These greaser aesthetics are both *there* (in the novel and the film) and *nowhere* (i.e. in the imaginations of these texts' teenage consumers and in the imaginations of the novel's characters themselves) as greasers connect with hipster-rebel-artist myths of yore and afterward.

Coppola then extends Hinton's depicted rebel myths with his own additions/images/sounds/symbols of the *rebellious* and *cool*. That is, in the film *The Outsiders*, one notices that in addition to Hinton's imagined Tulsa greaser styles, the film also contains additional cool/hip capital such as Stevie Wonder's title song "Stay Gold," the slick Tom Waits as an older cowboy greaser who lives at a honky-tonk dive bar, and of course the long list of young Hollywood notables in the film: Tom Cruise, Matt Dillon, Diane Lane, Ralph Macchio, Rob Lowe, Emilio Estevez, Patrick Swayze, Leif Garrett. The modernist themes and styles of the film *The Outsiders* then combines with a postmodern blend of retro fashions, phantasmagoria, and bricolage of Tulsa and outside images. For, as one today watches this film that was released in 1983 that depicts Tulsa in 1966 that actually looks more like 1956, a complicated layered situation of nostalgia and retro fashioning presents itself: because of the associations of films made in the 1980s, because of the retro cultural capital of Tom Waits and Stevie Wonder (et al), because of the now kitschy depictions of the 1950s/early 1960s time period, and of course because of these now established Hollywood stars who have been captured here romantically almost pre-pubescently at the dawn of their careers before they had become famous (or at least before they had become household names).

Now, holistically Coppola's film then takes on a multifaceted designation of "vintage," a label that becomes very important as I look to the Blue Dome Zone's constructed pastiche that is comprised of vintage clothes and clothing stores, vintage bars, vintage restaurants, and overall vintage styles and designs. Tulsans, and cool young Tulsans especially, now look to this film—*revert* to this text to get noticeably giddy and excited about this timeless capturing of fused styles and periods on film. Vintage, classic



Tulsa, for the taking and application. And, subsequently, this case of the vintage/classic also combines with the notions of grit-as-glamour, along with some of the other mentioned notions of the myth of the hipster-rebel-artist with her/his authentic grime and dirt. In the designation of the vintage in the context of *The Outsiders* film, the greasers are seemingly *there* in Coppola's film for the viewer to take in, but they were also *never there* in 1983, the film's time of release. Even taking Walter Benjamin's aura out of the equation, these greasers in 1983 had been swallowed up by myth and the mentioned layering of rebellious nostalgia. In other words, Hinton's earnest offering of her greasers in her neighborhood and city that officially originated in 1967 were also diminished and then swallowed in 1983. In some ways, as related to aspects of authenticity—regarding the questions: what would one say is an *authentic* 1950s greaser type? What does the *real* greaser Tulsa of the late(r) 20<sup>th</sup> Century look like?—Coppola's *The Outsiders* then gets put next to the kitschy *Grease* (1977), the tongue-in-cheek musical parody that stars John Travolta in the lead greaser role as head of a bunch of greasy misfits that call themselves the T-Birds. Please allow me to deviate with these lines of poetry:

*[Chorus:]  
 (grease is the word, is the word that you heard)  
 It's got a groove, it's got a meaning  
 Grease is the time, is the place, is the motion  
 Grease is the way we are feeling*

*We take the pressure, and we throw away conventionality, belongs to yesterday  
 There is a chance that we can make it so far  
 We start believin' now that we can be who we are - grease is the word.*

These lyrics are (of course) from the supergroup the Bee Gees's titular song "Grease." I would like to further isolate the following lines that so keenly connect with this dissertation's aims:

*We take the pressure, and we throw away conventionality ... This is a life of illusion, a life of control ... Mixed with confusion - what're we doin' here? ... (grease is the word, is the word, is the word...)*

Throwing away conventionality? This is a life of illusion? A life of control? Mixed with confusion? What are we doing here? *Grease* is the word, and though *Grease* is a musical comedy and Coppola's film *The Outsiders* is relatively a more serious dramatic treatment of this time period and subculture, in similar ways, Coppola's film presents a nicely packaged and marketable film of vintage rebels—but/and not necessarily more authentic rebels, or even more believable and/or realistic rebels. These are perhaps both *equally* arbitrary rebels of the imaginary in 1983 (and 1977). After all, this *is* a life of illusion. There is confusion. And, it is these same/similar imaginaries and illusions that *some* (but not *all*) residents and patrons of the modern-day Blue Dome Zone use to construct their ethos and mythos for this alternative neighborhood of cool and hip and rebellious and reactionary and different and weird. They still hold steadfast to the taunt(s):

***Keep Austin Weird. Keep Tulsa Weird.***<sup>451</sup>

Because to them, to the celebrated greasers and modern-day Zone players, this is all weird. Relatively weird (enough). They do question what they are doing here and if the nuances of the Zone are illusions. They are confused, so they go to this place to hang together, to hold on to (pre)packaged weirdness, which is better than not. Yes, Hinton's novel and Coppola's film fit a continuum of rebel myths, starting at least arbitrarily with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in the more recent English. *The Outsiders* (film) opens with Ponyboy's (C. Thomas Howell's) voiceover line: "When I stepped out into the bright sunlight from the darkness of the movie house, I had only two things on my mind: Paul Newman and a ride home." Now, in culmination, not only do we have allusions to

air mailed/downloaded Shakespearean plays, *Rebel Without a Cause*, *West Side Story*, along with Tom Waits, Matt Dillon, John Travolta, Elvis Presley, et al, but we also have that cool and “tuff” paramour Paul Newman, *Cool Hand Luke* himself. The *real* rebel, however, the authentic greaser rebel perhaps never existed in the first place. But that doesn’t actually matter because we imagine these rebels as real and authentic homegrown weirdos. Our rebels; *we own them*, and apply them to fit our hipster needs. Just as Coppola has. Hebdige quotes Stuart Hall as explanation for how the media—newspapers, popular novels, films, etc.—“play a crucial role in defining our experience for us”,<sup>452</sup> which in this case would be the experience of the *other/outsider* teenage rebel groups in a novel or film:

As social groups and classes live, if not in their productive then in their ‘social’ relations, increasingly fragmented and sectionally differentiated lives, the mass media are more and more responsible (a) for providing the basis on which groups and classes construct an image of the lives, meanings, practices and values of *other* groups and classes; (b) for providing the images, representations and ideas around which the social totality composed of all these separate and fragmented pieces can be coherently grasped.<sup>453</sup>

Even before Ponyboy tells his story, his internal rebel myth (and story) has already been consciously and unconsciously constructed and influenced by the likes of Romeo Capulet, Huck Finn, Holden Caulfield, Paul Newman, Elvis Presley, et al. Ponyboy’s identity has been shaped by the media as much as it has by his greaser buddies and his environment. His particular Tulsa subculture both adopts and influences media practices

and depictions. Today, and at least since 1967 and then 1983, Ponyboy's rebel myth continues to shape the minds and imaginaries/imaginings of its readers and viewers, hence the current zone of Tulsa Cool that earnestly and ironically utilizes and facilitates aspects of Ponyboy's, Hinton's, and Coppola's versions of the rebel myth.

## 10.2 *The Outsiders* and Tulsa Cool: Scenes That Contribute to the Arc of Our Neo-Bohemian Gentrification Imaginary

There's a moment in Coppola's *The Outsiders* wherein Matt Dillon's Dally Winston is in a hospital bed. The characters of Two Bit and Ponyboy have just come in to visit him. A nurse asks him, "What's happened to your gown?" He responds: "I threw it away." She rolls her eyes, and he yells to her: "Get out! Just get out! You make my stomach sick!" Dally then laughs. He believes he is above hospitals, nurses, and hospital gowns. As it turns out, this nurse in the film is played by S.E. Hinton in her thirties, which then confirms our trajectory, our exchange and pop-cultural hand-off. Coppola with his visual effects 16 years after the publication of the novel—with his smoke clouds and oozing blood and retro/vintage snapshots of Tulsa streets and rundown bars/buildings then kicks Hinton out of the equation. He starts with her, but he then kicks her out of the room, and what we are left with is a shirtless Dally in a hospital bed who is swearing revenge against the Socs—a vintage visual message in the 1980s. He accidentally breaks the unlit cigarette in his mouth on the hospital bed. He throws the broken cigarette across the room, then takes a switchblade from Two Bit (played by Emilio Estevez) and stabs the bed: "We are going to get even with those Socs! Let's do it for Johnny, man!" The dark instrumental music subtly plays. The look in Dillon's face is one of anguished hatred, of a hipster who hates the world in the moment. Who wants to rebel because he

has been misunderstood and mistreated. Ponyboy looks on in shock/awe as Hinton/the nurse leaves the room. Dally puts the switchblade to his forehead. The next scene cuts to Two Bit and Ponyboy in downtown Tulsa at the bus stop across the street from a Gothic church.

They are nervous about the rumble. Hinton has left the room. She has moved aside in order to allow Coppola's visual layering to fold and unfold on top and through the Tulsa decades and actual streets. Hinton wrote her novel in actual time (in the late 1960s), yet she has disappeared (in the 1980s) in earnest to make way for her greasers into the postmodern zone. None of this is in the original novel, which is too bad, but that's the point; Coppola presents us with his shirtless hipster who stabs a bed in a Tulsa hospital, and this is one of the images we think of on retro night—on the days when we feel like punching a Soc, in a case when you do not want to abide your parents or that bouncer or cop: You just stab the bed. The image remains clear; because Coppola gives us the question now: What would Dally do? We have the projections. The classic nostalgic projections to download as answers.

\*

This 1983 Coppola film has captured the imaginations of many Tulsans, has been celebrated as a cool film. These same kinds of folks now drive from their Tulsa suburbs to the cool Blue Dome Zone. Hollywood actors and local Tulsa residents as film extras both of course *act* in *The Outsiders*. Scenes take place in *The Outsiders* in actual Tulsa locations. People live in the *Dome*, reside there. Patron there. Escape to there. Cool Studies remains a genre of thought, and as described in John Leland's *Hip: The History*, there's a landscape there in the hip realm with spikes and jets to a variety of terrain and

places for thought and imagination. *The Outsiders* provides one of those places. The film begins with Ponyboy and his Paul Newman/movie house reference, while we see him scrawl these words into a notebook, and then cuts to the opening credits. These opening credits present themselves as a brown blanket of nostalgia: for old Tulsa, which actually hasn't changed *that* much if you aren't looking. Brown and white sketches of train tracks, the sides of trains, a row of harmless phone lines. The Oklahoma sky broadly presents itself like the moon. There is a water tower. A rundown house in a shoddy neighborhood. Old Southwestern buildings, Tulsa buildings. A glimpse of the 1950s/1960s Tulsa downtown skyline and then to a street through downtown. Abandoned lots. An innocuous tree here and there. A simple square bar with a neon BEER sign.

The first action of *The Outsiders* starts with our hero Dallas "Dally" Winston leaning against a streetlight pole in front of a 1950s-style diner-bar called the Bowen Lounge. There's that neon red beer sign. Hamburgers are 75 cents. Cheeseburgers, 85 cents the sign reads. Small neon Coors beers signs in the windows of this place. It's the middle of a clear day and Dally youthful and nonchalant in brown leather motorcycle jacket, tight jeans rolled at the bottom, black boots, smokes a cigarette while leaning. This nod is part of our fantasy. A nod to those iconic 1950s poses, the seminal birthplaces of pop culture Cool in America among middle class youth. This dissertation (partially) is about the middle class, about the inspirations for the white middle classes, but it's also about an alternative fantasy of and for the Tulsa outsider, and, in practice, an outsider could be nearly anyone—a bohemian, a drug addict, a suburban mom who wants to get shitfaced. Dally could represent potentially anyone, which is why his insinuations and those of Tulsa Cool transcend race, class, and gender, et al.

Two of our other heroes creep up to Dally in this scene. Ponyboy and Johnnycake (played by Ralph Macchio). They, like Dally, are uniformed in the greaser style. Ponyboy with greased hair, blue cowboy jeans, a faded blue sweatshirt with the arms cut off. Johnny with longer ruffled grease hair. Light blue jeans, a dirty light blue jeans jacket, black t-shirt. Collar up on the jacket. He looks like he has been rolling in the dirt. This grime gives him credibility. To look like shit because this is how he feels. Dally, still leaning, is asked what he wants to do, to which he replies: “Nothing legal, man. Let’s get out of here.” A young woman walks past in long skirt and proper blouse, rather conservative-looking, which shows the clash of styles with these characters, who are now walking on the sidewalk. Rundown buildings appear in front of them. Our key hero and chosen outsider has now positioned himself on the concrete in a worn-out urban setting along with himself as outside the law, at least verbally for now, as a hood who celebrates deviance in the city’s aging structures—and we then celebrate this deviance and grit indirectly, by association. We cheer for the projection on the side of the building. Hinton’s mind, Ponyboy’s first-person narrative, has converted to Coppola’s vision(s) on screen. We enter this world because we know we are safe at home in front of the television.

These greasers walk to a gas station, the DX. In front of a restaurant, amid our vintage cars we see a fight between a kid and some greasers. A group of teenagers gather around to watch, including our heroes. After getting punched and kicked by some leather daddies with 1950s-style grease and leather jackets in tow, the spotlighted misfit in the round pulls out his switchblade to defend himself before this ruckus is broken up by the cops, our authority/“law” that Dally blows smoke in the ear of.

Meanwhile Van Morrison's "Gloria" plays for us. "G-L-O-R-I-A!" Diners, gas stations, fights, cops, tough looks: Our greasers walk towards their neighborhood, their poor neighborhood that seemingly has created a lot of and for this teenage psychic tension: just toughs in an abandoned lot, a house in disrepair, a honky-tonk bar, a drive-in movie theatre, at a rumble in the park.

What is cool about all of this? Tulsa Cool about this? One, this film takes place in Tulsa, and Tulsa is a good shake from Hollywood and rarely gets national press and attention. Even while writing this dissertation I have heard, "Tulsa? Why the hell would you want to write about Tulsa?" Maybe that's the point. I think Tulsa deserves some attention, and the film *The Outsiders* most famously lends it. Call it cool credible attention. Tulsa gets a bone here: Its streets, its buildings, its history, its greasers. And, it's not that this film is just another depiction of the 1950s-rebel stereotype. At least not completely. Dally and his buddies represent the Tulsa rebel. The tough teenager with a swagger who speaks with a Southern twang, who wears cowboy boots at times, who perhaps actually has ridden horses and been on a bull or two in a rodeo, who sleeps overnight occasionally above a honky-tonk bar, who drives to Texas for escape. This all happens in *The Outsiders*, and most Tulsans can relate more than most. This situation then combines with other visuals in Coppola's film. We understand the Chuck Taylors, the Oklahoma winds and storms, the vast open sky and landscape for golden sunsets, the rockabilly haircuts, the misunderstood Tulsa poor kids in a city of abundance, the fistfights, the hamburgers at gas stations, even the sad deaths of Dally and Johnnycake in the film. The deaths too are part of this Tulsa fantasy. A fantasy and hope for a revised place where everybody can be cool together after the killing. "Seems like there's gotta be



someplace without greasers, Socs,” Johnny cries out of anguish. Yes, there’s a place without strict claims of greasers/Socs, Johnny, but you are here/there in Tulsa before your more appropriate time. Too early for the Blue Dome Zone. If you had waited twenty years, you could have had a neighborhood that accepts you.

Yet Tulsa Cool also gets intertwined with this misunderstanding. I stated earlier in this section that the primary catalyst of Hinton’s novel consists of the moment Johnnycake stabs and kills SuperSoc Bob. In Coppola’s film, it is late at night, the Oklahoma winds are violently blowing dust and debris about, Bob and his friends are very drunk and drowning Ponyboy in the park fountain on greaser turf. Arguably Johnnycake kills Bob in a form of self-defense. The Socs are acting deviantly (being drunk and trying to drown Ponyboy), which rails against the stereotypical straight/hood status of the greasers/Socs, and the stereotypes then get further complicated when Johnnycake kills Bob to save his friend. Is Johnnycake acting deviantly? I suppose only a court can officially decide. What I am more interested in, however, is Coppola’s treatment of this scene. In this dramatic moment, the camera close-ups visually depict the misunderstanding that takes place. We understand that these two greasers are misunderstood, as we root for them. They are just kids with family troubles who want to blow off some steam in the park late at night before the Socs circle the park in their Mustang. The four Socs dramatically get out of their car and drunkenly/violently prey on these two greaser boys. We get up-close face shots of Ponyboy, Johnnycake, Bob, Randy, and the other two Socs. This technique (i.e. an up-close focus on micro-expressions and verbal/nonverbal stylistic/visual cues) exacerbates their identities as spoiled, rich Socs who are sadistic towards these dirty greasers who are actually pretty good kids who are

minding their own business and who do not deserve this unjust treatment from these drunken belligerent Socs. The well-groomed, pretty Soc faces take on a negative hue here, as we then feel for Johnny's beatdown hang dog look along with the sensitive Ponyboy who skittishly smokes a cigarette. With these visuals, we now root for the downtrodden characters, the ones who don't fit in. Conversely the kids "who have all the breaks," the rich kids who are a part of the American dream are now disgusting to us. Immoral. They, here on screen, represent the amalgamation of entitlement. They look clean-cut and cocky and extremely uncool. We have no desire to enter their zone.

We also see close-ups of the objects, the important objects (call them *tools*) and words, which also get inverted for celebration: Johnnycake puts his hand on his silver switchblade in his back pocket. Bob holds his silver round flask and brings it to his lips. Ponyboy takes a drag of his cigarette and blows smoke into the air. Before the fight in this park, Bob calls greasers "white trash." Ponyboy returns the favor, calls Socs "white trash." Bob pours his flask onto Ponyboy's sleeveless shirt. Ponyboy spits into Bob's pretty face. In the moment when Ponyboy is being drowned in the fountain by the Socs, we see Ponyboy underwater, blowing bubbles in the green murky water. He is struggling and writhing. We see the Socs sadistically laughing, hear dramatic instrumental music, see Johnnycake reach for his blade and stand up. A viscous red *goos* across the screen. Blood has been shed. A Soc has been killed by a greaser. Furthermore, the former 1970s pop music teen idol Leif Garrett playing Super Soc Bob has been obliterated from our visual consciousness. This cinematic moment represents a death. Call it an *end* on a few levels. This blood fountain moment on film represents a fantasy of bohemia, a countercultural fantasy of bohemia. This moment represents the actual death of the

modernist straight/square/bourgeois. A death of a Soc teenager named Bob and a pop culture idol. And, as this greaser, Johnnycake, has stepped over the Rubicon of murder/manslaughter, we then imagine a point of no return. The clash has widened and the divide is stronger, yet we understand Johnny's actions. We even celebrate it as a visual instrumentation of justice. We cheer for it on retro night.

The potential for an admixture has been killed momentarily, which is where modernism comes in. On the other hand, with postmodernism, the novel has been killed. The author has been killed. The Soc has been killed. One fantasy is dead. Another one presents itself: a fantasy of a greaser who kills a Soc and the audience cheers it. As I will later explain, certain fantasies get killed in *Rumble Fish* too, at least *somewhat*. The distinctions then have been blurred. There the fixed protagonists/antagonists have been fragmented and mixed. This *mixture* is also happening here in *The Outsiders*, but to a lesser degree. We still, primarily, root for one team and/or side. Yet, regardless, Coppola complicates this mixture more than Hinton does, which moves us further along on an arc-of-gentrification that ultimately leads towards a mixture of styles and ways of living and consuming. We track and backtrack with our realities and illusions, associations of glory days long gone and hopes for hipper futures of vintage and novel adjustments. This is what film can perhaps represent better. The visual points to the complexity in this case. The visual compounds the dynamic. This could be counterintuitive, as we often think (perhaps) films are more reductionist and even more simplistic in ways than novels, but in this case the film pushes the complexity of tones and styles a little further and a little better. We like the layered complication in this case of a misunderstanding that the audience embraces—as we do the misunderstood kid who escapes from the suburbs to

the Blue Dome Zone to fit in, to feel as if his sensitive grit is celebrated. To feel as a person with flaws and troubles can feel joy in a sphere that is open to such distinctions. This film offers that in parts, as does a neo-bohemian district. A place for the misunderstood outsider to feel joy, to not feel lesser than—to *kill* in an acceptable way (at least on screen). The Socs, the ones whom are typically celebrated in mainstream society, are the ones who are wrong here. The regular understanding is flipped. We don't need a nice car. We don't need good clothes, and we don't need a clean face. We don't want to go to college, get a good white collar job and get married and have two kids. We do *not* want a middle class house and life in the Tulsa suburbs. We would rather poetically connect to the soul of a place, even cheer/party for our flaws and what we do not have.

### 10.3 (2)

After Bob dies, Ponyboy and Johnnycake go on the lam. But before this, they seek out the advice of Dally, who, after having gotten into a fight with Tim Shepherd, is trying to get some sleep in a bed above a honky-tonk bar. As Ponyboy and Johnny stand in front of the bar, the neon red hue of the doorway of this bar introduces us to Buck Merrill (played by Tom Waits), a tough-looking older cowboy who wonders what these young greaser kids are doing here so late on this night. This combination, of an otherworldly red hue with cowboy Tom Waits and a Tulsa honky tonk, presents a particular Tulsa realm of excitement and sketchy hip ambience. A peculiar Tulsa hipster haven, which resembles so many of the dive bars and venues in the Blue Dome these days such as Cain's Ballroom, Arnie's, and Chaz's. The country/rural meshes with the

urban and neon and seedy, a perfect set-up for Dally to take the boys up to his room to offer them advice on how to escape this murder rap.

Along with giving them a loaded gun. And fifty bucks. And cigarettes. And congratulations for killing a Soc. Tom Waits as Buck Merrill plays pool and drinks beers downstairs with other misfits. The country music is loud. People are drunk. The neon red tinges everything and everyone.

Per Dally's instructions, Ponyboy and Johnny take the "315 train to Windrixville," a "freight." "I will be up there as soon as I think everything's cool," Dally explains. The boys find an abandoned church on top of Jay Mountain as a hide-out. The church is grungy, with holes in the walls. There are cobwebs, and owls and other birds perch on its broken rafters. The wood is rotting. The boys sleep on the cold, hard, cement floor out of exhaustion and necessity. Johnnycake gets the idea they should disguise themselves, so Johnny cuts his long(ish) hair short with a switchblade and takes the grease out of it while Ponyboy cuts his long(ish) hair with the same blade and bleaches it a whitish blond. Ponyboy remarks: "It's like being in a Halloween costume you can't get out of, and I hate it."

Halloween: These disguises and Ponyboy's distaste with his new physical appearance speaks to his identity formation as a greaser, even in this abandoned rotting church. In the world of Hebdigian subcultural capital, Ponyboy has lost a fixed tool of rebellion, and he has broken the greaser code. He has cut his tuff black and greasy slick greaser hair. Is this Halloween? Is he in costume? Is a disguise the same as a costume? Is a hide-out the same as a party? One could say that the Halloween "mask" or costume in this case refers to an escape, and that this escape relates to the hiding of the

hipsters/starving artists in a place such as the Blue Dome Zone of Tulsa. And the abandoned church curiously offers a clash of authenticity. As Ponyboy and Johnnycake escape here, attempting to look more straight and normal, historical and contemporary hipsters also fluctuate their identities. A hipster say in skinny jeans and an ironic t-shirt may go to a dive bar in the Blue Dome Zone on Saturday night. On Sunday, however, he/she may attend church in slacks and a tie. Where/what is the escape in this case? Is the hipster escaping on Saturday night in skinny (non)conformist irony, or is she escaping on Sunday in more formal clothes at the local Methodist church? The identity here, with said hipster, would seem to be in flux. Johnnycake and Ponyboy believe they have less flux though, by comparison. Their identities are more fixed, and thus Ponyboy feels shame and anguish over the fluctuation of his identity. The novel has strict identities, and the film has only *moderately* fluctuating identity formations. The flux isn't as vast as say in *Rumble Fish*. And/also, there is even more flux at times, typically, with contemporary neo-bohemian hipster Blue Dome participants (at times).

\*Here's a FLUX [capacitor] spectrum anyway, as a crude gritty visual:

**LIL' FLUX**

**LOT O' FLUX**

< -- *Ponyboy/Johnnycake*-----*Motorcycle Boy*-----*Blue Dome Hipster*--- >

This "Halloween" scene is also in the novel, but Coppola's more *descriptive* treatment of it reveals the visual layers and mirrors/reflections of a Halloween costume: "Geez, this really makes me look tough," Ponyboy says sarcastically. "Well, guess we're disguised," says Johnny. "Shoot nothing," remarks Ponyboy. "It just ain't us. It's like being in a Halloween costume you can't get out of, and I hate it." Before Ponyboy says these words, the audience sees Ponyboy in a cracked mirror's reflection and then they see

Ponyboy's and Johnny's upside down reflection in a pond outside of the abandoned church. The mirror is cracked in three places; in the middle we see the newly bleached blond Ponyboy smoking a cigarette. The left slice of the mirror portrays only half his face. He wears a country western shirt, and we see the trees and sky in the rural background. In the pond reflection, we see the boys upside down, top left of the screen. The church, also upside down is to the right. Ponyboy throws a log into the pond to turn us right side around again, back to our regular fantasy. But upside down and cracked? Half a face, partial identity.

The urban meets the country in Oklahoma. Cool kids turned around beside a dilapidated country church in the country. This is fragmentation at its visual best: Ponyboy's and Johnny's identities have been fragmented. They are confused and upside down. Their reflections are cracked and not quite right to them. We understand this too, at least on some level. These greasers have been mirrored. They have been inverted. They have been compromised just as other images of hipsters/starving artists have been compromised and fragmented. "We got to get used to it," Johnny says. "It's our looks or us." In the background of this pond reflection is the church, which indicates the reflection of the institution, the abandoned (or embraced) construct itself. Here, the bleached Ponyboy and more conservative-looking Johnny stand, reflected, next to the abandoned institution, which is their former identities and new identities. Their new identities remain, even if they feel cracked and/or upside down. They have to go back into the church for the night, back into the party that is Halloween. Is this a parade? I think it is. We are beginning to realize that physical appearances and style are not as important as the mental and emotional fortitude of these greaser characters. Through it

all, throughout the hardship and struggle, Johnnycake encourages Ponyboy to “stay gold” after all. This affirmation of staying gold connects with a beatdown hipster with a heart of gold’s tendency to look forward, to keep going with head down, remain progressive minded, to then invert the American consumption ethic, to conserve the environment and recycle manmade objects and even (good) ideas. This speaks to these Tulsa greasers as a vital national allegory, as rebels who possess something other than money and socioeconomic status. To stay gold is to hold on to a hipster integrity. The Halloween costume confuses this here, but the main heart and spirit of these greasers remain, which is the main point. Money can’t buy toughness. Money can’t buy authenticity. Money can’t buy an anti-hero. Money can’t necessarily make someone cool. Not in Tulsa because alternative status is what we’re after *in essence* even if the Blue Dome Zone makes a lot of cash. An alternative from Oklahoma City and the suburbs that manifests into these dive bars, in vegan restaurants, at loft parties, on bicycles, on the side of street. Especially on the side of the street with dreams of authentic creativity and toughness. Art, music, and writing; stolen cigarettes, cheap beer, and diversity of thought. A steadfastness of thought to “stay gold” even on the concrete in the shadows. To realize one’s identity and hold gold and true to one’s self. To celebrate the clash yet see past the clash.

This is all retro-vintage anyhow.



## 10.4 (3)

In the culmination (call it a climax) of the film, Dally shoplifts from a convenience store and gets gunned down in the park late at night. His gun wasn't loaded but he is perceived as a threat by the cops, so they shoot him dead. As is often and historically the (neo)bohemian hipster-rebel-misfit subcultural situation: perception is reality. Some people just don't like the looks of you. This, in all of its FF Coppola/Matt Dillon glory, presents a clichéd penultimate moment of a hipster cool and tuff rebel. Enter James Dean dying in a fastcar accident here. Enter Hendrix taking sleeping pills and dying in his sleep. Enter the kid in *West Side Story* who dies via switchblade. Dally is the archetypal rebel here, and Coppola treats him as such. *Yet/and it is happening in Tulsa*. He runs from the convenience store to the park. He has already been shot in the side by the convenience store clerk. He runs along the hill in the park. Smoke drifts through the park and around him and the cars. It is dream-like, otherworldly, yet Dally is uber-familiar as a rebellious Tulsa teenager. Archetypal, mythical. The cops pull up, start shooting at him. He exclaims: "You will never get me alive!" This is a tried/tired and true last statement as is his wrongful death by police guns. This is a regular, familiar story. The police gun down a teenager wrongfully. The misunderstood teenager and/or romanticized misfit-criminal dies via racist and/or power-tripping cop. Guns are abundant and ablazin', and the audience feels bad for him, the victim, this Tulsa teenager.

The audience, also, in some square Soc-like cases, does not feel bad for him. Coppola then heightens this response/depiction to that of visual myth with a lot of smoke and lights and sirens and dark instrumental music. There is a lot of crawling on the street (by Matt Dillon) before death. The stakes are raised higher; this is on the big screen, on

the side of our wall, in the middle of the green space in the park, in front of our punk rock stage. There are a lot of gunshots. Dally/Matt Dillon has his under t-shirt off. He is in a jean jacket, hairless teenage chest exposed. This Matt Dillon-as-Dally-the-greaser then rolls onto his back and dies. Carmine Coppola's dark soundtrack plays all the while. The other greasers can't believe Dally has died. They stand there in the middle of the street in shock. Tom Cruise (a.k.a. Steve) looks especially hurt and dumbfounded. All told, Coppola has presented us with this. Call it a death and a response. Hinton presents us with this as well, but Coppola gives us added detail: the smoke/fog, the blood, the looming cigarette smoke, the retro police cars, the jean jacket, even Matt Dillon down the grassy decline of the park into the Tulsa neighborhood street. He has made it larger, more memorable, more pronounced. Easier to tattoo on your arm or heart. More quotable and projectable. The myth has been visually and fantastically extended. We mourn for our Tulsa rebel and cheer for his rebirth—in the form of other films and neighborhoods, et al. Other screens and retro nights and punk shows and rest stops.

\*

Here the myth of the fantastical Tulsa rebel teenager dies, or at least one version of it dies. This is a death and rebirth. The fantasy dies, and from here, Ponyboy goes about his life. His dream, or at least one dream, as a greaser who fits in with the group has died. From here we move onto *Rumble Fish*. In *Rumble Fish*, Motorcycle Boy also gets shot dead by a cop, but a different dream of confusion dies there. If *The Outsiders* presents a rigid culture clash then Dally represents one solid loud side of the clash. The superficially no-good hipster-hood who actually has a heart of gold once you get past the deviance and the curse words and cigarettes and the bravado and even Matt Dillon

himself. This paradigm-dynamic will also come up later in my sections on the Blue Dome, but it's just that these days a "Soc"-type person now can be seen wearing a t-shirt with Dallas Winston's face on it; this same square can buy an *Outsiders* cigarette case, watch *The Outsiders* on retro night during Happy Hour. Participants in this sector, hipsters and squares/neo-Socs alike also believe in the myth/fantasy of the rebel at times. At times they believe in Dally.

They believe in Motorcycle Boy. They even at times believe in Matt Dillon and Mickey Rourke. As they also believe in Steve McQueen, James Dean, and Elvis and Patti Smith. Yet, at other times they do not believe in these rebels. At other times they believe in them ironically, paradoxically, sometimes without earnestness. They wear James Dean's face on their t-shirts. They play an Elvis antique pinball game. They watch Steve McQueen in *Bullitt* (1968) on retro night at the retro bowling alley bar. They graffiti "the Motorcycle Boy Reigns" on the side wall of a coffee shop. This is both earnest and not earnest. Both modern and postmodern. Both hip and square.

Yet at certain times they do earnestly believe in Ponyboy and Dally before he gets shot dead. They do believe in rebelling against Oklahoma City and the heteronormativity of the suburbs. They seek the danger and the grit and the grease of run-down buildings and deviant thoughts and behaviors that just don't completely fall over the edge. To get close to the edge is cool. Tulsa Cool takes in the lessons of *The Outsiders* for its clashes and for its hybrid that fits into the gentrification of the imaginary—as a film that mashes up historical/nostalgic Tulsa—and Tulsa Cool embraces *The Outsiders* as license and confirmation for rebellion: as an overlapping mixture and duplication/repetition of rebellion on film, in the street, and in our minds. We celebrate our greasers, and we want

to stay gold like these parentless Tulsa greasers who eat chocolate cake and drink beer for breakfast and who slum it on hardwood floors. We all in one way or another want this because, as Ponyboy says, “things are rough all over.”

## CHAPTER 11: KNIFE FIGHT – SPECIFIC APPLICATION TO THE BLUE DOME ZONE

This story is not complete. This story is not complete without Mr. Blake Ewing, owner of a retro-themed bar, Max’s Retro pub, a Blue Dome Zone bar that has vintage arcade games, skee-ball amusement machines, 3-4 projectors and screens that often play ‘80s and ‘90s classic pop cultural films and television shows such as *The Goonies* and *Saved by the Bell*, and a drink list with a couple dozen cocktail names with retro pop culture references. Ewing also owns Joe Momma’s, a pizza joint; Boomtown Tees, White Flag, Legends Dance Hall and Saloon, the Fur Shop, and the Phoenix—all places that keep the cool train of consumption coming, a train that often (for our purposes) begins and ends at the Blue Dome station. Ewing, who states he originally went to college to become an English teacher, ultimately deviated from this teenage/literature-infused dream and opened his first business Joe Momma’s in 2002.

Joe Momma’s credo: “We’re proud to be a local Tulsa based company, and are excited to use our restaurant to show off local artists on our walls and musicians on our stage.” Twelve years later, with his multiple businesses, he has become one of the primary contributors to this here found myth of the Dome. Even as a kid, living in his parents’ house in the South Tulsa suburbs, he had visions of downtown. He comments that his first job in high school was at a restaurant in downtown and that he has always had a heart-throb for Tulsa’s more authentic urban epicenter. This all sets the stage for a

fantasy, for a love affair—Mr. Ewing’s love affair with the nucleus of his town, which then complicates what happened in the winter of 2011. In December of 2011, Ewing published his “Open Letter to Tulsa Area Hipsters From Blake Ewing”<sup>454</sup> as an advertisement for the Max Retropub in the then current issue of *This Land Press*, a newspaper that one writer has described as a “‘new media’ publication that is 1/3 Oklahoma Gazette, 1/3 The New Yorker and 1/3 Grantland. Basically, it’s pretentious and hipster as hell, but in a totally fine and readable way.”<sup>455</sup> In his “Open Letter,” Ewing starts off with deadpan:

**Dearest Hipster,**

**First, let’s begin by clearing up a few things. I know that many of you out there do not want to be classified as a hipster. You don’t want to be the recipient of some arbitrary label placed on you by society. You’ll contend that just because you love independent music, thrift store clothing, facial hair, tattoos, Vans or Chucks, shop locally, reject labels and all things popular, it doesn’t mean you are a hipster...So, what I’m trying to say is, if you’re that person I described above, but don’t think you’re a hipster, this is for you.**

Ewing zeroes in on a crucial mindset and perception/depiction: any hipster worth his/her organic salt does *not* want to be labeled—not as hipster or beat nor mod nor emo, hippie, goth, or greaser. Once you are labeled then you are *done*, in the mass-ive waters, just a fad and a trend and a cartoon via Disney; yet/and, he does list off the hipster uniform, the tendencies: the tattoos, facial hair, Vans (shoes), et al. This provides a commentary on, a loud criticism of, alternative consumption and/or big-time buying habits. In Ewing’s mind, hipsters consume in particular ways, in ways that set them apart *and* bring them together sometimes in an alternative sphere of conformity. This is artistic and this is complicated because creativity is not easily sold at the mall. The *artistic* is not an item on

a shelf at Wal-Mart, yet there are still uniforms and tendencies for sale that abound.

Bohemia: Meet Neo. Ewing acknowledges this and pushes further:

**We opened the Max Retropub a little over a year ago. Hipsters (and people like them) rejoiced at the retro-themed bar with its arcade games and skee-ball machines. Our unclean, greasy-haired, heavily tattooed bartenders made you feel welcome and our old games and music took you back to your childhood. Our cheap PBR, Olympia, Stroh's, and Colt 45 delighted your ironic sensibilities. We had done something special. We made a cool little bar that offered something different. The downtown scene and the hipsters who keep it alive embraced the Max.**

Here, in a more earnest tone, Ewing articulates the hipster *contribution* to downtown and to his Retropub in particular. These folks were contributing to a scene, all (faux)alternative variables intact—"the music that took you back to your childhood," the cheap "ironic" beer, the old games, even the intentionally hired "greaser" bartenders—but Ewing then notes a *change*. Something *has changed* and now he is *aware*, or at the very least he is afraid of losing squib, losing customers and ultimately a key locus for an emergent scene. He likes, it seems, what the Max was, and/yet he doesn't like this change of sensibilities, this loss of authenticity, this dissolution and convolution of a particular aura. He states:

**Over the course of the year something happened. As our downtown area continued to grow and attract new and different types of people, The Max's crowd started to change. Friday and Saturday nights brought a world of unique personalities to The Blue Dome District. Some of those personalities didn't mix well with our hipsters. Often times, on a Friday night, we'd see some sort of class war between the Chads and Ashleys and their hipster counterparts. Other nights, south Tulsans wearing extra medium Affliction shirts would enter the Max, causing the once comfortable hipsters to flee.**

**This problem has caused me a great deal of concern. Hipsters (or people like them), are the ones who built the Max. It was created with you in mind. You're the ones who support us on Mondays and Wednesdays when the Chads and Affliction guys are at the gym or playing C league softball. You knew about the Max before it was cool. It's what you do. You set trends. You have your fingers on the pulse. Your creative and artistic sensibilities are a valuable part of our community and your affinity for clever, ironic places keeps us on our toes. I'm not patronizing you here. Hipsters (and people like them) make our city special. I want you around, especially at the Max. I'm sorry that things have gone this way. We'll do better.**

Ewing loads his guns here, his patronizing and non-patronizing barrels. He says, "I want you around," but only after criticizing hipsters in his own all-but-subtle way. He takes a risk by insulting *everybody* and then sort of apologizing to some people. On the one hand he seems to value and appreciate local artists, some of their styles and contributions to Tulsa (in downtown foremost), but with a wink and a nod (he is loudly and publicly ironic here himself) he also points out the counterculture-mass culture obvious/oblivious: some hipsters, in homogeneous fashion, are falling into the same conformist traps as the South Tulsa square Chads and Ashleys, which presents a common complaint of the squares-Socs: *it's not different if everyone looks and acts the same*. Yes, but/also underlying this, refuting and confusing this, is Ewing's regard for the creative, the *actually* creative and interesting, whatever that may mean to him. Call it an acute perception, an awareness of the new, a desire for the cutting edge of the mass void—the appreciation of the creative/artistic and even clever and ironical—and this then presents the heart of Ewing's frustrations/conundrum/art-commerce quagmire-snafu: *Can a mass-void have an edge?* The Max was cool for a little while, people *in the know* even patronized (i.e. consumed) there for a time, but it didn't take long for the masses to come,



and it didn't take much longer than that for the patronization (i.e. scorn) *and* hipster exodus, however equally conformist or non-conformist those hipsters were and/or are; for, one must know: if you build a Hipster Temple, the masses will probably come, and/yet then the original hipsters (some/most/all) will then get pissed and leave. This is a tried and true hipster game, and this is how it usually works and goes: A cultural pattern, and, all satire and winks aside, Ewing has a problem with it, apparently, with this exodus; clearly he would rather see these skinny-jeaned-tattoo-junkies frequenting his establishments over the Chads and Ashleys of South Tulsa; after all, Ewing himself, having grown up in South Tulsa with a literary affliction of his own, fled to downtown and its dreamscapes as quickly as he could as well. He wanted to shed his own Affliction/Chad-Ashley associations and become part of something, be a part of a scene, be a main contributor and player of/in the scene—thus, Ewing's confusion, his snafu, this current clash of Profit and Cool.

He wants to make money, but he also wants a *more* authentic artistic and creative scene for his downtown Tulsa, which does plead our query: Was this letter effective in perpetuating this mythos and heterotopic dream? It depends which hipster one talks to and how many PBRs and/or Colt 45s s/he has had. It depends on which retro film we are watching. In a later interview in the *Greater Tulsa Reporter*, Ewing mentions: "I want to create a scene that makes people want to leave their South Tulsa homes and drive downtown for a night." And: "To our creative kids, we want them to know, 'We care about you here [at the Max and in the Blue Dome Zone.]' You don't have to go to Nashville or to Austin to get respected." Thus, more irony: Ewing grew up in South Tulsa but he wants to be the Hipster Moses for others with a creative and/or artistic bent or

urge, if only for a night; he wants to say *he cares* about *this*, yet he pokes fun at the sacred hipster *style*; thus, yes, Ewing cares, but he also *does not care* that much. Or, maybe he cares *too much*. Which may or may not be cool. I wonder if any bar owners in Nashville and/or Austin, two contemporary hipster/neo-bohemian capitals, have ever constructed a public letter such as this one? In the last part of that “Open Letter”, he writes:

**So here’s what we’re going to do...We’re going to commit to make Sunday through Thursday “Hipster Days.” They’re all yours. Each of our specials will cater to you. It’s our way of saying “Thank You.” You made us who we are. They may have taken your weekends from you, but the rest of the week is all yours. Effective December 1<sup>st</sup>, we’re bringing back a full menu of food from our new grill and implementing these specials. Come enjoy.**

**Sunday – Sunday Funday**

80’s Board Games (with hipster-themed prizes) and \$2 Jumbo Hot Dogs.

**Monday – Manic Mondays**

Skee-Ball Tourney, \$1 Red Bull (Buy the shot and mix it yourself) and \$1 Sliders. Music with Mike Williams and John Morland [I assume these are hipsters.].

**Tuesday – Free Play Tuesdays**

All arcade games are free all day long.

**Wednesday – Mac & Cheese Buffet**

\$5 All you can eat Mac & Cheese. Top it yourself with seasonings, bacon crumbles, little smokies, or SPAM.

**Thursdays – 80’s Ladies Night**

22oz. High Life in your own hot pink MAX stadium cup for \$2. (A portion of Thursday sales go to Breast Cancer Research.) \$2 Jumbo Hot Dogs and 80’s Rom-Coms on all the screens.

**Every Day – Half Price Hipster Hookup**

Half price PBR for people with three or more tattoos, piercings other than the ears, a bicycle, a full beard, Vans, Chucks, skinny jeans, cardigan sweaters, or mustaches.

As one can imagine, certain select hipster-types did not take kindly to Ewing's wink wink nudge nudge. Also in the pages of *This Land*, Holly Wall wrote an article titled "**Knife Fight in the Blue Dome District: A Modern-Day Outsiders.**"<sup>456</sup>

Whoah; this here/wait here/this *here*...for my purposes, for our purposes, *is telling*. A "Modern-Day Outsiders"? Check. *The clash returns*, at least for a little while; greasers vs. Socs has now been replaced with Pissed-Off Hipsters vs. South Tulsa Afflictions and Pseudo-Hipster Bar Owners. *The Outsiders* is Modern. One member of the former group responded swiftly to Ewing's "Open Letter." Anonymous "Patrick" writes:

**First, let me clear some things up. "Hipsters" and "people like them" (as you so eloquently put it) did not build The Max. Honestly, they didn't even frequent it when it was all shiny and brand new...**

**Ironically (and I say that ironically) you took the time to pen an open letter that could have been an apology for bussing in douche bags and bros on the weekends (a necessary evil we all know we'll have to live with if downtown is going to flourish) and instead took that opportunity to start a Sunday through Thursday marketing campaign. An irrational last ditch effort to get the very people you openly scoffed (the hipster) to swarm in and help your bottom line...**

**Honestly, I think that what you're failing to understand here is that you are not like us. You're a southey, a Soc (yes, midtown is too far) and we can spot a fake from a mile away. This means you're never going to get our money or our support. Don't let this dissuade you. You can bring your fellow Philistines downtown on the weekends to spend their money and fight each other in our streets, but we expect them to go home afterwards. This is our truce, our turf war in the park.**

This incensed writer, who was basically anonymous, just named "Patrick" on Facebook but with a gagillion hipster followers then went further:

**“(If you have any character what-so-ever you won’t focus on marketing to fucking hipsters. This, because hipsters above all else, are a social group that universally loathe any establishment trying to tell them what is cool, what to do or what to buy.”**

“[H]ipsters ... are a social group that ... loathe any establishment trying to tell them what is cool ... or what to buy.” Patrick, Patrick, Patrick: You are neck-deep in our dream, in our fantasy of Art, Bohemia, and Hipster. Authenticity is *very* important for you, as you mention: Ewing is a *fake*—a *Soc*, you say. Ewing, the now labeled “uncool d-bag Soc businessman” then responded. (This is a knife fight in the Blue Dome after all.). Ewing:

[Quoting Holly Wall] **He said The Max has seen some “interesting social class battles” since the south Tulsa weekenders started mixing with the downtown-dwelling hipsters. “The hipsters made downtown what it is and are the ones who hang downtown during the weekdays. It wasn’t meant as an insult to hipsters,” he wrote. “I knew what I was doing when I bought the ad. The angry and opinionated hipsters will stretch the value of my dollar by blogging it and tweeting it and discussing it with all of their friends for me, and everyone else will see that I have a long track record of appreciating and supporting local artists of all kinds, and that I create unique locally owned businesses and dedicate my life to making our downtown something unique and special. It wasn’t meant as some laugh out loud joke, though it was written with a wink and a smile. It wasn’t meant to degrade hipsters. Why would I want to do that? I’m confident that most of the local hipster community knows that I care about them and that I credit them for making our city unique and special. They know that I really want them to feel appreciated at my establishments. This Land has never run an ad that has created so much chatter . . . which is the intent.**

*...are artists hipsters? are hipsters artists? is everybody?*

And, the grit is in the clash, a complicated configuration of art and pseudo-art; Ewing both says this all would “stretch the value of my dollar” and that he also appreciates and supports “local artists of all kinds.” He states: “It wasn’t meant as a laugh out loud joke, though it was written with a wink and a smile.” Patronizing? Maybe.

Maybe not. Ironic? Probably. A battle over turf? Most definitely. Most definitely kind of. Yet, Ewing's letter doesn't matter as much as Anonymous Patrick Hipster's response letter matters, at least for my/your purposes. Anonymous Hipster cites a "turf war" with the "douche bags"/bros/southeys/Socs/ Midtowners/ Philistines, and *he means it*. This war is *in earnest*. He doesn't want them there though he concedes this is "a necessary evil ... if downtown is going to flourish." Though, he urges these d-bags to go home after their weekend nights in the Dome, to leave the weekdays for Hipster Fare; for, what's a *weekend* to a hipster? *Answer*: Monday through Friday afternoon. Friday night through Sunday day s/he spends while drinking PBR and watching David Lynch and Jim Jarmusch films at home. Or, better yet, these weekends are spent as bartenders and waiters for the mentioned d-bags!

This: All of *this*: Weekend Warriors, True Hipsters, Turf Wars, a "Midtown" bar-owner who supports the arts and wants to generate serious coin? This buffet is complicated because in reality *an easy binary/opposite clash does not exist*, and this is where the likes of *Rumble Fish* and muddled/muddied authenticity and illusive dreams come in. Where *The Outsiders* doesn't actually fit that well; sorry, Holly Wall; sorry, Anonymous Patrick. In reality, in the complex matrix of flesh and buildings, it's not always easy to tell the difference (if there is a difference) between a hipster and a southy, a bro from a cool guy, or even a pseudo-hipster from a serious artist/hipster. In waking flesh and tangible buildings it is not always easy to deduce what constructs a pure hipster scene or *spot*. The fashions have blended often times, the ideas have mixed, the codes/signs/messages have been kneaded, woven, and jumbled, *as have the businesses and their owners*. Blake Ewing is part of the confusion, the muddied downtown Tulsa. Is

he innovative? I would say *Yes*. Is he creative? I would say *Yes*? Does he support the arts? *Yep. I guess*. Does he want a free-flow of coin? *You betcha*. Is he an asshole. *Perhaps*. Is he a Soc? *I don't know*. Is he a hipster? *Who cares? Maybe. He is kind of overweight to be a hipster, but he does have some of the characteristics*. Regardless, what the Max offers here is a place for confusion, a liminal space to project your Hip, to *leave* your un-hip, to hip check, to call *not hip enough*—to adopt/adapt your identity. Downtown Hipsters/South Tulsan; greasers/Socs: They all borrow and bleed with another because they *all* seek to *escape* into the Dome (for however long), and perhaps Ewing and his establishments embody/show this best of all. Perhaps Anonymous Patrick needs more confusion. Perhaps he needs to (re)watch *Rumble Fish*.

Alas/did I mention: There is confusion? Life is an illusion? *Fantasies have flourished here*, in this exchange. This is not rational. This is all too rational. Did I also mention that Blake Ewing is a Tulsa City Councilman? *No?* Well, then, be sure to look for commentary on the local American/Tulsa government and its role in neo-neo-bohemian hipsterdom in the sequel to this dissertation. Ralph Macchio is going to star as Mr. Blake Ewing himself!

Working Title:

*Knife Fight in the Blue Dome!*

CHAPTER 12: POSTMODERN RUMBLE AND BUFFET. AFTER THE FALL.  
AFTER THE GLORY. AND INTO GENTRIFICATION.

“We all have these spaces that we either dream about . . . and[/or] somehow fit into the dream . . . and these are mine.” – Francis Ford Coppola on *Rumble Fish*<sup>457</sup>

“If *Rumble Fish* fails as a traditional movie about real people, it is beguiling as an exercise in hallucinatory style.” –RC, *Time Bomb*<sup>458</sup>

Even though the two films were shot back-to-back in Tulsa in 1982 with much of the same cast and crew, right from the opening of *Rumble Fish* (1983), it’s easy to decipher this is a very different film from *The Outsiders*. We see a black and white film, clouds are passing quickly in fast motion across the sky, and we hear the fast loud chimes of Stewart Copeland’s soundtrack. The film cuts to a steel sign in the shape of an arrow with the words “The Motorcycle Boy Reigns” crudely scrawled on it. We then see a brick building with the same phrase graffitied in large letters across its outside wall. An establishing shot of the Tulsa downtown skyline is seen, from the north side, from the vantage point of a person standing in the Blue Dome Zone, amid the blight, which localizes our particular awareness. Our main characters are now situated in the (future) Blue Dome Zone, to the north and east of downtown. Then, knowing we are in the bastion of our (pre)gentrification (of the) imaginary/reality/transformation, we then see the sign “Benny’s Billiard’s” in the window of an establishment, a peculiar diner and poolhall. The first character we see is Midget, played by a young Laurence Fishburne,

donned in Panama hat, white suit, skinny tie. He walks into this diner-pool hall. The owner Benny (played by Tom Waits) is on the phone and swatting flies with his right hand. Midget walks up to Rusty James (played by Matt Dillon), one of our protagonists in this film, who is playing pool with his friends, a colorful cast of misfit-looking teenagers.

"Yo, Rusty James. Biff Wilcox is looking for you, Rusty James," Midget tells him.

"I'm not hiding," Rusty James says.

Rusty James's friends, Smokey, Steve, BJ, and a few others huddle around a booth and the countertop of this place. They have a debate about Rusty James's impending fight with Biff Wilcox, and we then understand, via their conversation(s), that the gang wars of *The Outsiders* days are long gone—and that this group's leader The Motorcycle Boy (played by Mickey Rourke) has been gone for two months. His younger brother, Rusty James doesn't know when he will return. The boys are perplexed, the gang has been dismantled.

\*

Coppola's labor of love, *Rumble Fish* remains a more influential and even strangely more accurate representation of the current neo-bohemian Blue Dome Zone versus the more commercial *The Outsiders* (both the novel and the film) because, among other reasons, of the film's characters' flux of identities—which is due in part to the fluctuations/confusions of class status, race/ethnicity, and physical style(s) in the film. This character identity flux along with the gentrification-inspiring aesthetics of urban Tulsa and the progressive hipster ways of Motorcycle Boy in the film more accurately



resemble the modern (post)gentrification “grit-as-glamorous” conditions of the Blue Dome Zone, a place that celebrates and reaps benefits off of the fantasies and aesthetics of a gritty and dilapidated downtown area. Coppola’s cinematic fantasies here then create a more representative template for our localized reality—a reality that shows a collection of misfits in downtown Tulsa diners, bars, flop apartments, and post-industrial environs. These subjects catalyze the conversion of urban Tulsa into an alternative and even more real-seeming zone of homegrown entertainment and creative consumption practices that all the while holds on to and perpetuates the industrial strongholds of the place.

#### 12.1 The Neo-Bohemian Inspirations of *Rumble Fish*: The impetus of a Pre-Gentrification Fantasy for Gentrification

While *The Outsiders*’ teenage rebels in a neighborhood speak mainly to our pre-gentrification Tulsa conditions/parameters, *Rumble Fish* more crucially represents the urban gentrification inspiration/aesthetics for the Blue Dome Zone now. Again, of the two films, Coppola is better known for *The Outsiders*, as it continually serves as a classic film for a young generation of moviegoers. It was a box office hit at the time of release and continues to be successful; his recently released 25th Anniversary digitally remade edition of the film that has an added 22 minutes of originally deleted scenes along with a hipper soundtrack has done incredibly well in DVD and Blue Ray sales. Even though he used much of the same cast and crew in Tulsa two weeks after the filming of *The Outsiders* completed, Coppola’s more experimental, more daring *Rumble Fish*, however, did not do nearly as well as *The Outsiders*; *Rumble Fish* was a commercial flop and heavily criticized by film reviewers at the time of its release. “Smoke billows. Fog settles,” Rita Kempley writes. “Mist rises. [Coppola] was trying to break through realism

. . . But what he's done is use too much dry ice." Stephen Dalton: "Misery, lawlessness and violence are served up matter-of-factly to palates presumably so jaded by screen violence that it seems there are no squeamish stomachs left among the prepubescent."<sup>459</sup>

However, Coppola held steadfast to his idea that for young audiences "*Rumble Fish* will be to *The Outsiders* what *Apocalypse Now* was to *The Godfather*" for older audiences, meaning it's the more controversial and misunderstood film.<sup>460</sup> "No doubt: this is his most baroque and self-indulgent film," RC of *Time* writes. "It may also be his bravest."<sup>461</sup>

Nowadays, Coppola's sentiments are validated in that *Rumble Fish* is understood in a new celebratory light by hipsters and cultural avatars. The *Tulsa Voice*, Tulsa's free/independent/alternative newspaper, put forth a June of 2014 article titled "Do this: The summer bucket list you've always wanted. A checklist of the best things to do in Tulsa this summer." Coming in at #10 on this "bucket list" is the following:

**10 // Re-enact a scene from *Rumble Fish***

In the early 1980s, Francis Ford Coppola was inspired by Tulsa, by S.E. Hinton and her writing. He and Hinton wrote the script for *Rumble Fish*, his unsettling, avant-garde movie starring Mickey Rourke as Motorcycle Boy and Matt Dillon as Rusty James, while filming *The Outsiders*. Coppola's black-and-white tale of teenage angst in Tulsa flopped at the box office. But the three decades later critics and Tulsans have learned to love this strangely compelling gem. Trek off the beaten RiverParks path underneath the 21st Street Bridge, where a few scenes from the movie were shot. Now, the area is filled with happy day-drinking spots like Elwood's and the Blue Rose Café. In coming years, this area will be developed like crazy with A Gathering Place, a multi-multi-million-dollar park extravaganza, slated to open in 2015. // *Jennie Lloyd*<sup>462</sup>

Jennie Lloyd pushes the desire to visit the underside of the 21<sup>st</sup> Street Bridge, a rundown cement, steel, gravel and debris-strewn site with graffiti of "The Motorcycle Boy Reigns" along with other tags and murals, but then she also tellingly mentions the nearby "happy

day-drinking spots” and plans for “a multi-multi-million-dollar park extravaganza” in the surrounding area. A person can then drink a cocktail on the patio of the Blue Rose Café while looking off to the underbelly of the 21<sup>st</sup> Street Bridge, meanwhile fantasizing about Motorcycle Boy and Rusty James from *Rumble Fish*. Jennie Lloyd’s desire then alludes to our fantasy and complication of gentrification and of *Rumble Fish*’s place on this arc as a representation of a more authentic pre-gentrification Tulsa milieu. Various patrons desire to visit these *Rumble Fish* sites, both physically and in their minds.

I also know firsthand from talking to numerous local artists/hipsters in Tulsa that *Rumble Fish* often gets celebrated as the prototypical hip representation of Tulsa Cool (much more so than *The Outsiders*), and this is largely because of Hinton’s more well-rounded, edgier characters along with Coppola’s avant-garde adaptation of Tulsa’s urban setting. In truth, Blake Ewing and Anonymous Patrick had it wrong.

Bars and clubs in the Blue Dome Zone notably and frequently project *Rumble Fish* on their walls, as part of retro night or just as part of an earnest/authentic/expected ambience. I have seen the film in such establishments numerous times, and I have spoken with many young Tulsa hipsters who love the film. This film provides a visual mantra for these Tulsa hipsters, who perpetuate it and its styles/messages. Unlike the more residential neighborhood constructions of *The Outsiders*, *Rumble Fish* relies more on the jagged urban portions of Tulsa—the shady underbellies of highway bridges, boarded-up and abandoned downtown spaces, hedonism in seedy bars and establishments: propositions by hookers, and the public snorting of cocaine and other junk, et al.

*Rumble Fish* then more graphically depicts what I call the pre-gentrified urban Blue Dome Zone, a depiction that is still maintained and celebrated in the Blue Dome as

a place of glamorous grit and celebrated albeit now often commercialized subversion. Coppola himself states: “Tulsa was a city of very varied and interesting urban sounds . . . train-yards and industrial sounds and you could go out there and record all kinds of textures.” In fact, interestingly and in contrast, the famous French filmmaker and photographer Chris Marker, who was hired to photograph preliminary scenes for *Rumble Fish*, found Tulsa to be *too* urban, too gritty, too ugly. Originally hired to take these establishing plates for the film, he lasted in Tulsa for *only one week*. Coppola states that Marker was appalled and had remarked about Tulsa and its horrors: “This is an ugly city and I can’t do it.” Coppola mentions, “He left and went back to France.” Some people, including this groundbreaking French cinematic essayist, do not find Tulsa’s gritty urbanity appealing. It’s not San Francisco (or New York or Chicago), and it sure as hell ain’t Paris. Marker perhaps couldn’t see past his leftist pretension; he couldn’t understand what could possibly be alluring (even beautiful) about a tough/rough-looking and historically conservative Oklahoma city that was long past its oil industry-related prime. But Coppola for his part states that he “loves” Tulsa and its “urban tough neighborhood[s]” and that after Marker had left, the second unit did a fine job with the shots. Coppola even regards *Rumble Fish* as one of his two favorite films he has made (*The Conversation* [1974] being the other one). Marker and Coppola remained friends, though, for a long time after this mentioned Tulsa Trauma. However, I guess they only got together in France.

## 12.2 Style

S.E. Hinton's third young adult novel *Rumble Fish* and Coppola's film of the same name depict and utilize fewer sociologically-subculturally modernist elements: fewer codes, symbols, and styles that fit into strict categories of/for identity formation. With these texts, there is more sociological and critical confusion and difficulty, less certainty about a character's identity or even a character's place in time. The film's time period is difficult to decipher. The novel loosely depicts the early-to-mid 1970s, but the novel and film (especially) also proffer a buffet of time period styles—the 1940s through the 1980s, roughly—not just the strict 1950s-type styles and tone(s) of *The Outsiders*. Also, the easy class and racial distinctions of *The Outsiders* no longer exist in *Rumble Fish*.

As *The Outsiders* represents a more relatively wholesome depiction of a straightforward class struggle of “us against them,” the greasers versus the Socs,” *Rumble Fish* presents for us along with the Blue Dome Zone's and Tulsa's patrons, specifically—much like *The Man with the Golden Arm* does for its adult readers regarding Wicker Park and Chicago—a more complicated, arguably more authentic, and diverse/heterogeneous version of the rough and tuff Tulsa urban neighborhoods and city overall. The styles of the characters in *Rumble Fish* vary, from the motorcycle leather daddy to the punk to the disco to the mod to the preppie. Likewise, as the film is in black and white color, and a spectrum of races and ethnicities is often confusedly represented in this film, we can't easily put these characters into categories because many of them have combinations/confusions of styles and appearances. The main character Rusty James wears a rhinestone-covered bandana around his head, a white tank top undershirt, a long

leather wristband, khaki pants, white '80s-style tennis shoes, and a small hoop earring; his girlfriend Patty (played by Diane Lane) sports a parochial Catholic school outfit before trading it in for a glamorous evening gown; Rusty James's friends have mixed attires: Smokey wears a *West Side Story*/1950s-style gang/club jacket with *Wild Deuces* in puffy lettering on the back of it<sup>463</sup> and coifs his hair in basically a pompadour; Benny dons an Asian-style long-sleeve silk shirt and a conductor's cap; BJ sports leather gloves, a cut-off leather jacket, and Converse All-Star tennis shoes; Midget has a skinny tie to accompany his smooth suit and fedora; Steve tucks his simple collared shirt into his jeans in a conservative fashion; and, Biff Wilcox has the face and hair of a young Johnny Rotten, but his wardrobe looks like he might be in the 1980s New Wave synthpop group Duran Duran. All of these characters look different from one another. Coppola states about his choices: "[I said:] let's dress all the boys differently ... [make] them each styled differently." So, the styles of these characters differ, and, notably, each character changes his/her style as the film moves along, making it very difficult for the viewer to pigeonhole or label a character's identity. A kid could be a punk one day and a preppie the next. The fluctuation becomes evident, even in Coppola's black-and-white film, as these characters enter into their respective individual realms as bricoleurs in revolving contexts of bricolage and phantasmagoria and retro-chic—in a reality that nods to other time periods and imagines hybrids for the future Zone(s).

The setting of *Rumble Fish* takes place *after* the glory days of *The Outsiders* 1950s-type Tulsa wherein gang fights were clear-cut and frequent. *Rumble Fish* in this vein represents what historians could call *post-lapsarian*. In a historical-literary sense, we are now *after* the *fall*—after Tulsa's oil-boom prosperity/decadence and after the

glory days and after Dallas “Dally” Winston in *The Outsiders* has been killed. After the split-up of the street gangs. Ponyboy has assumedly gone to college and now has a cushy job in a bank or an insurance agency. Rusty James, the main character of *Rumble Fish*, is 14-years old in the novel and 17-years old in the film and played by a young Matt Dillon, who, in true heteroglossic glory, also plays Dally in Coppola’s *The Outsiders*. Dillon is reborn here in *Rumble Fish* with a new look and a new swagger—“Rusty James is Dallas but taken much much further,” Coppola states—and, Dillon/Rusty James here now possesses a combination of styles: his 1980s-style haircut in the film clashes with his leather jacket one day and his conservative suit vest another day. He doesn’t nicely fit into say a *greaser* category or even *any* category. He does long for and have nostalgia for the days of old with the gangs—“loyalty” is said to be “his only vice”—but his reality is one of an identity and by extension a world and city that are less hopeful and more confused, less defined; for, unlike the ending of *The Outsiders* where the good guys (mostly) win and Ponyboy has triumphed after death and struggle, *Rumble Fish* the novel ends with Rusty James heading to a reformatory and leaving Tulsa for good. This less-than-ideal ending coincides with Frankie Machine’s grim flophouse hanging at the end of *The Man with the Golden Arm*. The reader/viewer of *Rumble Fish*, young or old, is left with a sense of unease about the affairs and fate of the outsider-as-rebel protagonist.<sup>464</sup>

We don’t know where we can exactly place him. His identity is in question. His fate is in question. His goodness is in question. We wonder whom we should root for and where we are. Rusty James’s uncertain fluctuating identity has made us question our own identities. As it was with his greaser precursors, Rusty James should have just waited a

few years for the Blue Dome Zone to materialize. He could have fled Tulsa while staying in Tulsa.

### 12.3 Place/Space

The abandoned urban Tulsa residue was ripe for mixed identity construction through and among its buildings, emerging businesses, and participants, as the depicted places of *Rumble Fish* nod to future places of the Blue Dome Zone. Alongside the other places of the film such as a rundown flop apartment the boys live in, the underside of an industrial bridge, dive bars, old warehouses, and street carnivals (et al), the novel/film opens with Rusty James playing billiards, in a peculiar pool hall/diner combination named *Benny's Billiards*, and then getting into a fight in a vacant lot with Biff Wilcox, the mentioned Johnny Rotten/Robert Smith mash-up. As the novel/film progresses, Rusty James frequents disreputable bars and carouses around the city late at night in the role of the city night dweller, a flaneur of sorts with a tough/tuff attitude. One (notable) night Rusty James, his friend Steve, and Rusty James's older brother Motorcycle Boy experience a series of events in downtown Tulsa that one can describe as the urban epitome. The urban stereotype. Or, the urban essence. Sporadically in *Rumble Fish* we see quick aerial views of Cain's Ballroom in the distance, the (in)famous abandoned garage turned Tulsa music venue alongside abandoned warehouses/buildings, train tracks and gas stations. The Art deco architecture of Tulsa's downtown buildings lurk behind these other places and images of the area. Call *this* an urban snapshot or even a series of snapshots. After crossing the bridge to the "strip," the boys see a porn flick at a movie theater, Steve gets propositioned by a gay man in the bathroom and by a prostitute on the



street corner; they continue to walk the streets while drunk. Rusty James plays a Ms. Pac-Man video game, that 1980s staple, at an arcade. Cabs, bikers, and soldiers in uniform pass by on the street; junkies, mixed race and same-sex couples hold each other while walking by as well, and the fluorescent lights and the frenetic urban Tulsa energy abound.

The young men finally land in a loud, raucous, multi-ethnic bar where Motorcycle Boy impresses all with his skill with a pool cue. People dance to a live funk band. We see an up-close action shot of a saxophonist. Patrons openly snort cocaine. Everybody seems intoxicated, intoxicated with this “fantasy,” this spectacle; they are laughing and yelling and bouncing and clashing off each other. This bar is exciting. This bar is gritty. This bar is alternative, and this larger “strip” is *alternative*—at least very different from our days of greasers versus Socs.

Rusty James exclaims about his night-time environs: “[It’s] so cool over here, man! I hate our neighborhood. There’s no color!”

For Rusty this bar and this strip serve(s) as an alternative place, a *place to go—with color*. As I exemplify in detail later, the Blue Dome Zone of Tulsa now is also an alternative place to go and a place *of color*, which relates to Wicker Park in the 1990s, the Lower East Side in the 1960s, and even as what Sally Banes has written about Greenwich Village, New York, of the 1950s, that proto-bohemian sphere/epoch of yore: “Greenwich Village ... is an alternative community,” a place for people from other places wherein they did not fit in; Banes mentions the Village’s integration and progressive synthesis during this time, and one can say that Rusty James and company feel the same. The strip is obviously *not* 1950s Greenwich Village, but the strip resembles the Village in crucial ways, not least of which is its ethos and mythos of progressivism and a fantastical *other*

*than*, a place with comparatively fewer barriers and ambitions. Here the boys feel freer to love *and* consume whatever/whomever they choose. This provides alternative consumption; and, thus Rusty and the boys do appreciate the “color” of the place, the holism of this locale. One could bring in Norman Mailer’s “The White Negro” here along with Kerouac’s oft quoted *On the Road* lines regarding African Americans, but this would be reductionist. Yes, many African Americans (among others) are at this particular bar in the film, but this strip more broadly provides a carnival, a varied slew of characters and shades and styles. There are no strict dichotomies on the strip. It is impossible to determine exactly just who *the other* is. One of the ironic points of this black and white film is that the usual racial/ethnic separations are *too easy* here (or too complicated), that “color” for Rusty James goes much further than race—referring more accurately to the visceral, the frenetic, to inverted rotisserie shades of lightness and darkness, to the eclectic sideshow and buffet of alternative spindle-top. He has taken a look at the menu and now wants everything on the menu; or, better yet: There is no menu. There are no gangs. Only a realm where fantasy and reality have merged. This is not about colorblindness. This is about experience/acceptance, the confusions of experience and distinction. Where the Village begins and the Blue Dome ends. This is bricolage, bric-a-brac, phantasmagoria<sup>465</sup>; this is a spectacle, a subculture; this is a space—a meeting ground for a variegation of spectacles and subcultures. This is color. This is in black and white.

#### 12.4 Fantasies of Tulsa Cool: Motorcycle Boy

After passing out in the bar, and by themselves now, Rusty James and Steve walk home alone, only to get mugged by some badass thugs in an alleyway. These events, this urban *wonder* or even *miasma*, are not the typical young adult reader's/viewer's fare, for Hinton/Coppola (they wrote the screenplay together) takes the reader-viewer on a serious albeit dramatic and even fantastical tour of the possibly exciting and damaging perils of a Tulsa Night. "I just fantasized this," Coppola states. This was a "little carnival coming down a bridge." And, "I would like to visit this neighborhood." For, this is Coppola's fantasy of and for Tulsa, and thus this is now our fantasy of a neighborhood of openness and revelry; and this fantasy, this Rolodex of Hip, has also shaped the realities and subsequent fantasies of contemporary Tulsa and its participants; Coppola was one of the original architects of our Zone.<sup>466</sup>

What's *most* romantic and insidiously urban and contemporarily urban about all of this, this city dreamscape, gets personified in the character of Motorcycle Boy, who comes to the rescue of Rusty James and Steve soon after they have been mugged in the "dark, empty alley." He swiftly and suavely, even intellectually, kicks the asses of the two thugs. Motorcycle boots and sleeveless sweater vest intact. His cigarette burns to the concrete. Coppola was taken with the character of Motorcycle Boy while reading Hinton's novel and subsequently spotlighted this character (played by the young cool guy Mickey Rourke, who was around 30 years of age at the time) in his film. Coppola states he based Rourke's character on a picture of Albert Camus sitting on a motorcycle with a cigarette dangling out of the corner of his mouth, thus adding another layer to the rebel-

artist-bohemian motif and fantasy. “I guess I wanted [Motorcycle Boy/Rourke] to look like a French intellectual,” Coppola states, “as the enigmatic brother.”

Of course, Camus was pretty cool in his absurdist, existential way; and, in a similar way, Motorcycle Boy represents the anti-hero, the anti-*Outsiders* character who has helped get rid of the Tulsa gangs and wants nothing to do with the dope on the streets, even though he is nonjudgmental about these choices of others. He is perfect for this New City/Neighborhood fare. Motorcycle Boy, at times when he is not donning a sleeveless sweater vest, wears a tweed sport coat; he has short ruffled hair, he reads vigorously, has a high IQ, and is a loner albeit a legend in the city because of his intelligence *and* his reputation as an amazing fighter. He is *straight* in some ways (i.e. he is introverted and bookish and sober); yet, to the authorities (and to one cop in particular named Patterson), he is perceived as a subversive, non-conformist threat to the order of the neighborhood and city. “We’d all be better off if you stayed gone,” Patterson says, before stating to Rusty James about his brother: “He’s no hero.”

Even though he has ended the gang warfare, Motorcycle Boy is still known as an effective albeit dangerous leader for this smorgasbord-like kaleidoscope of misfits, including Rusty James. He is also a stellar and infamous pool player and a consistent smoker of cigarettes. He doesn’t drink. He talks softly. He is color blind, completely color blind (“not even greens and browns and yellows”), and he goes deaf sometimes, gets out of tune. He is tough and sensitive. Literate and street-wise. He got kicked out of school for making perfect scores on his tests. He functions as a cousin (maybe first cousin/maybe distant cousin) of James Dean/Jim in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) and Marlin Brando/Johnny in *The Wild One* (1953)—for, after all, Motorcycle Boy does ride

a motorcycle, he does look cool in his biker boots, and he does Hip-wise let a cool cigarette often dangle from his mellow lips. In these ways he serves as a hero for teenagers, at least initially, which puts him on the continuum of simulacra rebels that teenagers have loved/consumed since the second World War, as (again) is nicely articulated in *Rebels* by Leerom Medovoi.

But, Coppola enables Motorcycle Boy to *transcend* these other iconic characters in ways; for, the Motorcycle Boy is not the simple bad boy, not the easy stereotype. In response to the question, “What are you rebelling against?” he does not just snarl, “Whaddaya got?” as Brando does as Johnny. Motorcycle Boy, by comparison, is thoughtful, articulate yet soft spoken/quiet, bookish, and smart enough to pick and choose his rebellion. He likes a good time, but he does not lose himself in mindless intoxication and inarticulate violence as say the subjects of Larry Clark’s *Tulsa* perhaps do, and he is somehow cooler as a result, albeit he then arguably has less edge. His is a perhaps more digestible/stomachable edginess, which is the neo-bohemian way, and Coppola captures this transcendence/easy swallowing (at the very least) with his avant-garde film techniques and arrangements: with his *presentation* of Motorcycle Boy.

In one fight scene, Rourke/Motorcycle Boy gracefully moves like a ballet dancer (as choreographed by Michael Smuin, a former choreographer and co-director of the San Francisco Ballet at the time of the film’s making), thus blurring the lines between the rebel and artist on the Tulsa streets, which is neo-bohemian in that the outsider-eccentric deviant meets the stylistically graceful and creative. The artist meets the rebel. The dancer meets the fighter with *style*. This is our hybrid. For, if *Rumble Fish* is “the antidote of *The Outsiders*” (Coppola’s phrase) then Motorcycle Boy is the antidote of the

greasers and the Socs and the antidote of even James Dean and the young Marlin Brando. Motorcycle Boy is a new kind of hero, a neo-bohemian hero, because for starters he is against drugs and gangs yet still gets into “exotic fights” and functions as the postmodern “enigmatic brother.”<sup>467</sup> Quite a combination. One patron of the bar the young men go to during this aforementioned Tulsa night remarks about the Motorcycle Boy: “[He’s a] deep motherfucker, man, you know?” And: “He’s a prince, you know?” And: “He’s like royalty in exile, you know what I mean?” Last, Steve remarks: “Isn’t there anything he can’t do?” For, yes, it is true: *The Motorcycle Boy Reigns*.

But, he doesn’t want to. No, *the Motorcycle Boy does not want to reign*. He realizes his image is an illusion. The perceptions of him are misguided by fabrication and hearsay, or so he thinks. He tells his younger brother: “But I can’t be what I want any more than you can.” Rusty James sees a photograph of the Motorcycle Boy nonchalantly leaning up against his motorcycle in a national magazine and says he can’t wait to tell the other guys about it. Motorcycle Boy tells him not to, that he doesn’t want the added publicity and attention: “[I’m] tired of this Robin Hood, Pied Piper bullshit. I would rather stay the neighborhood novelty if it’s all the same to you.” Rusty James is thus confused; he does not understand his older brother’s indifference, for he idolizes his brother and says that the other guys would follow him anywhere. Motorcycle Boy questions this rationale: “Yeah, they’d all follow me to the river, huh, and just jump in?” Rusty James agrees, in earnest. Motorcycle Boy then counters with some advice: “If you are going to lead people you got to have somewhere to go.” Herein lies his problem: He doesn’t know what to do; he doesn’t know *where* to lead his followers. He may have an identity and even a myth (local and/or national) of his own, but he doesn’t know what to

do with it. Even his father says that Motorcycle Boy has been “miscast in a play” and that he was “born in the wrong era.” He sees in black and white, and thus he can literally see fewer differences in people, which is partially why he wanted to end the gang wars, the arbitrary separations. The cop Patterson thinks he’s crazy, but we know Motorcycle Boy isn’t insane, just “miscast”: ahead of his time, or at least ahead of the early 1980s. He lives a *postmodern* existence in a *modern* Tulsa, a gentrified existence in a pre-gentrified Tulsa. He is indicative of a hipster Tulsa artist of at least the 1990s with these mentioned styles and attitude, but he was literally too early here/there (on film in 1983 and of course 1975 when the novel came out) for Tulsa pre-Blue Dome Zone. The Blue Dome during the ‘70s and ‘80s was still largely abandoned and blighted, a place that very few people wanted to visit and patron. The Dome was waiting for the Motorcycle Boy to reign, for the complication to happen, for the multiple shades of hip and nod, for a new kind of cool, a new myth, and a confusion of myths. For fewer dichotomies. He would not remain a “neighborhood novelty” for long; and, as royalty, he could finally come out of exile.

### 12.5 The Confines and Freedoms of a Fantasy

What the Motorcycle Boy *does know* is that he wants to let the rumble fish in the pet shop free in the river. With this fairly innocuous motion, he strives to invert the bricolage, the semiotic order of things. He knows that if *he* jumps into the river or follows the river to the ocean that the spectacle will be too great, the signs will be too digestible, too *memorable*. All he can do is set the fish free and tell his brother to “take the cycle . . . follow the river clear to the ocean.” Motorcycle Boy realizes his true identity is dead, that

his reality is too far gone with the mythic fantasy, that his image/visage is now something *else*, yet he wants his brother to get out; he wants his brother and whomever else to break free of their confines of illusion, their overreliance on myth and fantasy. He wants them to get over their hero worship. He wants us to move past our hero worship. Move past the media-driven depictions of the earnest/romantic rebel-outsider, move past the spectacle of superficial teenage deviance: Find substance in the ocean, away from the easy distinctions. I enter Gelder *on* Hebdige here as support: “The ‘symbolic challenges’ issued by a nonconformist subculture might be trivialized, for example; or having made themselves stylistically spectacular, they might then be reduced to a ‘mere’ spectacle.”<sup>468</sup> The subculture has died, and Motorcycle Boy realizes this, as he realizes that he himself has been reduced to a “mere spectacle” and has been trivialized by his onlookers, been reductively made “stylistically spectacular.” In fact: *Motorcycle has died even before he gets shot.*

Yet.

Yet, Motorcycle doesn't completely help himself in shattering his myth, in deconstructing the illusion of his grandiose reputation. Enter James Dean here. Enter Elvis. Brando, Frankie Machine, and Nelson Algren. Enter Allen Ginsberg. Enter whomever you want. All of these myths, these famous players of the rebel romance, rose and fell (then rose again), and each was at least partially responsible for his glorification and/or demise, consciously and not, which speaks to the complication of the postmodern bohemian. The styles and spectacles are sometimes there, but so are the deconstructions and breakdowns of the traditional notions of the rebel and the bohemian artist.



Part of this complication rests in the idea that Motorcycle Boy is residuary. Part of *this* residue of myth connected with his actual feats (and with the real-time feats of other heroes and anti-heroes), and of course fighting/violence/*motion* in this Tulsa Situation is still a good part of the equation that is Motorcycle Boy's reputation and appeal; for, Motorcycle Boy does want to recoup his identity, but he also perpetuates his legend by suavely and powerfully kicking ass in two specific yet differing scenes that I have already partially illuminated—the “dark alley scene” and the “vacant lot scene”—and Coppola's avant-garde/ “art film for teenagers” camera lens grittily zooms in on his subject(s) during these scenes. In this guise, Coppola plays his own part in Motorcycle Boy's “immortality,” and all of the fans (graffiti artists now towing the front line) of Motorcycle Boy (and his moniker and his visage) play their parts as well in constructing and reconfiguring his myth and/or fantasy. The residue remains. The grit is there on screen and in our minds, yet there is confusion as to who and what we are actually rooting for. Our heroes, bohemian or otherwise, are often not clear-cut anymore. The cult-of-personality does not always suffice, or at least now it's more complicated and dumbfounding for the contemporary (neo)bohemian consumer.

#### 12.6 Cool Scenes, Commentary

In the mentioned scene wherein Rusty James fights in the vacant lot, Motorcycle Boy comes home after having been away for two months. As we learn, this period feels like forever to Rusty James, who wasn't quite sure Motorcycle Boy was going to ever return. Thus, when Motorcycle Boy does return in the middle of a fight that Rusty James is having with Biff Wilcox, Rusty James loses focus to look up at his older brother, his

idolized hero (and *our* momentary idolized hero), and Biff slices the side of Rusty's abdomen with a large piece of broken glass. In retaliation, Motorcycle Boy releases his motorcycle, which violently hits/flips Biff and knocks him down, unconscious. This fight is over. The violence has ceased (for now). Motorcycle Boy has returned. He has not raised a fist. He has only unleashed a motorcycle. *He reigns again*. Contributing to the *complexity* of this fight scene, Coppola depicts Motorcycle Boy and the other characters in black and white, in a neo-*film noir* style that serves as a nod to French New Wave Cinema and German Expressionism with its low-key expressivity and dream-like, unbalanced yet drastic compositions. "The stunning black-and-white cinematography in Francis Ford Coppola's 'Rumble Fish' functions rather like a cold compress, subduing a film that is otherwise all feverish extremes," Janet Maslin writes. "Mr. Coppola has sought to imbue a story about tough teenagers with rhapsodic passion of opera, the sharp contrasts of German Expressionism, the angst of existentialism and the imagery of Dada."<sup>469</sup> Coppola says, in doing so, he wanted to "make a film for teenagers to show them what film can be," and he surmised that this classical style would present the ideal way to do so. He mentions films of the 1950s especially along with the lighting of 1940s films. He mentions Ingmar Bergman and Federico Fellini. He remarks on the French New Wave and even Orson Welles.<sup>470</sup>

Yet. Yet Coppola's tribute to these previous cinematic touchstones works *alongside* his utilization of what was at the time in the early 1980s groundbreaking electronic camera work and film editing. Using an electronic blackboard and innovative photographic and editing techniques as part of a process he called Electronic Cinema (a term that he coined),<sup>471</sup> he succeeded in making this postmodern "art film for

teenagers”<sup>472</sup> a hybrid of sorts, an amalgamation of the mimetic—i.e. his various representational and innovative form matches his multi-layered content—and he does so mostly at night on the unlikely urban streets of Tulsa, Oklahoma, with cutting edge technology *and* a keen sense of cinematic history. In this scene in an “abandoned lot,” which looks like an old train station or an old warehouse, we see the various amplified shadows on the walls and faces, some shadows of which were actually painted on. We see a lot of smog and smoke. Coppola remarks: “We made the smoke as part of the dingy urban look that we wanted.” The lights flicker on and off here. An assumedly homeless man crawls on the floor. A cat walks by. Its shadow is huge. Rusty James swings off a pipe that breaks and sprays water everywhere. The movements are graceful, acrobatic: black, white, neo-noir(ish). Artful. Kids squarely punch each other in the background and foreground. The blacks and whites and grays and shadows are daunting. The lack of color does not mesh with the multitude of styles and spectrum of flavors, but the lack of color also somehow *exacerbates* these differences. We are not distracted by color. We are focused on the nuances of *other* differences. The differences that perhaps transcend color: the movements of these young men, their facial expressions. Their *micro* expressions.

All the while, during this vacant lot ruckus, Motorcycle Boy is not amused. His version of transcendence and dominance is one of aloofness and brevity. *He is over it*. He leans nonchalantly on his motorcycle. He states, “I thought we had a treaty,” indicating he thought he had ended the gang wars, ended the violence. But, he has been gone for two months; the kids don’t/didn’t know better. However, and this is important, this is not a gang war exactly, at least not in the strict greasers-Socs sense. All of these kids look different—to a person. It is impossible to distinguish who belongs to what gang, and the

black and white color on film superficially attempts to reduce this confusion and complexity, this colored fluidity; yet, it simultaneously *heightens* particular substantial awareness, call it an awareness of unlikely details, such as faces and shadows, of differences in motion. Coppola remarks that he is partial to this black and white classical frame because this mode makes it “where you can actually see the actors’ hands.” These hands. These hands grip a motorcycle. These hands fiddle a cigarette. These hands grasp a large slice of glass. These hands are complicated. As the Dome is now—a place of variegated local hands if you are keen and hip enough to look closely.

Meanwhile, the composer (and the band *The Police*’s drummer) Stewart Copeland’s edgy Musync-crafted soundtrack haunts us. It lacks words, it is loud, and it is harsh and different, a culmination: of the OFF and jarring and risky. Stewart: meet Motorcycle Boy.

All of this. All of this provides a combination of the *weird*. Weird cat, weird shadows, weird music, weird outfits, weird hands. At least in 1983. At least for Oklahoma.

### ***Keep Tulsa Weird***

It, all of this, looks like a modern-day Brooklyn L-train subway coming out of Williamsburg, the digestible hipster mecca of the world right now. Motorcycle Boy is back, among the shadows and the smoke and the confusion, to implement his relative weirdness. The world of *The Outsiders* is not weird, at least not *that* weird; yet, now with Hinton’s third young adult novel and Coppola’s art film for teenagers we have entered the weird. The abandoned lot of the weird. The positive and *positively* weird. At least for Oklahoma in the 1980s, and maybe even for today—at least for some Socs. Compared to

fast food places, corporate chains and strip malls, mega churches, and Tulsa cookie-cutter suburbs, et al. Not as weird for a place such as Brooklyn (or New York or Chicago), but certainly weird for Oklahoma. *Rumble Fish* and the Blue Dome Zone by extension seem relatively weird.

Although, as we know, sometimes (and oftentimes), WEIRD is not that lucrative. Coppola mentions this: “This film didn’t make much money at all.” And: “This film was not a success . . . but I’m very fond of it.” Yet he also acknowledges that *Rumble Fish*’s reputation has *come around*. It now at *least* has a cult following. Hipsters love it. Tulsa Cool loves it. The Blue Dome Zone cherishes it. The *Tulsa Voice* newspaper tells us to visit locations where the Thing was filmed. It is ranked number 10. Coppola again: “Over the years some people find it worthwhile or like it.” Thus:

### ***Rumble Fish Reigns***

#### 12.7 Conclusion

*Rumble Fish* then functions as a postmodern representation and inspiration for Tulsa Cool specifically and Neo-Bohemia in general. There are no strict gangs to speak of here, only a hodgepodge of individuals looking to piece together their identities. Rusty James has a nostalgia for the gangs of yore (such as in *The Outsiders*. Matt Dillon nods to himself in a freaky simulacra-fueled *deja vu*), but this new condition in Tulsa has also opened up broader opportunities for Rusty James. His world, perceived and/or imaginary, is not confined to only white male teenagers anymore. As one can see from reading the novel and watching the film, the 1970s/1980s Tulsa of *Rumble Fish* offers a racially and ethnically and more socially integrated environment. The character of Midget played by a

young Laurence “Larry” Fishburne in the film serves as a key catalyst-narrator and guide for Rusty’s actions. Coppola calls this character Rusty’s “guardian angel of sorts.” The viewer often sees Midget trail behind Rusty James and the other characters, Midget’s cool skinny tie and smooth fedora attached to his personage. He is often these characters’ voices of reason or/and conscience: “Biff Wilcox says he is going to kill you, Rusty James.”

Further, as Motorcycle Boy, Steve, and Rusty James walk down the bridge and enter into the Tulsa night, we see warehouses, bars, parties, and streets filled with other races and casts of people: the soldiers, the prostitutes and junkies, et al. The grit. The grime. The glamour. The heroin. The chic. The more *authentic* urban Tulsa comes to light, at least in the sense that more groups of people and *consumptions*/styles are represented. Coppola’s film is in the classic black and white, an irony considering the film deconstructs elements such as *strict* class, style, and race distinctions. One simple point/lesson of the film is *freedom* (another irony considering the black and white film)—that the boys need to go to the river, as symbolized by the in-color rumble fish in the pet shop that Motorcycle Boy/Rusty James free into the river at the end of the novel/film. But, *this*, these conditions, presents a lot more than freedom. One can extend this point of *freedom* to mean an openness for a larger tent or ocean of styles, tendencies, and colors. These fish, now in color on film, one of two depictions in non-black/white color in this film, are allowed a kind of freedom or open regard, a flourish, a newfound situation that parallels Rusty’s own open departure from Tulsa. He is free to go wherever he wants on his motorcycle (the now dead Motorcycle Boy’s former motorcycle), and he “follows the river to the ocean” as Motorcycle Boy has advised him to do, and hence Rusty James has

seen “through the bullshit” (also Motorcycle Boy’s phrase) of the legends and myths of Tulsa past.

But wait. Rusty *does* make it to California—but only to create and be a part of further myths out there. “California is like a beautiful wild girl on heroin,” Motorcycle Boy says, “who’s high as a kite, thinkin’ she’s on top of the world, not knowing she’s even dying even if you show her the marks.” The Tulsa myth(s) layer on top of and link with California myths, including a “junkie” state that is dying *and* delusional. A myth of delusion. A delusion of myth. The bridge meets the beach. The grime meets the atmosphere. Rusty James meets James Dean, et al, and Urban Tulsa meets the ocean and sun and seagulls. Rusty: meet Jim. Hinton: meet Coppola. You: meet Motorcycle Boy, alive *and* dead.

He is immortal.

This condition of seeing through the “bullshit” and Tulsa legend gets complicated, gets entangled with the archetypal *rebel* cosmos, with the death of Motorcycle Boy at the end of the novel/film. Towards the end of the film, after Motorcycle Boy has been shot by a cop, the camera pans to graffiti underneath a highway bridge that reads: “the Motorcycle Boy Reigns.” With this, the legend continues, as does, by extension, the legend/myth of Tulsa grittiness and edginess. The myth of the Motorcycle Boy now merges with subversive fantasy of graffiti and/or street art. One still today sees “the Motorcycle Boy Reigns” graffiti around Tulsa, which speaks to the influence the film has had on contemporary *alternative* Tulsa. Likewise, while *The Outsiders* functions more as a neighborhood film, *Rumble Fish* works as an urban (city) film. Peter Roffman writes,

The eerie photography by Stephen Burum marvelously evokes the contradictions of American city life. As Coppola hypnotically intercuts from lovely, haunting shots of the modern city skyline to closeups of the dilapidated slum buildings that look like the remnants of a nuclear holocaust, and from the shadowy, empty suburbs of the rich to the teeming, carnival-like streets of the downtown redlight district, we begin to understand the frustrations of growing up in such an environment.<sup>473</sup>

We see the smoky shots of downtown Tulsa in *Rumble Fish*, along with shots of its bridges and highways, its rain-filled back alleys and downtown streets. Coppola comments on this urban industrialism: “[We took] the urban sounds . . . jack hammers and wind and that urban clanking of various industrial sounds and used them as percussive.” Rusty James and Motorcycle Boy are part of these sounds, part of this industry, part of the city, an extension of the urbanity both fantastically and literally, which means they are an appendage of the grit and grime. Their *signs* are avant-garde, yes—even the palatable avant-garde as constructed by Hinton then Coppola, but they comprise a specifically graspable urban Tulsa avant-garde, a city alternative, which in this case could mean an alternative to Tulsa suburbs and/or just assumed heteronormativity.

Although, as David Muggleton indicates in *Inside Subculture*, an *easy* clash of suburbs versus tough inner city no longer suffices in explaining the entire picture now (in postmodernity) and contemporary Tulsa. The suburbs have now merged with the city in interesting ways. As it is now, some contemporary hipsters in the roles of inner-city weekend warriors frequent the downtown neo-bohemian neighborhood Zone of Tulsa.



White flight, the condition of leaving the inner city for cozier gated manicured clean-scapes, et al, has all but vanished and all but completely smokily drifted away into the ether of consumption. Even though some/many of our separated suburbs remain basically intact, and these do of course include some of the current whitewashed suburban neighborhoods of Tulsa, the pattern in many U.S. cities remains that people with both financial and cultural capital—the Creative Class, Artist Class, and others—are returning and have increasingly returned to the urban core, call it the hole of the donut for something *else* and something *more*. They do so and have done so for residence and sometimes, as I say, just as weekend-warrior types. Richard Lloyd, doing his part, also explains this type of contemporary cultural tourism, which has been a part of Bohemia since at least the turn of the century in the U.S. People want to be a part of a *scene*, or at least see one in person, albeit however briefly. These conditions, this process, these fascinations—call it gentrification and/or Urban Renewal or Emerging Hipsterdom or culture vultures or weekend warriors or cultural tourism, even structural nostalgia, or just *keeping it weird* or *fresh* or *real* (hence *open/progressive* and *green/organic* and *authentic/raw*)—certainly fit in with Muggleton’s views of individual subjectivities, flux, and plurality. The contemporary Tulsa suburban teenager can go downtown to play punk or play greaser, as Rusty James and Motorcycle Boy can go to particular downtown bars to mix with people of various walks of life; and, herein then lies important questions of authenticity, a designation ultimately that becomes confusing and elusive, however you decide to slice the hipster bread, when one tries to pigeonhole and/or corner types of *precise* subcultures. Muggleton writes, “Yet before we can address such a question we must first establish the ‘real’ purpose or reason for subcultural affiliation, for without this

knowledge we cannot decide who is, or is not, authentic. It seems logical to argue that if we want to discover the ‘real point’ of being a mod or punk or greaser or whatever, then we must ask the individuals concerned to provide their subjective motives and reasons. In other words, the question of authenticity can only properly be addressed by having recourse to the views of individual members themselves.”<sup>474</sup>

Muggleton then goes on to explain that even after *asking* his subjects about the *points* behind their subcultural choices, the difficulty still rests in the largely varying subjective subcultural experiences and contexts, which then takes us back to *Rumble Fish*. Rusty James’s perspectives about his environment, and his identity by extension, do differ from those of Motorcycle Boy and Midget, et al. Yet, even though he would like to belong and be loyal to a set group or gang, he does not have a distinctive culture he can conform to and resemble. He does not even have a uniform because the styles of his friends and associates vastly vary and fluctuate. His subculture and subsequent identity as a subcultural member has been stripped down, muddled into nowhere. The stylistic and ideological connections are more fluid—i.e. his identity is in flux—and this is related to why he decides to skip town at the end of the film (a variation from Hinton’s ending in her novel where Rusty James has to go to a reformatory). Rusty James here in Coppola’s film does not have a firm foundation or understanding for who he is or even where he comes from. Rusty James’s condition speaks to the (postmodern) chaotic/confusing nature of things, especially, for our purposes, in Tulsa. Subcultures may exist and do exist, but they are often constantly changing due to heteroglossic bric-a-brac, shifting (often competing) narratives and myths. The myths may linger (e.g. “the Motorcycle Boy Reigns”), but these myths also get re-appropriated, re-represented, and even

misrepresented (if even subjectively and/or objectively possible), as contexts change and fluctuate. So goes the Postmodern Thing and the Neo-Bohemian Thing, that circus tent of fluff, fun, and grime.

And. And, I will end this cool thread here, even though I have only *scratched* the surface of Tulsa Cool and the *buffet* of Hip when it comes to *Rumble Fish*. For, I've barely mentioned Tom Waits, who plays the pool hall-diner owner Benny in the film. I haven't mentioned Dennis Hopper, who plays the "lawyer on welfare" father of Motorcycle Boy and Rusty James in the film, nor have I dissected the cool gritty dive bar (the *Main St. Lounge*) that Dennis Hopper's character likes to frequent in the film. I have not written of Nicholas Cage, Coppola's nephew, who plays Smokey in the film while wearing a "social club"/gang jacket his father used to wear as a teenager in Queens. Cage's father, August Coppola, the very same Augie Coppola/older brother of Francis that Coppola has dedicated this film to. I have scarcely mentioned Larry Fishburne. I have not disassembled a motorcycle nor have I put one back together. I haven't analyzed this film's usage of the young Sofia Coppola, a.k.a. "Domino" (her screen name) as Donna, little sister to Patty, a.k.a. the beautiful and hip Diane Lane. I have not analyzed Time, or TIME, or Coppola's "cinematic expression of time" (his mentioned main theme), nor have I espoused on the idea of being "Hip on Time." I have not entertained with commentary on the film's intriguing time lapse photography footage, nor have I discussed how *Rumble Fish* and Coppola was/were inspired by the time lapse photography of Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982). I have not said *any* of this further cool squib here because the cool squib is *endless*. The cool thread unravels until eternity and for immortality.

**But.** But, let it be known, and let it be asked:

*Tulsa Cool Lives*

*Rumble Fish Reigns*

*Where's the Blue Dome?*

*Who is Larry Clark?!*

CHAPTER 13: TULSA COOL LENDS ITSELF. SOME PHOTOGRAPHS

[notes]

The front cover of Larry Clark's *novel* book of photographs *Tulsa* (1971) shows a young man with a large head in relation to his body. He kind of looks like a young Mickey Rourke if young Mickey Rourke were fairly gaunt, had a large head in relation to his body, and was holding up a shiny gun while sitting cross-legged in a bed with white ruffled sheets. This young large-headed gaunt Mickey Rourke also has an analog wristwatch that reflects outward into my eye and your eye. This guy looks off to the side, he looks cool, he looks composed, he looks ready. He is an epitome. He is the guy. He is. This is *Tulsa*. And, he is Tulsa.

i was born in tulsa oklahoma in 1943. when i was sixteen i started shooting amphetamine. i shot with my friends everyday for three years and then left town but i've gone back through the years. once the needle goes in it never comes out.

L.C. [Larry Clark]<sup>475</sup>

This little hot note starts off Larry Clark's *Tulsa* photographs. Is this cool? Having a gunshot wound while you lie in bed, with the white sheets covering your crotch? Yes, this is **cool**.

We see boobs, amphetamines. A black eye, some pointing, some tighty-whities underwear, a kitchen, more boobs, a pregnant young person. More amphetamines. [More needles. More injections.]. Is this cool? I guess this is cool.

We see a funeral. A dead baby's funeral.

Is this cool?

Maybe less cool.

“police informer.”

“everytime i see you punk you're gonna get the same.” This is battery. An assault.

A bloody face on a twin-sized bed.

Where are the white sheets? More long hair. More boobs. Some penises. More injections.

A guy smiling.

An open book. He taps a vein.

29 pages total in this book. 58 sides of pages. 112 photographs (by my count). 111 words of text. (One baby. One dead baby.). One painting of Jesus. [13] needles. [10] boobs. [3] penises. [29] guns. One house. One funeral. One American flag. One kitchen.

### **One Tulsa.**

“death is more perfect than life.”

Guns in bed. This is shirtless teenager with shiny gun in bed. This is dead pregnant teenage girl dead. This is amphetamines. This is romance. This is a dance, a masquerade. Larry Clark, here a photographer, later a director of *Kids* (1995), *Bully* (2001), among others—still/dead and moving pictures.

KIDS: Some unravel into the ether. Some apply bandages and walk on (with a limp), holding scars and stories. local LEGENDS and PARADES. a legend on parade.

They are in black and white. They, meaning these photographs are in black and white. *Rumble Fish* is in black and white. *Rumble Fish* is a film.

After the cover-boy (Billy Mann) is “dead 1970”, we see “1971” and this cardboard sign:

**Police. (The one’s that tore this  
house up.) 2/11/70**  
**If you Dick-Sucking Mother  
fuckers come back today Don’t  
get mad if you find your Mother +  
Wife’s inside sucking Nigger Dicks.  
David Roper  
2/12/71**

This is David Roper, one of our (anti)heroes, the subject of a few of our photographs. He assumedly is an addict. I assume he is angry. He is deviant. Is he bohemian? Is he neo? Is this Tulsa? They tell me this is the suburbs of Tulsa. How do I know it is the suburbs?

Then there’s the house. And a long-haired cool guy, tight white shirt, cigarette; he looks to the side.

He could be too cool for *The Outsiders* and *Rumble Fish*. I assume he might be able to kick the shit out of Dally and/or Motorcycle Boy. He certainly could handle Ponyboy.

Too cool for Coppola. Is he authentic? Is David Roper authentic? Is Coppola authentic? Yes, this tight shirt/long hair is authentic. He is fantastic and he is here on the page. He is also not authentic.

REPEAT: We get guns, an American flag. A lampshade. A young man shot in the leg. Dally got shot. Motorcycle Boy got shot. Did this man actually get shot? Do I know the difference? His lady puts her hand to her face in what looks like anguish: “accidental gunshot wound,” the caption reads.

Is this postmodern? I have no idea. Is this Tulsa? I guess. This [thing] is labeled *Tulsa* and assumedly it contains Tulsa residents, but I have no idea if this is actually Tulsa.

Maybe I can find the house if it is still in Tulsa. Today?

What is Tulsa?

What is a Tulsa?

A place? A city?

A state of mind?

Is being deviant neo-bohemian? Are these artists? Are these struggling artists? Are these saints? What is the opposite of a saint?

Is this all real? Is any of this real? Is any of this a fantasy?

I don't know what to make of this. Honestly. Am I lying? Hebdige would call this scene subcultural. A subcultural scene with signs and codes and labels and *style*. Jon Leland would call this Hip. Stansell would call this Bohemian. Lloyd would call this Neo-Bohemian. Larry Clark calls this *Tulsa*.

I call this a sad [fucking] reality. A sad fucking [myth]. A sad \_fucking\_ *fantasy*. These are kids: Teenagers.

*guns, needles, and hedonism on parade. a nod, a look. a time and place.*

“But, it is only nudity and drugs,” one could say. “Some guns. Just kids messing around.”

“But, there is a dead baby.

But, there is a pregnant girl who injects speed.”

“A ha. Ha. Oh, fuck. Ok.”



Tulsa Cool lends itself.

Tulsa Cool lends itself to these types of images. This type of rhetoric. It is a mesmerism, a surprise of the grit and junk and awe. I would bring in a scholarly interlude here—an academic naysay, and academic say. But, I don't think it would help.

I don't think.

I see something:

Teenagers, a dead baby, some junk, a narrative for Tulsa. [enter your projections here:  
\_\_\_\_\_.]

\*

Chris Townsend, of *Art and Death*, writes: “bohemia peopled by struggling artists and marginal figures continues the modernist tradition of representing artists, and their bohemian peers, as outsiders.”<sup>476</sup> In this context, Townsend remarks about *Tulsa* that Larry Clark’s “milieu was that of street life, narcotic addiction and petty crime. ... Indeed *Tulsa*’s is a bohemia devoid of artistry and art.”<sup>477</sup> In fact, if I concur with Townsend’s remarks, I would have to view these *Tulsa* characters as bereft of art and art-making, leaving them solely with their deviance and their hipster nods and crimes. In truth, much of my difficulty in designating Clark’s book of photographs as Tulsa Cool is situated in this sometimes fluid/sometimes distinctive relationship between Hip and Crime—in the interconnections and differences between the hipster and the outlaw. Albert Goldman comments: “[T]he roots of the counterculture as a defiant revolutionary way of life lay not so much in the sources that the kids were proud to show ... but rather in that culture that had always been most antagonistic to conventional values and codes of behavior, the culture that had always acted out the most basic fantasies of the American psyche and

created the whole underground world of drugs, violence, street argot and antisocial defiance: the criminal culture.”<sup>478</sup> Goldman highlights the appeal of criminality—drugs, violence, deviance, et al—to countercultural members and hipsters. There’s a balancing act between neo-bohemian hipsters and criminal behavior, and Clark’s *Tulsa* seems to tip the scales. After the shock dissipates, we are left with bad tastes in our mouths of hipsterdom gone awry.

As these photographs convey though, these young Tulsa teenagers in Clark’s beginning pages resemble other (mis)understood Tulsa hipsters. The photographs then, as I flip them, positioned in seemingly chronological order, provide a narrative build-up that takes us and these hipsters over the edge, to a point that’s not that cool anymore. *Tulsa* starts in 1963 with two young men, David Roper and Billy Mann, shirtless with short hair. David sits on the ground of a Tulsa street, the blurry trees and truck and houses behind him. He looks beyond the camera. Billy sits at the wheel of his car. We see his profile as he looks ahead, nonchalantly. Further photographs depict young men in a basic house, looking into a cracked mirror, combing one’s greased hair. These depictions resemble moments of Hinton’s and Coppola’s *The Outsiders*. These could just be hipster greasers in a house, in a car, sitting down on the street. We even see David Roper in a living room scratching the back of his head. A picture of Jesus Christ hangs above the fireplace mantle. We also see him with a shotgun in the woods, alongside a creek. He appears to be hunting, which isn’t much different from regular Tulsa fare, just outside the city; a Sooner hipster who knows how to hunt and fish; a young man with energy to burn, leaves his living room, puts on his shirt and goes out to the woods to do some hunting. Yet, in the next photographs we see some needles, a young woman in a black sweater, a

clean-cut young man sticking a needle into another clean-cut young man's hand. A different young man sticks another needle into his leg. We see a little blood on a palm. In one photo we see a group of young men in the living room, sticking needles into their arms while laughing, just playing around. Another guy in the bathtub with a heart tattoo on his arm sticks a needle into his wrist. He appears to be playing around too, just having a good time. Nothing serious. We also see a glamorous young woman, hair styled and done up, nice evening clothes, drinking a can of beer. Smoking a cigarette.

These young people seem fairly harmless now, at this point. In truth, plenty of young people, hipster or not, party—get drunk and high and do not suffer severe consequences. Yes, in *Tulsa* they are injecting amphetamines into their bodies via needles, but they seem coherent, they seem together. Just partying and having fun together with their drugs and beer and cigarettes in a middle-of-the-road Tulsa house. This falls into the hip category, but it's not that radical. A bohemian-hipster these days in Tulsa might do the same. Get a little buzz going off beer, weed, and/or junk before going to the Blue Dome Zone for the night, before the show—a good time before the Good Time. At this point in the narrative/chronology, the subjects of Tulsa seem digestible, relatable, at least not *that* jarring or shocking. They could be friends of Ponyboy or Motorcycle Boy. They could just be a part of the party downtown.

Yet Clark presents a turn. About halfway through his book, on one side of the page we see a young man, smoking a cigarette. A baby is in his lap. The baby with an eerie sense of fright and concern looks into the camera, warns us of the horror. The young man looks to his left, to our right, at the woman on the next page/photograph. This young woman, the formerly glamorously presented woman, is now in a long ruffled shirt. Her

hair is barely put together, she looks high and out of it, has her arm to her cheek and looks down in oblivion. She is the mother of this baby. Clark's caption just below her picture reads: "dead." Simply dead. The narrative now takes on a different meaning. Some of these kids are no longer just playing around. Some of them are suffering and dying, and this goes beyond just hipsters in a living room having a good time and fucking around. Yes; everything was cool up until this point. The hipster has fully merged with the outlaw, with the worst and most dire results of deviance and excess, even bohemianism and the less desirable/palatable aspects of legend and myth of Excess and excessive. Jon Leland writes: "In the evolution of hip, few characters have been as influential as the outlaw. For many of us, outlaws are the first figures we encounter who reject mainstream society and are celebrated for it. They are hip's miscreant uncles, figures who give us permission to adopt our own code, go our own way. In a society directed toward work, outlaws create the leisure space in which the nation's countercultures, from colonial rebels to the 1990s gangstas, gather their numbers." He continues: "Shunned by the law-abiding mainstream—placed literally *outside the law*—they inhabit a country within a country, inventing their own language, economy, values and folklore. These cross back over through hip ... Like outlaws, hipsters spur a mixture of fear and attraction, projecting society's fears back to us as style. The hipster, viewed coolly, is the outlaw as metaphor ... To the extent that laws exist to hold society in place, outlaws are a creative force. In a Darwinian sense, society produces its outlaws for the same reason it produces hip: to foment noise and conflict, the engines of evolution ... Yesterday's crime has consistently proven to be tomorrow's recreation. In between is hip."<sup>479</sup>

As Leland writes, “At an elemental level, the hipster is a vicarious form of the outlaw. Hipsters are criminals once removed, intimations of crime without the thing itself.”<sup>480</sup> The hipsters and neo-bohemians of Tulsa’s Zone resemble Clark’s outlaws, in style and attitude, as cultural sponges of countercultural metaphor. Dabbling in excess is acceptable, as is even just appearing to be far gone is accepted and sometimes celebrated. It’s just not that hip to die from it, in practice. In reality. And this confusion carries with us. When Clark writes “death is more perfect than life” in large letters on one page, to the right on the next page we see our cover boy, that large-headed Mickey Rourke look-alike sitting cross-legged on a bed, shirt off, with a silver revolver in his right hand. He looks the part of the outlaw, but then we see Clark’s caption below this photograph in the later pages of the book: “dead 1970.” The fantasy conveys itself, perpetuates itself. If this outlaw were my brother or my boyfriend, I would not feel the romance of his death—at least not as much. But since he’s a stranger to me and us, his death (his “perfect” death) feels glorified, as dramatically rebellious outside the law. We could blow this picture up, put it in on our living room walls. People walking by, stopping to look at it with their beer or joint in hand might comment about it, “that looks pretty cool”—which speaks to the conditions of hip.

In Hinton’s *The Outsiders*, Ponyboy remarks about Dally: “That was the first time I realized the extent of Johnny’s hero-worship for Dally Winston. Of all of us, Dally was the one I liked least. He didn’t have Soda’s understanding or dash, or Two-Bit’s humor, or even Darry’s superman qualities. But I realized that these three appealed to me because they were like the heroes in the novels I read. Dally was real. I liked my books and clouds and sunsets. Dally was so real he scared me.”<sup>481</sup> For Ponyboy, Dally is too

*real*, perhaps too real/raw to be hip. But for us, his death (and life) is a fantasy, a fictional image that we can get behind, not actually be scared by, because on some base level we understand his death is not real, and thus Dally dying in *The Outsiders* on a Tulsa street is hip. As is Motorcycle Boy's death in between the river and the bridge. That is righteous. This young man in *Tulsa* holding a gun is cool too because we don't actually know him. His funeral ain't all that cool, but his image is, which is where the Blue Dome Zone comes in. We need a zone, we go to a Zone where hipsters are celebrated and wherein the images of the outlaws are celebrated; that dead baby (and even the image probably) isn't that cool, but we can celebrate the parties leading up to that moment, at least for a little while—at least from afar.

The Zone now, complicatedly, welcomes these hipsters and outlaws alike. Yes. It welcomes the legal and the illegal, the criminals and the poseurs. Acceptance is what it's after. A big tent of outlaw and pseudo-outlaw is what we get. As Leland mentions, this ethos and these images are a part of American folklore, a part of the fabric of our national rebel identity—from revolutionaries to gangsters to people who robbed banks and maybe gave some money back to the poor. There's romance there, a streamlined national romance. But, within these images and soundbites, we don't often think about the blood and guts, and broken bones and cries of unfathomable anguish. We do not think about the dead mothers nor the dead babies. We do not consider the late-night calls to the police and/or ambulance and hospital and the pumping of stomachs and the puking of blood and nightmarish hallucinations before a last gasp. We do not often think about such things because they don't look that good on our walls; they don't help sell tickets or drinks or make it easy to digest your nice plate of organic vegetables in front of you. Yet, with

Clark's photos we see this gritty and heartbreaking devolution. We see these young people wrestling on the floor and in their beds with their guns. We see the gunshot wounds, the cries of anguish; we see the black eye and the tortures of the human body; we see a pregnant woman injecting a needle into her arm, and we see a dead baby in a small coffin at a funeral. There are flowers. And, not as many people are laughing in the living room now. That picture of Jesus is nowhere in sight. As Robert Warshaw writes, outlaws inhabit "what we want to be and what we are afraid we might become."<sup>482</sup> The edge of the outlaw is appealing to us, yet getting too far gone, going over the edge and to the point of no return, personally is not that satisfactory for us. It's too dangerous, too scary. In turn, for most of us and for hipsters, "outlaws are not the same ... different in both motive and what they produce."<sup>483</sup> Because what they produce (i.e. sometimes dead mothers and babies) is not what we want for ourselves. It's best just to have tall-tales and legends about other people that these things have happened to. Thus: "The freedom of the mythic outlaw is ... contingent, illusory."<sup>484</sup>

Leland again:

The logic of the romance ultimately requires that the outlaws die for it, preferably in a blaze of glory. Living represents a kind of failure. Theirs is literally a dead end. For all their crossover with hipsters, outlaws are more often transitional figures on the way to hip, guides to the American atavism that hips channels. If they are figures of attraction and repulsion to the straight world, to the hip they are raw material. The division between hipsters and squares repeats that between the criminal world and straight one. Without outlaws, without the abyss they imply, hip would not have

the same power to excite and repel. But where the outlaws can succeed only as tragedy, hip thrives in the continuities of living.<sup>485</sup>

Thus, I have made up my mind. Just as *hip* does, Tulsa Cool needs Clark's photographs. They present Tulsa Cool's ending point, its scenery over the cliff's ledge. We, hipsters, need that view; we need that reference point in order to thrive "in the continuities of living." The Zone could not exist without it. These photographs of these young rebels let us know how far we can actually go. Their deaths help us understand our limits, our lives. Our lives before/after work or school, and even before that edge or ledge. We eventually decide to go over the cliff, or turn around—walk back into those Tulsa woods. Into that dive bar or art gallery. Even back to the suburbs. Every so often, we should each take a glance at that photograph of that baby, in order to understand just how unhip we actually are or have the potential of becoming. Or, just reminders that we are not actually outlaws. For, bohemians without art and artistry probably won't last for long.



## CHAPTER 14: THE BLUE DOME ZONE

### 14.1 Old School is the New Cool. (Neo)Field Notes; The Blue Dome District

“It is ‘T’ for Texas, and it’s ‘T’ for Tennessee.” – *Townes Van Zandt*<sup>486</sup>  
 “It is ‘T’ for Tulsa, and it’s ‘T’ for Tallyho.” – *John Macchio*<sup>487</sup>

Next to the umbra that is the Art Deco architecture of downtown Tulsa, to the northeast, as a simulacra phoenix that has risen from the (post)industrial ashes, sits the Blue Dome District, a nine-block neighborhood that embodies the mantras: “Old School is the New Cool” and “The Blue Dome is a State of Mind!” At the core of the Blue Dome District on the corner of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and Detroit Avenue, a blue and white marquee broadly states the message:

**BLUE DOME DISTRICT**  
**music \* arts \* food \* lofts**

Synthesized retro and Hip-oriented *alternative* consumerism—of “music,” “arts,” “food,” and “lofts,” etc.—dominates this neo-bohemian neighborhood in eastern downtown Tulsa. Some people (some “outsiders”) are surprised to hear Tulsa or even Oklahoma has a neo-bohemian neighborhood, but if one studies Tulsa’s history of art/culture/investment and urban evolution/ revolution/ shifts/ gentrification, it becomes easier to comprehend Tulsa’s *local* business-laden and profit-generating edgier neighborhoods—the Blue Dome District being one and the Brady Arts District being at least one other (with the Pearl District closing in)—that construct what I call the Blue Dome Zone and hold added

cultural and symbolic capital as sites of artists-in-production and the *appearance* of artists-in-production, nostalgia and structural nostalgia in wake.

Plus, these neighborhoods bring in lots of cash. Lots of consumers and lots of money.

*Art* means Money these days, and *Hip-Cool* means Contemporary Profit.

We see Woody Guthrie on the side of a business.

We see the Motorcycle Boy on the side of a building.

We see Bob Wills on the side of a business.

We see Tom Waits on the side of building.

We see a switchblade on the side of a business.

David Roper is *not* on the side of a building.

We see a motorcycle on the side of a business.

We see marijuana leaves on the side of a building.

This.

This, sans Roper, is all *graffiti* on sides of local businesses that earn profits. And, this is all a fantasy . . . an alternative production/consumption fantasy. An *exchange*. A *construction*. Well, it is mostly a fantasy. An *alternative*. To *what* though?

Fantasies can be expensive. Fantasies can be lucrative. Just ask Bohemia.

“Bohemia, what are the costs?”

“Lotta Time, lotta money. Lotta nightdreams.”

\*

If you ask any (or almost any) Oklahoman/Sooner with a pulse (perhaps even *inside* the restrictive relatively conservative confines of Oklahoma City) what city/town

has the coolest/hippest/edgiest/grittiest cultural capital in Oklahoma, they will (almost always), if they have *any* contemporary wherewithal at all, without a doubt/hesitation say: ***Tulsa!***—but what I *will* (also) say is this: Yes, Tulsa is the hipper, edgier Oklahoman city, this is basically fact and this is partially fantasy/fiction—and it cashes in on this alternative/status image (and, anyone who tells you differently has been to too many OKC Thunder NBA basketball games and probably works for Chesapeake Energy and/or is a pool-boy for former CEO Aubrey McClendon)—and/but if you want to know a little more about Tulsa then you also need to know a little something about Oklahoma City (hence, another glaring *clash*), that *other* Sooner City.

In one poll of the “Best U.S. Cities for Conservatives to Live,” OKC was ranked number one. #1!<sup>488</sup> The Bay Area Center for Voting Research, an agency that looks closely at how people vote and think about a wide-range of issues, ranked OKC as #4 on their list of “most conservative cities” with over 300,000 people.<sup>489</sup> Oklahoma City had the highest percentage of people of any U.S. city who voted for the Republican presidential candidate John McCain in 2008 (a whopping 65%), and OKC was only one of four major U.S. cities that had a majority who voted for Republican Mitt Romney in 2012 (Phoenix, Salt Lake City, and Ft. Worth being the other three). In addition, in opposition, as on the other side of a spectrum, Tulsa does not make these top “conservative” U.S. cities ranking lists. As a result, by comparison and by sheer cultural *will* and historical happenstance, Tulsa is the hipper Oklahoman city, the edgier city, the more liberal/blue city, dare I say more *substantial* city, especially in its urban core—the more neo-bohemian city with, as I’ve mentioned, more cultural capital and larger numbers of artists in cultural production. It is the *place to be* and the *place to go* in

Oklahoma. The data supports this. This dissertation is not *exactly* about data, but what I will include is *this*: Compared to OKC, Tulsa has a much longer history of generating money and a vastly longer history of producing art; as I've mentioned, Tulsa was once called "The Oil Capital of the World" and "America's Greatest City," and, thus, it comes as no coincidence that Tulsa, not Oklahoma City, is the historically cash-rich city that now houses two world-renowned art museums, full-time opera and ballet companies, and one of the nation's largest concentrations of Art Deco architecture; Tulsa has the more liberal voting record, yes, but it also has, per capita, more local bars, restaurants, cafes, music venues, greenery, and art galleries—more alternative consumption offerings; and, by/in turn this relatively more edgy eclectic parade-carnival-urban cash cow buffet has more tattoos, piercings, and looks of *on the nod* (see: David Roper).<sup>490</sup> Thus began/begins the grand Oklahoman hipster and Outsider actual and fantastical migration(s) to Tulsa and to a realm/vortex such as the Blue Dome Zone in particular, that burgeoning and hip downtown Tulsa area with a bohemian bent, a familiar artistic-artsy-urban tale with Ford Prius-loads of cash. Hinton lived there, Clark lived there, Coppola migrated there briefly to make one vintage rebel film with mass appeal and one "art film for kids" that initially flopped at the box office but has had lasting cachet;

and, WE migrate there:

[To] *the district*.

...*the sub-district*: - - The Dome - -

Mr. Richard Lloyd quotes one Internet-design entrepreneur commenting about his neo-bohemian Chicago neighborhood/district: "Wicker Park is not a place—it's a state of mind!"<sup>491</sup> One can just as easily insert:

“The Blue Dome Zone is not a place—it’s a state of mind!”

The Dome is not a place. It is a state.

It is a place and a state.

It is a district:

It’s a place that is counter to Oklahoma and Oklahoma City in many ways. It is the conceded liberal bastion of Oklahoma and Tulsa, and it thrusts the fixations of bohemian and artistic myth and fantasy, of a mind-state, of an alternative Oklahoma mind-state: a state, a neighborhood, a mentality of/for the artist in production and the appearance of the artist, which of course extends to the buildings, the businesses, and even weekend-warrior patrons from the suburbs, from Midtown, and, yes, from Oklahoma City. People, residents and patrons, want to create art; *these* people and *those* people want to consume art; they want to feel as if they are part of a *scene*. It is a heterotopia, Michel Foucault’s *heterotopia*. The Blue Dome District is a heterotopia, and one could say that Tulsa in general as counter to Oklahoma City is also a heterotopia. Mr. Foucault states:

real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like **counter-sites**, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.<sup>492</sup> (bold mine.)

Ken Gelder states in *Subcultures*: “A utopia is imagined; a heterotopia is imagined as well, but it also has some kind of realization, somewhere.”<sup>493</sup> Thus, Tulsa and the Blue

Dome *especially* is a heterotopia, an actual place and an *imagining* that is a “counter-site” (even in the relatively counter-cultural Tulsa at large), but it is also a state of mind, a kind of hipster-artist utopia *away* from Oklahoma. It is both a *place to go* and a fantastical escapist locus.

Just as Hinton’s novels are.

Just as Coppola’s films are.

Just as *Tulsa* is.

These are escapes.      *carnivals*. BUFFETS. parades.

**some facts, some fantasy:** Yes, the factual history of the Blue Dome District is that the dome structure was “[built] as a Gulf Oil Gas Station in 1924[;] the Blue Dome Building [was] a historic stop for all those traveling on the famous Route 66 from 1926 to 1932.”<sup>494</sup> The Blue Dome area was also a railroad hub for a few decades in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but in 1933 the *route* of Route 66 relocated south a few blocks out of the area. Gradually, fewer trains went through; fewer automobiles stopped in. A few gas stations and a few auto repair shops remained, but the place was sleepy and empty for a good while, making the district largely uneventful and basically *off the* (cultural/historical) *grid*. Pump your gas, drive away. Then the final Tulsa-impacted oil “bust” of the 1980s hit, and the area lost *even more*: it lost most of those gas stations and repair shops; *more* people moved out, some buildings were demolished, and the buildings left were mostly abandoned and rundown. Few residents. Fewest patrons. *Fewer consumption*.<sup>495</sup>

Yet.

Yet gentrification started in the 1990s.

*Gentrification*: that controversial Urban Renewal, that glorious word/phrase, that heinous word/idea; one hipster has asked: “Gentrification? Are you for it or against it?”

*I plead the Fifth*, and Grit gets going on the way to Glamour.

*the grit gets going...the grit is gone...and the grit is going...at a going rate.*

This is all fact: the actual Blue Dome, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the main visible symbol of the neighborhood, in all of its Moorish-styled/ornate gem-like domed glory, was built in 1924—and it still stands as the not-so-glossy, brick, blue, and humble symbol of the place—but this fact, this symbol, hardly matters. Route 66 matters a little more, but it doesn’t really matter either. What matters most is that this here-and-now *district* carries a potent and almost graspable fantasy; the place is now an idea:

A destination fantasy of art, weirdness, openness,  
[neo]liberalism, and alternative consumption. A fixed place, a counter-site, for a  
fluctuating scene. The Blue Dome here/now is both an alternative community and a place  
for alternative consumption, both temporarily and temporally—call it *more*  
permanent(ly). Sally Banes writes about 1950s/1960s Greenwich Village in Manhattan in  
familiar *alternative* terms—“The Village offers a sense of community to those who have  
*left* their homes, and their small towns.”<sup>496</sup>—and the Blue Dome carries similar  
alternative and migratory status-appeal: for permanent residents and business owners but  
also for consumers who are only there for a weekend or for a few hours during the day  
and/or night—for people/players/consumers who have *left*, who have *come*, and who  
have *arrived*. The time spent, the duration of *stay*, is perhaps immaterial, for what is a  
stopwatch to a fantasy? A CLOCK for an ESCAPE? A gentrified escape in Oklahoma?

**[Leave Oklahoma: Come to the Dome.]**

Can you consume TIME?

Can you consume *a time*?

...can you have a *good time*? can you have a good *consume*? can you consume a good?

can you time a good?

Richard Lloyd calls this, all of this, or at least *part of this*, a *MacGuffin*—Alfred Hitchcock’s MacGuffin:

Essentially, a MacGuffin forms a pretext that sets into motion the real action of the plot . . . The arts serve as a MacGuffin for postindustrial economic activities in [neo-bohemian neighborhoods], a pretext for particular patterns of congregation that then prove useful for other kinds of enterprise.<sup>497</sup>

For our purposes, the arts, the culture, the bohemia of the Blue Dome Zone in the middle of Red Scare Oklahoma has set the foundation, the pretext for congregation, for our Red Dirt Parade—for our escapist fantasy of greasers and confusion and artful weirdness. And, again for our purposes, this greasy confused weirdness then presents a (bullet-holed/cutting) edge that beckons, that is inviting; and/but, this reality and this fantasy is also a *theory*, Richard Lloyd’s theory: “But the theory of neo-bohemia is about much more than the life of a single neighborhood; it invites us to rethink in broad ways the interrelations of lived space, subjectivity, and instrumental labor in this contemporary period of globalized capitalism and flexible accumulation.”<sup>498</sup> A MacGuffin? A theory? More than a single neighborhood?

Yes.



But Still.

Yet.

I Walk.

And.

**I walk. I am a flaneur. I consume:**

A person can start under the mentioned marquee on 2<sup>nd</sup> and Detroit, the intersection that Hillary Speed writes is the “bustling corner . . . that attracts artists with a bohemian bent.”<sup>499</sup> The business directly below the marquee is Dwelling Spaces, and inside one will find alternative clothing and gift items related to Tulsa Cool—Tulsa pride t-shirts and coasters, glossy books describing Tulsa’s music history, old-school country music and local independent bands’ albums on vinyl, prints and art on canvases of the Tulsa skyline and snapshots of the Blue Dome District. *These are local artists*. Art meets commerce here. Commodification meets Cultural Capital: “Featuring 85 local artisans and craftspeople doing their creative thing in a wide variety of media—multimedia paintings, music, books, accessories, clothing . . . heaping helpings of locally-made fare with upbeat flair and panache.” The place sells all-organic cotton garments as part of the “Be Green Tulsa” Campaign with proceeds of their apparel going towards the city’s Be Green environmental campaign, “a non-profit campaign that offers resources on environmental issues”: tree-planting programs, improvements in water & air quality, storm water education, and mass transit offerings and recycling.<sup>500</sup> The local identity and aesthetic meet nostalgia, pride, and the Hip alternative. Dwelling Spaces states on its website: “We have the coolest, raddest, hip-hoppinest art, apparel and collectibles that

you can't find anywhere else." This presents a *fantasy*. This presents an escapist mantra:  
*You can't find this anywhere else!*

Which also pertains to the Blue Dome Arts Festival, which occurs every year in a weekend in May, Friday through Sunday. If a person looks to the website [www.bluedomearts.org](http://www.bluedomearts.org), on the homepage, s/he will see the words "Route 66" accompanied by crude blue-and-white drawings of a vintage car and a brass horn jetting out from a drawing of the Dome. If that person clicks further on the site, these are some of the other messages and sound-bites that person will find:

*200 + Art Vendors/Tulsa's Top Food Trucks/Live Music **Local Artists**, & Performers/Handmade Goods/Chalk Circle Art Parade/Festival Beer from Arnie's Bar... & Much More!*

The Blue Dome Arts Festival is open to artists who live in the state of Oklahoma and construct **hand-made works of art**.

ART

FUN

**LEGACY**

For over 10 years the Blue Dome Arts Festival has supported local artists who live in Oklahoma and construct hand-made works of art.

... 3 days **celebration of art**.

So come and enjoy this three day event where you and your family will be entertained, educated, and **inspired**.

Drums, dancers, live music, fashion shows, singers and more!

henna tattoos for the kids. Yoga for adults. dog friendly. Doggie water stations. food trucks!

Only local trucks from Oklahoma.

Home brewed beer.

At the Blue Dome Arts Festival **everybody is an artist.**

**SPONSORS:** Arnie’s Bar, Arts & Humanities Council of Tulsa, Miller Lite, GuRuSu, Scion [Fowler Scion], George Kaiser Family Foundation

This is a festival, and I am on parade—a local and national parade, a grassroots and corporate parade, a liberal and conservative parade, a blue and red parade, a digestible and noxious buffet, an alternative and mass(ive) buffet of experiences. A blend. A heterotopia. A smorgasbord, a fantasy; Richard Lloyd writes: “. . . a local art fair may be designed to sell an artist’s work, but at the same time, the fair may also be selling the idea of the neighborhood as a desirable place to live.”<sup>501</sup> This is a festival: A place-site that offers art and artists, and in turn in MacGuffin-like fashion has become a place that people desire to come *to* and live *in*. Come be a part of the festival! Thus the condition of the Hipster. There are artists who are hipsters, and there are hipsters who want to look like artists, and everyone now (hipster or Midtown square/ alt-greaser or suburban Soc) wants *to feel like an artist*: Everybody is an artist!—and this is where the buffet gets confusing—where the fantasy gets persnickety. Is everybody an artist?

No.

I guess so.

Maybe so.

I am getting ahead of myself.

And

I keep walking,

and I keep consuming. For, what is *GRIT*? [Answer: a noun: 1.

*particles of stone or sand*. 2. courage and endurance.]

I see these particles. I consume these particles. I have endurance, I have *grit* for this, and I allow the grit to get on me. This is FUN. Are you having *fun*?: A coffee shop inside Dwelling Spaces, called Joebots Coffee Bar hosts the expected hippie and hipster clientele and employees, the *styles* one will see in many of the Blue Dome: visible tattoos, *shocking* piercings, long hair on some men, shaved heads of some women, the occasional person with dreadlocks, old t-shirts with ironic messages or with old-school brands, tight skinny jeans, long hippie spring skirts, bra-less upperwear, Converse All-Star shoes, combat boots, faded Army jackets, swinging retro pocketbooks, Elvis Costello-style glasses, horned rim glasses, Doc Martens, mustaches, beards, headbands, more beards, cool handshakes, hand-rolled cigarettes, vintage satchels, testosterone irony, estrogen irony, a bit of androgyny, skateboards, skinny ties, et al—some styles that embody the punk look, a nod to emo, and/or a rockabilly constitution, some retro cowboys, some rips, some pleats, some stonewash, tie-dye, and polyester; some and many individuals represent a hybrid of these alternative and/or subcultural *styles*. Artistic styles. Subcultural styles. Time period styles; the 1950s are here. As are the 1960s, and the 1970s, 1980s, '90s, 2000's and Today. This is bric-a-brac. Bricolage.

Phantasmagoria. Musical styles. The indie movement has become fractured and more fluid. Do-It-Yourself or at least go to Urban Outfitters for your hip squib and pseudo-hip squib. Lloyd writes: "Applying their creative talents to the construction of their own lives, they are practiced bricoleurs, turning secondhand clothes into chic, trend-setting ensembles, and converting cultural capital into a myriad of social opportunities, from gallery openings to exclusive parties."<sup>502</sup> The mall apparel is here. Vintage stores are here. The Salvation Army? Yep. Goodwill is here. Target stuff is here. Flea markets are

here. Urban Outfitters (repeat) goods are here. Online squib is here. *The festival is here!* Today and *here* alternative carries a large(r)® bag, there are bricoleurs and buffets at this parade.

A writer for the *Lost Ogle*, an entertainment and Tulsa humor magazine puts forth “5 kinds of people you’ll meet at Tulsa’s Blue Dome District”; commenting on the area’s gentrification, the writer mentions: 1. *The Young and Begrudging Professionals*—the youngish white collar folks who have secret tattoos, play guitar on the weekends, and have an inordinate amount of angst that compels them to drink copious amounts of alcohol while playing Skee Ball. Then there’s: 2. *The Weekenders*, your typical Soc-type fare who just want to drink in the Zone. The writer also mentions:

3. *The New Kind of Gay Guy*

4. *Disgruntled Hipsters*

5. *TU Students*<sup>503</sup>

This writer mentions the various patrons, the new kinds of consumers that sit next to each other at bars, at venues and such—and, you guessed it: *This is postmodern*, this is PoMo; this is post-postmodern in the Blue Dome escape zone.

Tulsa is a town with known musical scenes and a rich music history—for one, Cain’s Ballroom, the birthplace of Swing music and Bob Wills’ Texas Playboys, was founded here—and many of the styles around the Blue Dome represent these various music genres: the rockabilly, the country western & alt country, the punk, the indie, the glam, the jam band, the hippie-ish/neo-Crunch, the emo, the *noise* (etc.). The styles of Hinton’s and Coppola’s *The Outsiders* and *Rumble Fish* along with Clark’s *Tulsa* also represent and reflect these varied musical styles. The variegated mob around Rusty James

and Biff Wilcox fighting in the abandoned lot is here. Ponyboy's and Johnnycake's Halloween costumes are here, and David Roper's shirtless grungy angst is also here. A dead baby unfortunately could even be around here somewhere. These styles are *here*, and some music is in the mix: Tom Waits is here. Leif Garrett is here. Stevie Wonder is here. Even Nic Cage dressed as Elvis is here. This tent here is vast: A monochromatic version of the rockabilly greaser a la *The Outsiders* can be seen in the neighborhood, as can the postmodern merging/fluctuating combinatory styles and looks of *Rumble Fish*, as can the heroic/heroin chic or junkie chic of *Tulsa* lore. The nod is here. It is Matt Dillon's nod, Motorcycle Boy's nod, it is David Roper *on the nod*. Their jean jackets are somewhere around here, as are their motorcycles and switchblades, their ripped jeans, their longer hair, their hip talk, and hep facades and ways/mores. This is Tulsa Cool. Blue Dome cool. A state of mind, a place, a merging for the vagabond, the weirdo, the hip weekend-warrior *in the know*, for the starving artist, for all of it. There are cigarettes, there is caffeine, and there are drinks and treats. Some of these are vegan and/or vegetarian, even pacifist. Some are *not*. Some of these harm pregnant women and kill babies. *Have you ever tried meth at a parade?* This is fun, trash, vice, and substance. This is vintage and *new*; as Lloyd mentions, this is a "creative milieu" as part of what Sharon Zukin has labeled a "symbolic economy."<sup>504</sup> This is an economy! A symbolic economy—a gritty buffet of time periods and styles and walks. A hipster GDP.

I walk.

I am walking:

[\***Note:** An elaboration on these mentioned buffet-wise hipster styles can be found in the *Hipster Handbook...*]<sup>505</sup>

As I leave Dwelling Spaces and walk around the Blue Dome I notice Yokozuna, a vibrant chic Japanese restaurant with “modern twist” sushi (i.e. creative ingredients for their rolls). Across the street from Yokozuna is Arnie’s, a prototypical smoky dive bar with a combination of older local men and younger hipsters with trucker hats and snap-button Western shirts, a shuffleboard table, and affordable Guinness beer on tap. On the block and around the block is Dilly Deli and Juniper, two “farm-to-table” restaurants, only two examples of Tulsa’s commitment to the local, green, and organic food movements. There are many more farmers’ markets in Tulsa than in Oklahoma City, for example. A glance at the periodical *Buy Fresh Buy Local Oklahoma* indicates this. The number of farmer’s markets/local produce fare-fair/organic/free range food offerings between Tulsa and Oklahoma City is 2:1. Tulsa is a lot *greener* in this way, more alternative with its food, more *organic* and (dare I say) more progressive, which means it is more *alternative* in its consumption *and* its ideology. Or is it? Another restaurant on this same block is Joe Momma’s, which claims on its website: “We’re proud to be a local Tulsa based company, and are excited to use our restaurant to show off local artists on our walls and musicians on our stage.” On the same street, Fassler Hall, which proclaims, “. . . [we] make it feel like a bar that’s been around for hundreds of years.” Lee’s Bicycles, a local shop, has custom-made bicycles for the local enthusiast who wants to save gasoline and help the *earth*. The Earth?! Loose Leaf Company calls itself “. . . a collaborative workspace for independent creative professionals, such as photographers, designers and artists in the area.” Boomtown Tees coins itself as “Tulsa’s source for unique local tees and customer orders!” Frederick Signs Company: “We have creative services specializing in the development of original logos and graphics.” The Letterpress

of Oklahoma, with their old school vintage typography and printing on antique letterpresses, sums up [one of] the neighborhood's motto[s]: "Old School is the new Cool." The IDL Ballroom books itself as an all-purpose creative event space with art deco style, and the Engine Room is a creative media company. The Max Retro pub and the Dust Bowl Lanes and Lounge, two staple watering holes of the Blue Dome District, offer the most marketable of retro-vintage drinking establishments. The Max Retro pub bills itself as "Tulsa's only RETROPUB! Featuring retro arcade games and gourmet junk food. Come enjoy the 80's style bar with your friends and play the classic games from your childhood with great drinks and great music." Dust Bowl Lanes "...is an 8-lane bowling alley in the heart of Tulsa's Blue Dome District. The 8,000 square foot facility, which includes a lounge, full-service bar, patio and private VIP room with two lanes, is a retro-inspired tribute to the classic bowling alleys of the 1970s."

This is retro and this is rebel. This is organic and this is creative design. This is identity construction, and this is also massive consumption.

This is alternative *and* digestible.

This nine-square block neighborhood serves as an ideal example of Richard Lloyd's *imagined* sociologically *proven* neo-bohemian neighborhood with its retro-vintage/Old School, kitschy/ironic, cool, rebel[lious], pseudo-rebellious, alternative, unconventional, pseudo-alternative/unconventional, and creative businesses/technologies and consumer options. Richard Lloyd writes:

This startling increase [in the numbers of contemporary artists and by extension (neo)bohemians] lends credibility to the idea of an expanded cultural economy that impacts employment as well as consumption. What



are the implications for the contemporary relevance of bohemia? . . . They remain disproportionately committed to center-city living even as center cities struggle to weather the effects of economic restructuring. In fact, Ann Markusen shows that artists are an especially fast-growing population in cities not traditionally associated with cultural production [**cue:** Tulsa]. . . . Bohemia, if defined solely as an urban artists' district, has only become more frequent in the postmodern period.<sup>506</sup>

In a state and even a city that is “not traditionally associated with cultural production” nor Bohemia, this neighborhood—of artists, neo-bohemians, cultural players, poseurs, and weekend-warrior consumers of Hip and Grit—just east of the predominately Art Deco downtown Tulsa contains mainly modest one and two-story buildings—largely rundown, barely renovated, older brick buildings, a world away from the glamorous and urban gothic Art Deco to the south and west. Ten years ago and more so fifteen years ago in the Blue Dome District, most of these mentioned current local alternative business establishments were not there/here. In their stead were mostly vacant buildings alongside a few residential spaces. In the 1990s, the Blue Dome District was not the place to be, was nowhere near a “state of mind,” but rather a forgotten stretch of the city that very few relatively cared to go to, patron, and/or consume. Only fairly recently has the Blue Dome developed as an alternative sphere for artistic production and creative consumption, as a place for hipsters and artists in the know to congregate and bounce their cultural capitals off one another, for weekend-warriors to slum it in the forays of Tulsa Cool; but, Richard Lloyd would describe this process, this transformation/even this gentrification, as typical of/in the contemporary bohemian climate:

New bohemian districts are increasingly common features of the contemporary urban landscape, their importance only enhanced by post-1960s mass counterculture. They are recognizable via the cumulative identifications generated in and around older bohemias. These neo-bohemias make unprecedented cultural and economic contributions to the broader social system without ever losing their distinctiveness within it. We can see the replay of key bohemian themes . . . Anchoring ourselves in the Wicker Park case [and now the Blue Dome District/Zone case], and treating bohemia as a mode of spatial practices combining place and mind-set, rather than as a category of individual or as *only* a cultural style, we can make empirically informed judgments about the nature of bohemia's ongoing importance.<sup>507</sup>

Lloyd makes his “empirically informed judgments” in his text, and I like them and agree with them (largely), but this dissertation is not an empirical text nor is it a sociological text, at least not in the *traditional* sense. Is this text unconventional? I am merely trying to speak/write about a place and a mind-set/fantasy—a mind-set/fantasy that exists in the Blue Dome District and Zone of Tulsa, Oklahoma. A mind-set/fantasy that is larger than its collection of brick buildings and hipster styles. It is a fantasy that speaks somewhat to bohemias of yore, and it is a fantasy that has been influenced by the works of Hinton, Coppola, and Clark, for examples—these works’ stories, themes, characters, messages, codes, *approaches*, and styles. For, this is not empirical, nor numerical. We do not paint by numbers nor write by numbers here in the neo-neo-bohemian sweatshop. This is fantastical. This is relational, a place to get the head wet and a place to let the hipster air

dry it out for a financial/cultural/mass produced/alternative going-rate and maybe a cigarette or four. A place to ride your bicycle with a basket containing your creatively fused sushi rolls to go, patchwork your clothes and *goods* together, and mail a postcard made of Tulsa hemp to your mother (who may or may not be in the suburbs) while typing on a vintage typewriter, producing Old School letterhead; you will do all of this at the retro bowling alley on '80s Night. Tom Waits plays overhead, and a large projection of Mickey Rourke pretending to be Albert Camus flickers in your periphery. Your cigarette smoke touches his cigarette smoke fading away on screen. This is all cool; your current sense of the *now* and nostalgia meets a structural nostalgia and a sense of goddamned identity complication: *Tulsa Cool Reigns*.

#### 14.2 The Brady Arts District. Keep Walking.

“Brady’s success is a Valentine to Tulsa’s creative class: hole-in-the-wall bistros, art galleries and studio space, the national Woody Guthrie Center, legendary music venues like Cain’s Ballroom and Soundpony and a trendy gay nightclub, among many others. The revival that’s taking place in Brady is part of the reason *The New York Times* dubbed Tulsa one of the 52 places to go in 2015.” –Justin Juozapavicius<sup>508</sup>

The Blue Dome Zone only begins with the Blue Dome District. We head north across the old Santa Fe Railroad tracks into the Brady Arts District. This zone—the Blue Dome District, Brady Arts District, and a few other connected streets—encompasses a space east and north of downtown Tulsa. Above else, this is an escape zone for outsiders/misfits and for people who are tired of being inside (if only temporarily), and the dive bars and farm-to-table restaurants and alternative open-ended fare of the Blue Dome District barely scratch our gritty surface. I move. We move.

About the Brady Arts, Scott Wigton writes: “Just a decade or so ago, Tulsa’s downtown Brady District was really showing its age. Littered with a few too many shattered buildings, weed-infested empty lots and the rusting hulks of obsolete factories and vacant warehouses, the general appearance of the district, at least to the casual observer, was one of decay and decline. Progress seemed to have passed by the Brady District as Tulsa’s urban core depopulated and economic setbacks saw companies leave downtown. Over time, the area became dilapidated, worn out and neglected.”<sup>509</sup> He continues: “Signs of life, however, clung stubbornly to the area, thanks to a smattering of restaurants and bars as well as some artsy shops and galleries, a few industrial outfits and, of course, landmarks Brady Theater and Cain’s Ballroom. Even as it languished, the Brady District still managed to attract and retain a core of artists and others drawn to a grittier urban lifestyle with a tangible bohemian vibe.”

“Today, the approximately 27-city-block Brady District is experiencing a boom not seen since Tulsa’s big-oil era.” This last bit stated by Wigton is important. The big recent boom in Tulsa’s notorious Zone is the biggest since the early twentieth-century oil-related boom in the town. Since mid-century, the city had been awaiting its next resurgence, and surprisingly we have gotten it this time in the way of art and funkiness and local liberal-related fare. Hinton and Coppola and Clark have played their part in bridging this gap and fantasy—in getting the Blue Dome Zone from mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century until now and where it needs to go as a site of publicized rebellion and open alternative consumption. After all, Hinton imagined her rebel fantasies and neighborhoods and city in the 1960s and 1970s, and Larry Clark threw his countercultural deviant weight around during this period as well. Coppola extended these visions with his films in the 1980s.

These texts then helped bridge the gap, inspired reworking/rethinking for eventual gentrification in Tulsa, in the Zone most specifically. They presented models for young Tulsans and for young-at-heart Tulsans for how to look, how to act, how to live—and this goes for the (neo)bohemians and artists and business owners and investors in the Zone who also take these visions to heart and to the bank. Hinton/Coppola/Clark also provided (re)models for places and spaces in the area, and how to interact/refashion/manipulate (with) these buildings—in modest houses, apartments, bars, and streets. They fit the bill and contributed greatly to the Zone’s gentrified, commercialized/packaged rebel blueprint.

We then see these applications of said visions in the types of people that walk these Zone streets now—in their clothes, attitudes, and ways of living—and we see this in the current buildings and businesses (and owners/investors) themselves. Local businessman and artist David Sharp bought property in the Brady District in the 1970s, making sure urban renewal wouldn’t occur in a way that would wipe out the old, historic buildings. Sharp much like some other progressive-minded liberals with cash had big dreams for the area, via their attention to historical preservation and local business and the arts. The George Kaiser family, among others, pumped money into these pursuits. “It was about working with the character and authenticity of the existing neighborhood and wanting to help out and not impose our own vision,” says Stanton Doyle, a senior program officer of the George Kaiser Foundation. Among other pursuits, Doyle spearheaded the renovation and allowance of *Teach For America* teachers to live in the Brady Lofts for very cheap rents. This forward-thinking decency has carried over to

intentionally controlled low rents for artists and other community organizers in these lofts and other residences in the area.

Amid what Scott Thompson has called “a grimy, rundown, forgotten mash-up of abandoned storefronts and forgotten flophouses” through the 1990s, the Brady District started to attract investors and business people. Bradley Garcia, original owner of the district’s Gypsy Coffee House since 2000, states he was called “crazy, crazy for going to this blighted area of Tulsa.” Yet, he had a vision for “a coffeehouse where he could share his love of a bohemian lifestyle.”

Before this, Garcia states, “the neighborhood . . . was fill[ed] up with warehouses, factories and storage yards for oil fields.”

“I call it the Rip Van Winkle stage of the Brady [District] . . . kind of between the 1960s and the 1980s, when it went through its sleep period of quiet decline,” says architectural historian Cathy Ambler.

What’s most important is “[k]eeping the local businesses, keeping the artists at the center of it,” says Stanton Doyle.

“Not in my wildest dreams could I have imagined what has gone on has come in down here,” says Garcia.<sup>510</sup>

The Gypsy Coffee House and Cyber Café states of itself: “We are a privately owned by Tulsans for Tulsans not a corporate chain.” It asserts: “We tolerate everything except intolerance. Walk in Peace.” As the website goes, it explains that “The Tulsa Gypsy building was constructed in 1906 for Gypsy Oil Company. It later became known as Gulf Oil Oklahoma and then Warren Petroleum.” The oil-related slowly then transformed into the art-related: In “2000 we opened the Gypsy Coffeehouse . . . bringing

the 103 year old brick building back to life!”<sup>511</sup> As I enter the Gypsy I notice the vintage furniture, the stained glass windows, local artists’ paintings on the walls, the guitarist playing a Woodie Guthrie song during open mic, and the coffee and vegan food options, but it’s more than that; this is a different space in Tulsa—in Oklahoma. An inviting realm with its organic hands out for me to feel more comfortable, less scrutinized, less judged; and this is part of Garcia’s bohemian vision: “We tolerate everything except intolerance,” the creed goes, and I feel that. This coffee shop provides a place for me and David Roper and Motorcycle Boy and anyone else to go and feel accepted. We know there are no problems, or at least we hallucinate these conditions. Nothing feels weird to us. Nothing seems too outlandish.

From there, from this local bohemian coffee shop I walk west through the Brady District, past the headquarters of the *Currentland Press*—“Oklahoma’s alternative source for entertainment news and green living.” A recent cover tells us to “Keep It Weird!” I walk past the GitWit Creative, a creative design firm that bills itself as “an idea company.” Past a place called LeftBrain Interior Design with its “stylishly engineered living and work spaces.” Past the Tribune Lofts, which is known for its artist residences and studios and parties. I see the Brady Theatre and the legendary Cain’s Ballroom in the distance. Cain’s, formerly the garage of the Brady family, with its spring-loaded wooden floor that has seen countless legends from Bob Wills to Johnny Rotten to Johnny Cash and Patti Smith, has kept the droves coming, even when not much else was around. I see the array of local art galleries, gay bars and dive bars, performance venues, along with the Guthrie Green—a public garden and outdoor stage used for live music and farmers’ markets, a creative and green space named after Oklahoma’s own Woody Guthrie—that

Dust Bowl folk balladeer who carried around a guitar and a guitar case that read: “This Machine Kills Fascists.”

The Brady District. The Brady District describes itself as “a diverse, culturally robust district in downtown Tulsa. Grown from an historic oil-rich past with icons including the Brady Theatre and Cain’s Ballroom, the District has evolved over time to become a creative, community-driven engine of the Tulsa economy. With a variety of retail and service shops, restaurants, bars, clubs, galleries, museums, parks, private businesses, and historic music venues we welcome you to arrive early and stay late in the Brady Arts District. . . . The ‘Arts’ was adopted by the District businesses in 2009 to reflect the concentration of visual and performance arts which manifest daily in the District.”<sup>512</sup> I keep walking as I notice fliers for the District’s *First Friday Art Crawl*. In the middle of the Brady Arts District now, I get to the Zarrow Center for Art and Education.

At the Zarrow is Daniel Farnum’s exhibit of photography called *Rumbleville*, a showcase that has been inspired by S.E. Hinton’s novels and perpetuated by the contemporary young urban people of Tulsa. As it’s explained at the door:

Daniel Farnum’s art exhibition *Rumbleville* focuses on Tulsa’s urban neighborhoods and its young inhabitants. His photographic exploration fluctuates between past and present day socioeconomic challenges evident in the city’s nostalgic identity. Drawing inspiration from S.E. Hinton’s literary characterizations of teenagers and young adults in Tulsa, Farnum’s documentary photographs capture a contemporary depiction of childhood maturation in the same disadvantaged locations used in books such as *The*



*Outsiders* and *Rumble Fish*. The architecture and landscape surrounding the people in Farnum's images act as a backdrop that suggests Tulsa's connection to 1950s and 1960s Americana, while also addressing the lingering effects of rooted class divisions still apparent in the city's urban neighborhoods.

This description of the exhibit captures the inspirations and jettisons of ideas and images that double back on themselves for our purposes. Certainly, we have *The Outsiders* and *Rumble Fish* and S.E.Hinton (and Coppola and Clark behind the curtain somewhere), but we also pressingly have fluctuations "between past and present day socioeconomic challenges," Tulsa's "nostalgic identity," "childhood maturation," Americana, and Tulsa's urban neighborhoods. As I look to Farnum's photographs, these descriptors become clear. I see a young man in black clothes and black fedora, hands in pockets, standing in front of a rundown laundromat, and it occurs to me that this could be Dally from *The Outsiders*. This is Dally's pose. I see another young man with hat backwards in front of an abandoned building, light of day, a sign falling off its wood paneling. There's a sunset over a modest house. It looks like Ponyboy's house or David Roper's house. There are two kids sitting in front of a grimy apartment building. Two young hipsters in an abandoned lot, one with dyed red hair. A van that has been graffitied in front of a broken house. There's that drive-in theatre of *The Outsiders*. The lights are on.

Kids on the street, hooded and looking tough. Kids hanging off railings, leaning against brick, in Chuck Taylor shoes. Broken windows, busted hinges, skateboards and park benches. The underside of a bridge, dilapidated street corners, train tracks, rubble, more graffiti. A man with a large tattoo on his back; the American flag hangs above him.

There's the bail bonds place, a stray dog, the roller derby, a man with a long beard holding a baby on the front steps of a house. A guy dressed in all black but with a white scarf on a motorcycle. Is that Motorcycle Boy? More blight, abandoned buildings. These houses. These lots. These stray dogs and gritty teenagers.

This is contemporary Tulsa, this is Tulsa Cool, a distant cousin of *Tulsa*, as these images bleed and overlap and nod/wink to previous images and phantasms of the 1950s and 1960s and 1970s/1980s and so forth, of those spaces and time periods in between. The nostalgia remains and the residue gets on all of its Tulsa buildings and peoples. The Zone carries these persons and things, showcases them, profits off them, remembers them and welcomes them. For, this is more than a place or a habitus or a simple inspiration—the implications of these photographs present an affirming and power-charged ethos and a myth for a city and neighborhood, a celebration of the unlikely—a dream for the appeal and design of this place, these spaces in Oklahoma. Via *Rumbleville* as one signal, the Zone has clearly been inspired by Hinton's texts. Young Tulsans, in these photographs and in reality, perpetually, almost timelessly, pose on these streets—these same familiar streets—in repetition. Repetitive gazes, duplicated stances and poses. They wear on and the buildings wear down. The Oklahoma sunsets remain. As does the wind.

With this in mind, I walk—to the *Fuck You, We Rule OK!* three-day punk rock music festival at The Vanguard, a music establishment that touts itself as a “small venue [for] up and coming independent acts.”

But before I arrive at the Vanguard I take in some of the other Zone handfuls and eyesores and gems: 3CG Records, an independent record label; 108 Contemporary Arts—“a non-profit community arts organization that supports Oklahoma's contemporary

fine craft artists”; the Arts and Humanities Council of Tulsa Hardesty Arts Center; the Brady Artists Studios; the Flyloft Downtown Tulsa—a place “dedicated to nurturing performing artists and organizations”; the Living Arts of Tulsa building, the oldest Oklahoma non-profit contemporary arts organization—“6,000 square feet for shows, studio space, and artists in residence”; the Mainline Gallery and Bar, which showcases local art; the Theatre Tulsa, “Tulsa’s finest local theatre”; the Tulsa Artists’ Coalition Gallery, a “volunteer-run nonprofit of artists and art supporters”; the Tulsa Glassblowing Studio; the Woody Guthrie Center, an organization that promises to “fight for civil rights and social justice.” And, the list goes on of “eclectic dive bars,” cafes with “environmentally conscious items sourced locally,” establishments that cater “to the GLBT community and our friends,” tattoo parlors, and converted “loft-like spaces” and businesses that hold on to “an industrial feel” and “cutting-edge, eco-conscious construction,” and all-around all-told local art and artistry. This—these visions and dreams, these *choices*—all swarms in my head; I am amazed by the nearly never-ending examples of Sooner progression in the Zone, as I enter the Vanguard.

The place is loud, very loud with punk rock noises and young people and the young-at-heart yelling in their punk outfits/gear—the expected leather and piercings and chains and spiked hair and the cursing and pouring of beers on heads; aggressive dancing. I jump, I ram into people. I get in my appropriately gritty and punkish fill. I see some old friends. Cheap beer, a raucous crowd, a speaker blows out. There’s a fistfight in the bathroom. The bartender is a pretty well-known Tulsa painter and musician. I have a conversation with an infamous local graffiti artist. These punk kids and adults chant and stomp and jump along with the band, in this case, this current set, *The Brass Knuckle*

*Boys*—a no nonsense outfit. They could be playing in that abandoned lot with Biff Wilcox and Rusty James and Motorcycle Boy. The clash of Tulsa punk/greaser/misfit/hipster styles is loud and confusing and overly stimulating. The old brick walls yell back at the band, and my head throbs. My nervous system does not expect this energy to lurch out of a place in Tulsa. Because who thought thousands of punk kids could thrive in Oklahoma? But, of course, this festival is titled *Fuck You, We Rule OK!* and it dawns on me that this slogan would fit for the Blue Dome Zone as a whole. This piercing mantra could handle the greasers' demands; it holds true with David Roper's expectations. These punk kids here expect visceral, frenetic/raw *times*. Yelling "Fuck You!" is just the first step on the stairwell of escape, on the ascendance of known and unknown bohemianism.

I turn my head. The bald singer/guitarist of The Brass Knuckle Boys is screaming into his microphone. An image of Matt Dillon as Dallas Winston from *The Outsiders* has just been projected largely on the wall behind the band. I look to the bass guitarist with his shirt off, then to Dally with his shirt off. I take a shot of bourbon and think of the layers of rebel and packaging and loudness and the somehow enjoyable ringing in my ears. A girl with a Mohawk rams into me.

This, all of this then. My punk friends take me from the fest at the Vanguard to a party at a modest rundown house on the edge of the Zone. In this house I see: drag queens in the kitchen, people doing less-than-virtuous things of the substance and flesh-related in the living room and the bathroom. People are dancing, people are fighting, laughing, and confused and completely in the moment. I see at least one needle in an arm.

A naked woman dances to a punk song in the living room. A punk band plays in the backyard to a large crowd, a skateboarding half pipe rests behind them.

An overheard statement coming from the doorway of the house: “Yeah, Larry Clark. You know, the director of *Kids*, is from Tulsa.”

Two boarders ply their tricks on the pipe while the band plays on. There are hundreds of people here, inside/outside the house falling on top of themselves, along with dozens of vices and displays of questionable judgments—but the sordid maybe illegal details, all of these details, here are not that important; at least not crucial, and probably not so appropriate, to list out right now for a dissertation. The point is that this, all of this, this blur and zoom/rush of a Zone and night of excess and spectacle—of *Rumbleville* exhibits, vegan cafes, punk bars, *Outsiders* projections, aside comments about Larry Clark, social justice centers, puke, and drag queens in kitchens (et al)—are all *happening* in the Zone, today. In Tulsa. It’s all for the taking—as an escape, as a collective alternative, as the last stop of a route to rebellion and acceptance in Oklahoma, the weird conflagration and then watershed of outsiders on the inside in a 40-block give-or-take radius.

I know Hinton would be proud, as would Clark and Coppola—and at times they would also be appalled. Shocked. Surprised Tulsa has come so far. Their characters and subjects fit in inside these buildings and spaces, next to these people. The Tulsa Dream is there for me, and it is there for them—to consume and go for it, because, yeah: *Fuck You, We Rule OK!* This ain’t Wicker Park, and this sure as hell ain’t the Lower East Side. Though I think Allen Ginsberg and Nelson Algren are around here somewhere.

CHAPTER 15: WHAT IS THIS WORLD? A SYNTHESIS. A CONCLUSION. LIFE IS AN ILLUSION. LIFE IS A CONCLUSION.

My dog is named Lloyd. The bartender in *The Shining* is named Lloyd: “Words of wisdom, Lloyd! Words of wisdom!” The Lloyds. What would (Richard) Lloyd say to me (if he could talk)? He would say Neo-Bohemia is a widespread urban (at least *American*) phenomenon, that the Blue Dome Zone resembles Wicker Park in many ways (and like the Lower East Side in NYC, Williamsburg in Brooklyn, Montrose in Houston, Silver Lake in LA, East Sixth in Austin, and so on and so forth), that most major U.S. cities have some form of the Blue Dome and/or Wicker Park. I would push it further, say: “We need to push this further, Lloyd.” Every town. Every town, every city, every *place*, dare I say every text has a neo-bohemian element because these are ideas and dreams, tokens/totems of inspiration. What I have tried to do with this dissertation is convey a fantasy. Connections and collections of my fantasies and those of others. This is not perfect science. In fact, this not exactly a fantasy (at all), but more accurately these are realistic lessons/applications of the imagination, psychic ambitious exchanges between participants and places, thoughts and objects. This has been a difficult project for me to construct, a different kind of manuscript (for me)—one that has attempted to discover meaning(s) through unlikely connections, even a formula of a curious kind: apply the sociological concept Neo-Bohemia to three urban U.S. neighborhoods and one bohemian poet, try to understand the gentrification process of each of these postmodern bohemian

*sources*, and most importantly interconnect certain texts (literature, films, photography) to these *neighborhoods* (place and person) and the processes/transformations of gentrification. Zoom in. Zoom out. Spread out and jet out, come back. These are not as much arguments as much as examinations and applications, even hallucinatory placements of images and ideas, sub-groups, and associations of air, shit, brick, and flesh. And/yet, this project also presents a collage, a montage of Unlikely, for better and worse—for best and horrific. Is this punk rock? I did teach myself to type, but regardless I hope it works (for you), at least on some level. In some ways, this manuscript deals with impossibilities, trips possibilities. A discussion of a crazy person with himself. Question: Can a graduate student successfully write a dissertation about postmodernism or postmodern Bohemian? I am still not sure about the answer to this, but I do know it is at least somewhat crazy to take cool neighborhoods and see which texts have inspired these neighborhoods. I *have* gone insane. Even so, I do know with a decent amount of certainty that a city such as Tulsa for example owes a lot to my mentioned texts. The Zone, in my mangled mind, has taken some of its inspirations from them. Tulsa Cool holds them up as its bibles. As does the Lower East Side with Ginsberg and his poems and representations. As does Wicker Park with Algren and his stories and associations of Hip Grit. These neighborhoods owe these writers some favors.

\*

As I sit here typing in my attached/detached cheap space heater-fueled Cold-As-Balls garage, smoking hand-rolled American Spirits cigarettes while wearing a black pleather jacket with Outlaw country music playing out of my tape deck/Old School boom-box, in Lafayette, Indiana, my live-in girlfriend sits drinking PBR & Schlitz beer

with some friends at a hip dive bar called The Spot. The Spot is a fairly simple model, but this model is unique for Lafayette, Indiana. Take an older bar/building that has been abandoned for a while. Keep the high ceiling, the walls intact with its chipped paint and faded wood panels with some errant holes in them. In this two-roomed space on one side you have a large, narrow wooden bar—vintage black leather bar stools, cigarettes in ashtrays, kitschy/gaudy and local artists' paintings on walls, some heads and horns of dead animals, an antique small electric piano in the corner, an outdated Marlboro sign with a mustachioed cowboy smoking, a woman with blue streaks in her hair talking about the perils of homelessness in the local community, a hip-looking bartender with bushy sideburns and a vintage stocking cap and workmen's shirt and motorcycle boots, another bartender who looks like he is in an indie rock band (he remarks to the other bartender: "Hey, don't step on my guitar!"), an antique cash machine behind the bar, rows of beers from local and independent breweries, two old turntables that are playing Lou Reed. This is vintage *and* local: Old School. Retro. Worn. Grungy. Off. Found. Hip. The other room has a vintage pinball machine, more old stuff: a pool table, a shuffleboard table, a large projection screen on one wall. I saw John Waters's film *Pink Flamingos* on this wall a few weeks ago. Goodwill couches are in this room. Bands, local and nationally touring, play in this room.

This all presents alternative consumption, a place/sphere/locus—a bar for the Other as it pertains to Style, Music, Visual Art, Local Beer, Old Furniture, Gritty walls of an older building, alongside leisure-recreation that sells itself on the authenticity of the experience, the substance of the consume. Simple yet complicated. This bar presents a fairly simple combination of things and people, but the symbols and implications are



more powerful. This place provides a respite, an escape zone for the weird/off/outsider misfits of the town to feel more comfortable, less alone. If there is a small “scene” in Lafayette happening now (and I am told by a local musician that this scene is comprised of about 40 people and a few bands) then The Spot, a fairly simple dive bar a couple blocks south of downtown, provides the main meeting ground for this scene *right now*. This is Neo-Bohemia, if only on a small scale. A (post)industrial site for creativity and cultural production. Styles combine here, decades combine. Technology (the projector is new. The turntables are older.) combines. Age (the patrons are mostly in their twenties, but their styles are from foregone eras largely) combines. But who knows how long The Spot will exist as the primary location, or even basically the *only* offering, of Neo-Bohemian Lafayette. The location will surely shift, in physical reality and in people’s minds (at some point it will cease to be *the place to be* for people *in the know*—the cultural capital will surely move elsewhere, just probably not across the river close to the more conservative and monotone Purdue campus.). As it is now, The Spot provides the go-to place for creative mythmaking and artistic consumption in the area.

However/now/yet/of course, Lafayette is still far far far from cool or hip in general, *as a place-locale* and *a state of mind*, and it is a world away from Wicker Park, the Lower East Side, even the Blue Dome Zone. Hell, it is light years away from that other college town two hours south, Bloomington—a town with a similar population size and similar-sized public institution of higher learning, but/and IU-Bloomington has more cultural capital and far more hipster cred than Purdue does. This cannot be argued unless you have been living in a Hoosier cave. Bloomington has more cultural capital than Lafayette does. It is unequivocally *cooler*. The vast differences between these two

Indiana college towns, the Hip-Void of Lafayette and the comparative Hip-Fruit of Bloomington, can get further extrapolated on and pinned/penned down in another dissertation, but let it be known: That even in a place as uncool and unhip and non-bohemian as Lafayette/Purdue, there are still some neo-bohemian offerings. Alternative consumption can be had. It may just be at *one* dive bar and *a* Goodwill store instead of in an entire neighborhood. How not Lloydian.

However.

However (as this record's on repeat), Lafayette is *not* a state of mind for alternative consumption. At least not *collectively* yet anyway, and there are reasons for this (see my comments on Oklahoma City, if necessary). The Red Forces are too strong, but this is not the entire point; the point is that these ideas may be passing thoughts *or* lasting thoughts, thoughts that dissipate into one's lone-wolf PBR beer *or* thoughts that reach fruition in the form of an individual mantra *or* larger community; and, herein rests (partially) the difference between Lloyd and myself (the man, not the dog. My dog agrees with me.). I love the guy, but Lloyd doesn't deeply take into account the textual *influences* (both real and imagined) of/on his chosen hipster neo-bohemian neighborhood, and he does not celebrate the importance of individual thought, or maybe even just one individual bar or basement with a shitty punk rock band. He relies too heavily on his collective ethnography—his data about demographics, income, education levels, property values, and employment choices, et al. He does not write as extensively about how the people and materials of the place have been inspired, how they dream and start nuggets of myth and legend—how potentially even one individual's isolated idea has been inspired,

how texts have contributed to the (re)generation of this ethos and these nods, even these retro-vintage imaginings.

For, here, and now, the Blue Dome (as my most recent example) *is*, as I've mentioned, a reality *and* most crucially a state of mind, and this state of mind connects with, marinates with, dances with the likes of Hinton, Coppola, and Clark. HC & C: A hip underground off-the-clock law (pseudo-crime) firm of grit, cool, knives, and switchblades that are actually combs, et al. This is crucial. This is foremost. Yes, to a lesser extent, as I've also mentioned, the Blue Dome is also a reality. I *do* agree with Lloyd when he says: "[N]eo-bohemia is not, as some might suspect, simply a shallow caricature of bohemia's past, just another urban theme park," for these districts actually have artists who live and create art and have genuine commitments to perform actual creative and alternative work; it's just that these artists and their works have also (sometimes) merged with the contemporary state of late-capitalism and global technologies, and, most importantly, these artists/along with businesses have been inspired by fantasies: of Motorcycle Boy, of Roper, et al, and all that these gritty dreams and messages entail. These artists, and their shops and their galleries and their festivals, have catered to these contemporary conditions, and/yet they also hold onto bohemian rebels and outsiders of the past, their visages and legends; and, this, again, is also where *Rumble Fish* comes in, where *The Outsiders* and *Tulsa* and Ginsberg and Algren, et al, hold true. What we have here, locally and specifically, in the Blue Dome Zone (and the Lower East Side and Wicker Park, et al) is a medley of the retro with the artistic, creative, contemporary, and fantastical. The reality here has soaked up many dreams: dreams of

commerce and dreams of art, dreams of the badass wayward and weird. Illusions of identity formation and fantasies of new local business. Lloyd:

Bohemia has traditionally been considered marginal and subversive within the capitalist economy that nonetheless called it into being. . . . Today's bohemians have not necessarily abandoned that stance . . . but as a practical matter . . . neo-bohemia enhances profit-generating strategies in a variety of new, and occasionally surprising, ways. . . . But this division does not capture the actual fluidity of the boundaries between the articulation of cultural innovation and strategies of accumulation. Rather than looking at artists as a resistant subculture, I became compelled to think of artists as useful labor . . .<sup>513</sup>

What we have here is useful labor, yes, but we also have the consumption of ideas and the laborious applications of our fantasies; what we have here is a mind construction of a place in time, a construction that resembles somewhat other bohemian periods, but it is also a construction of contemporary holism and merging. An amalgamation. The clashes have all but basically and foundationally faded away, for/yet this is bleeding-Red state Oklahoma (and Indiana, et al) after all, and/thus a rift and confusion of styles, art, businesses, and buildings remain, at least in our given most contemporary heterotopeia: The Zone. Patrick still hates Chad, even if Patrick's gal-pal Lucinda thinks Chad is *kind of nice*. Anonymous Hipster Patrick: Please meet D-Bag Chad. You are going to play Ms. Pac-Man together and *like it*. This tent is complicated, and/but the parade keeps coming—and, consumers, in Lafayette and Tulsa and anywhere else, can decide and

imagine, within reason, if they want to take part in this gritty parade or not as workers and/or as volunteers. Lloyd writes:

If increasingly detached from the reality of more upscale residence and commerce, gritty accents remain a feature of neighborhood character. Moreover, the gritty aesthetic of the local scene, read through the historically constituted lens of bohemian tradition, is imprinted on the aesthetic representations produced by cultural creators, representations that evoke the glamour of urban instability, available to be consumed at a safe distance.<sup>514</sup>

For/and, a place such as the Zone, with a neighborhood aesthetic of “urban instability,” is a gritty subculture, yes, but the definition of *subculture* is simply that of “a social culture within a larger culture.” The Zone is social. Check. And, it is within a larger culture. Check. But people also live there for the *alternative*, that real or perceived urban instability. They go there for the *escape* and *the ideas*. It is not just *an* other. It, in their minds, is *the* other. Some people consume it “at a safe distance” at times, and/but, yet, people also visit there (hourly, weekly, yearly, monthly) for the escape and the spectacle, to consume and *be seen* and to *fit in*. Be part of the mass. *An edgy and gritty mass. A digestible edgy and gritty mass.* Richard Lloyd again: “But even as the neighborhood became more popular and more expensive, the local aesthetic continued to display the image of grit as glamour. This image connoted an authentic bohemianism appealing not only to committed participants but also to sporadic consumers.”<sup>515</sup>

The grit is in the mix, and the pudding has been packaged. Only \$1 on Wednesday, a.k.a. Hipster Hump Day, in some falling down Tulsa building.

This is subcultural style, but this is also mass cultural style (at times). A merger. Sociologist Gary Clarke says as much in a different way. Gelder mentions Clarke's mind-style:

Clarke spoke up for the ordinariness of mass cultural styles but he also argued against Hebdige's view—that culture, and subcultures, must “defend against the vulgar inroads of mass culture”—by suggesting that mass cultural and subcultural styles are much more entangled or enmeshed. He concluded that the “absolute distinction between subcultures and ‘straights’ is increasingly difficult to maintain: the current diversity of styles makes a mockery of subcultural analysis as it stands.”<sup>516</sup>

A mockery! Enmeshment! Yes, the Zone is enmeshed, and this is complicated because this is all fluid, an ocean of cool and hip and subculture and *mass*. I can't tell where Motorcycle Boy begins and Mickey Rourke ends, but we know they are both *there*, in minds and on screens and pages and on key chains and lunchboxes, on computer screensavers. Do you want to shake their hands or not? Do you want to take the risk? Do you want to get your hands and minds dirty? Up close and/or at a distance? Patrick? Chad?

And/thus, the Zone is a kaleidoscope—it is clean *and* it is dirty—as is Neo-Bohemia. In your mind and on the street. In the shops, in the coffee, in the coffins, in the dope, in your soap and your soup, at your feet, in your hair, behind your ear.

The mass culture is there because the commerce and investment and gentrification and cultural tourism are all there. The subcultures are around, but many subcultures will eventually make money, go commercial, proverbially *sell out*. And, of course, the Zone

makes money, a lot of it, a lot of dough and a lot of loot and squib & kale, for nearly everybody there: the hipsters, the owners, the residents, the artists. Spend money. Make money. Earn financial and cultural capital. Spend financial and cultural capital. Your money. Your time. Your style. Your nods. Your dreams. [Repeat.] [Repeat.] [Repeat.]

[Repeat.] [Repeat.]

[Repeat.]

Is the Zone a sell-out? I don't know, but I do know it *sells out*. Did Hinton? Did Coppola? Did Clark? Did Tom Waits, Rourke, Lane, Macchio, or Dillon? Ginsberg or Algren?

Richard Lloyd confirms some/most of this: “Links between art and commerce have only increased since then [the 1960s], helped along by avatars of pop postmodernism . . . Both the accessibility and appeal of bohemian lifestyles increase with the postmodern extension of an aesthetic economy.”<sup>517</sup> This is cultural pluralism and *this* is (pseudo)subcultural pluralism, a “postmodern extension of an aesthetic economy” aided by “pop postmodernism,” but it has also been aided by artists and creativity—actual (*authentic*[?]) creators of art and actual consumers of art. Art *and* profit *and* authenticity *and* artifice: “The popularity of the neo-bohemian scene, taken as a whole, demonstrates its ongoing appeal to a new class of urban consumers . . . [and] there persists the allure of the cutting edge on which local entrepreneurs capitalize, making use of local artists as standard-bearers in the process.”<sup>518</sup>

Art and Commerce. Pop Postmodernism. Mickey Rourke. The Zone. A Dead Baby?

These are facts, fictions and ideas, and this is commercial pluralism and time-period pluralism, retro pluralism, even artistic pluralism. Mindset pluralism. This is a buffet of styles, decades, art, and consumption. This is not real. This is all *too* real.

...for, how do you make money in your mind? has an *idea* ever rifled a cash register? don't we sell ideas on Wal(l) Street, in Wal(l)Mart, on films, in photographs, with novels?

This is not romantic.

This is all *too* romantic.

This is not fluid *enough*.

I guess GRIT *is* the word.

[grit is in the fluid.]

An Illusion.

[a state of mind.]

No time for Confusion.

Gelder again: "The term subculture is both 'inappropriate' and 'illuminating' here: maybe that's about as much as we can ask of any descriptive social category."<sup>519</sup>

Inappropriate yet Illuminating. Grease *is* the word. Grit is the motion.

And, Mr. Malcom Cowley, referencing Grub Street:

Grub Street develops in the metropolis of any country or culture as soon as men are able to earn a precarious living with pen or pencil; bohemia is a revolt against certain features of industrial capitalism and can exist only in capitalist society. Grub Street is a way of life unwittingly followed by the intellectual proletariat; bohemia attracts its citizens from all economic



classes: there are not a few bohemian millionaires, but they are expected to imitate the customs of penniless artists. Bohemia is Grub Street romanticized, doctrinalized, and rendered self-conscious; it is **Grub Street on parade**.<sup>520</sup> [bold mine]

For, the Blue Dome Zone is *not* Grub Street. [Yet, it *is* Grub Street.] You don't even need to know what Grub Street is. Just know that the Zone is *not* Bohemia. It is post-industrial, and it is neo-industrial (my term). We have a new industry there, a familiar contemporary industry. An eclectic blend and an ESCAPE. In our minds and on the street. Lloyd: "Thus is the 'scene' constituted in neo-bohemia, through the activities of artists, entrepreneurs, consumers, and service laborers, categories of social actors that bleed into one another."<sup>521</sup>

It *is* Bohemia.

It is Neo-Bohemia.

It is *not* Neo-Bohemia.

But.

And.

We are on parade.

The Brady Arts District, just north of the Blue Dome District across the tracks, is also on parade. Some hipsters argue it is even hipper than the Dome. The Pearl District, just east of the Blue Dome, the Pearl District—Tulsa's largest LGBT community—some would argue is more *alternative* (less of a *sell-out*, less *played out*) than the Dome. This is all good and fine; these are Hip arguments *to be had*, but, for my purposes, for my money, FOR NOW, I hold my ground—my Cultural Capital Ground

and Rebel Ground. I combine these neighborhoods and these streets, these artists and these people and these players—into a Zone, in Tulsa and elsewhere. From New York to Chicago to Tulsa, from literature, photographs to films, and back again through the chest of Ginsberg and mouth of Algren on through to Hinton’s feet and Coppola’s hands. This presents a Rebel Yell and a Hip Free Enterprise Yell. For my money, for starters, it is Macchio’s, Lane’s, Ponyboy’s, Motorcycle Boy’s, Coppola’s, Hinton’s, Clark’s, and Roper’s YELL:

***The Blue Parade Reigns! Long live Bohemia!***

*[my check is in the mail]*

*[as is yours]*

\*

After seeing a concert one night at Cain’s Ballroom, I walked next door to the SOUNDPONY, a narrow and unassuming dive bar and music venue with bicycles hanging from the walls and ceiling. Mike, one of the co-owners was tending bar. I asked him: “Do you think *The Outsiders* and *Rumble Fish* have inspired what’s happened in this neighborhood?”

“Yes, for sure,” he said. “We love the Motorcycle Boy here. Perfect hero.”

“How so?”

“I don’t know. That seems nearly impossible to calculate.”

“Well, I’m thinking about writing about those connections. What do you think?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know. But you should try. Someone should write that. It’s all true.”

With that, I thanked him and left some bills on the bar. I had to get back to Indiana.

**END NOTES**

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> My *Oxford American Dictionary* defines “gentrification” as “a movement of middle-class families into an urban area causing property values to increase and having the secondary effect of driving out poorer families.”

<sup>2</sup> Leland, 272

<sup>3</sup> This Kuprin quote comes from the opening title page of Nelson Algren’s *The Man with the Golden Arm*.

<sup>4</sup> The last four definitions were found online at the freedictionary.com.

<sup>5</sup> My definition.

<sup>6</sup> Wilson, 41

<sup>7</sup> Stansell, 2

<sup>8</sup> Stansell, 3

<sup>9</sup> Wilson, 41

<sup>10</sup> Nicholson, xvii

<sup>11</sup> Wilson, 10

<sup>12</sup> Wilson, 11

<sup>13</sup> Wilson, 10

<sup>14</sup> Stansell, 17

<sup>15</sup> Gelder, 5

<sup>16</sup> Goffman, 4

<sup>17</sup> Goffman, 6

<sup>18</sup> Nicholson, xvi

<sup>19</sup> Stansell, 4

<sup>20</sup> Wilson, 3

<sup>21</sup> Stansell, 17

<sup>22</sup> Stansell, 18

<sup>23</sup> This definition of *bohemian* is from a *Webster’s Dictionary*, but I have found that the *Oxford American Dictionary* along with other commonly used dictionaries have nearly identical definitions.

<sup>24</sup> Gelder, inside cover (not paginated)

<sup>25</sup> Goffman, 29

<sup>26</sup> Goffman, 33

<sup>27</sup> Lanham, 2-3

<sup>28</sup> Perhaps I am a hipster. God, I hope not.

<sup>29</sup> Lloyd, 17

<sup>30</sup> Florida, 8

<sup>31</sup> Lloyd, 104

<sup>32</sup> Wilson, 41

<sup>33</sup> Definition found on urbandictionary.com.

<sup>34</sup> I found this Ginsberg Gap advertisement photograph on the internet: <http://form9.staticflickr.com>

<sup>35</sup> Wilson, 7

<sup>36</sup> Lloyd, 129

<sup>37</sup> qtd in Robbins, 171

<sup>38</sup> Amram, 84

<sup>39</sup> O’Hagan, Sean. Web.

<sup>40</sup> *Pull My Daisy*, 1959

<sup>41</sup> Mele, 112-113

<sup>42</sup> Mele, 29

<sup>43</sup> Mele, 153

- <sup>44</sup> Mele, 153
- <sup>45</sup> Mele, 140-1
- <sup>46</sup> Mele, 153-4
- <sup>47</sup> Mele, 74
- <sup>48</sup> Mele, 122-3
- <sup>49</sup> Nicholson, 100
- <sup>50</sup> Amram, 4
- <sup>51</sup> Kerouac (A.M. Homes Introduction), vi-vii.
- <sup>52</sup> Nicholson, 112
- <sup>53</sup> Wilson, 24
- <sup>54</sup> Nicholson, 102
- <sup>55</sup> Nicholson, 119
- <sup>56</sup> Kerouac, vi.
- <sup>57</sup> Nicholson, 100
- <sup>58</sup> Kerouac, vii-viii.
- <sup>59</sup> Nicholson, 102
- <sup>60</sup> Kerouac, viii.
- <sup>61</sup> Amram, 50
- <sup>62</sup> Amram, 49
- <sup>63</sup> Such a buffet of reconfiguration reminds of contemporary street artists, adbusters, and various Occupy Wall Street efforts/opportunities to take back particular messages and spaces for their empowerment in today's environs. That is, before the celebrated transmissions of well-known and anonymous street artists and contemporary occupy movements, we had unknown poets/artists such as the young Ginsberg who simply inverted domesticate spaces, using them for their better-suited purposes of play and awe.
- <sup>64</sup> Amram 75
- <sup>65</sup> Amram, 78
- <sup>66</sup> Allan, 194
- <sup>67</sup> Nicholson, 2
- <sup>68</sup> Nicholson, 3
- <sup>69</sup> Nicholson, 3
- <sup>70</sup> Wilson, 17
- <sup>71</sup> Wilson, 17
- <sup>72</sup> Nicholson, 24
- <sup>73</sup> Wilson, 3
- <sup>74</sup> Wilson, 7
- <sup>75</sup> Emphasis mine. From Ginsberg's *Deliberate Prose*, 3.
- <sup>76</sup> Lyon, 395
- <sup>77</sup> Leland, 138
- <sup>78</sup> qtd in Leland, 148
- <sup>79</sup> Wilson, 3
- <sup>80</sup> qtd in Leland, 149
- <sup>81</sup> Roszak, xii, written in the 1995 new edition forward to his original 1969 text, as a telling retrospective.
- <sup>82</sup> Halberstam, 134
- <sup>83</sup> Amram, 51
- <sup>84</sup> Allan, 194
- <sup>85</sup> Allan, 195
- <sup>86</sup> Amram, 52
- <sup>87</sup> Allan, 195
- <sup>88</sup> Amram, 62
- <sup>89</sup> Allan, 185
- <sup>90</sup> Wilson, 3
- <sup>91</sup> qtd in Sterritt, 99-101.
- <sup>92</sup> qtd in Sterritt, 102

- <sup>93</sup> Amram, 84
- <sup>94</sup> qtd in Leland, 142
- <sup>95</sup> Please see Schumacher, Morgan, and Raskin for elaboration of Ginsberg's celebrity/fame in the late 1950s, early 1960s.
- <sup>96</sup> Lloyd, 239
- <sup>97</sup> Lloyd, 239
- <sup>98</sup> Mele, 158
- <sup>99</sup> Mele, 159
- <sup>100</sup> Morgan, 376
- <sup>101</sup> qtd in Morgan, 376
- <sup>102</sup> Morgan, 376
- <sup>103</sup> Schumacher, 394
- <sup>104</sup> Schumacher, 347
- <sup>105</sup> Schumacher, 376
- <sup>106</sup> Schumacher, 386-7
- <sup>107</sup> Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 324-330
- <sup>108</sup> qtd in Schumacher, 395-6
- <sup>109</sup> Schumacher, 395
- <sup>110</sup> Mele, 160
- <sup>111</sup> Mele, 160
- <sup>112</sup> Mele, 141
- <sup>113</sup> Mele, 149
- <sup>114</sup> Mele, 150
- <sup>115</sup> Schumacher, 409
- <sup>116</sup> See Finbow, 104-5 for elaboration
- <sup>117</sup> Morgan, 383
- <sup>118</sup> Morgan, 339
- <sup>119</sup> Tony Triglio writes extensively about Buddhism's interconnections with Ginsberg's poetry in *Allen Ginsberg's Buddhist Poetics* (2007)
- <sup>120</sup> Morgan, 342
- <sup>121</sup> Pacernick, 27
- <sup>122</sup> Robbins, 169
- <sup>123</sup> Mele, 171
- <sup>124</sup> Mele, 172
- <sup>125</sup> For further, specific criticisms of Ginsberg's lifestyle choices, see Hyde, Raskin, Kramer, Finbow, and Schumacher.
- <sup>126</sup> See Finbow.
- <sup>127</sup> Mendelsohn's *The Lower East Side Remembered and Revisited* (2009) is especially helpful as a historical guide to the neighborhood.
- <sup>128</sup> Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 457-8
- <sup>129</sup> Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 625-7
- <sup>130</sup> Mele, 169
- <sup>131</sup> Mele, 173
- <sup>132</sup> Mele, 174
- <sup>133</sup> Mele, 177
- <sup>134</sup> Mele, 177
- <sup>135</sup> Mele, 179
- <sup>136</sup> Mele, 3, 6
- <sup>137</sup> Schumacher, 589
- <sup>138</sup> A person could argue though that he caused more problems by staying in the neighborhood, hence his mugging by teenaged boys who probably perceived him as some old spoiled ungrateful hippie with some disposable cash.
- <sup>139</sup> qtd in Leland, 185

- <sup>140</sup> Lewis Hyde, 214
- <sup>141</sup> Lloyd, 6
- <sup>142</sup> Lloyd, 8
- <sup>143</sup> Lloyd, 11
- <sup>144</sup> Schumacher, 469
- <sup>145</sup> Finbow, 124
- <sup>146</sup> Wilson, 3, 6
- <sup>147</sup> Lloyd, 241
- <sup>148</sup> Lloyd, 246
- <sup>149</sup> Biographical source information on Ginsberg's political involvement is vast. One particularly useful biography I've utilized is Schumacher's *Dharma Lion*.
- <sup>150</sup> Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 460
- <sup>151</sup> Schumacher, 497
- <sup>152</sup> Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 483
- <sup>153</sup> Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 541
- <sup>154</sup> Goffman, 243
- <sup>155</sup> Lyon, 402
- <sup>156</sup> Morgan, 411
- <sup>157</sup> Ariel, 51
- <sup>158</sup> qtd in Hyde, 367
- <sup>159</sup> qtd in Hyde, 451
- <sup>160</sup> qtd in Hyde, 340
- <sup>161</sup> Hishneh in "Marketing Genius" notes Ginsberg's savvy partnership with Bob Dylan in particular.
- <sup>162</sup> Ginsberg's pop culture fame would arguably hit a height with a music video he made with Paul McCartney that got significant airplay on MTV.
- <sup>163</sup> Morgan, 301
- <sup>164</sup> Lyon, 391
- <sup>165</sup> Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 333
- <sup>166</sup> Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 333-4
- <sup>167</sup> Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 424
- <sup>168</sup> Finbow, 117
- <sup>169</sup> Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 432-456
- <sup>170</sup> qtd in Finbow, 117
- <sup>171</sup> Schumacher, 475
- <sup>172</sup> Schumacher, 475
- <sup>173</sup> Ariel, 58
- <sup>174</sup> Lyric from the band The Samples
- <sup>175</sup> Ariel, 63
- <sup>176</sup> Based on a personal interview.
- <sup>177</sup> Wilson, 179
- <sup>178</sup> Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 494
- <sup>179</sup> Schumacher, 507
- <sup>180</sup> Schumacher, 507
- <sup>181</sup> qtd in Hyde, 335
- <sup>182</sup> qtd in Hyde 354-5
- <sup>183</sup> Wilson, 195
- <sup>184</sup> Schumacher, 543
- <sup>185</sup> Schumacher, 472
- <sup>186</sup> Schumacher, 542
- <sup>187</sup> Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 738-9
- <sup>188</sup> Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 743
- <sup>189</sup> Ginsberg, *White Shroud*: 3, 5-6
- <sup>190</sup> Wilson, 208



- <sup>191</sup> Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 683
- <sup>192</sup> qtd in Leland, 142
- <sup>193</sup> qtd in Hyde, 331
- <sup>194</sup> Wilson, 234
- <sup>195</sup> Mele, 1
- <sup>196</sup> Mele, 1
- <sup>197</sup> Mele, 1-2
- <sup>198</sup> Mele, 2
- <sup>199</sup> Greif, 39
- <sup>200</sup> Mele, 2-3
- <sup>201</sup> I explain more about this “debate” in a later section, but over the years a lot of people criticized him and his poetry. Some called him superficial and a sell-out. See Kramer, Finbow, Schumacher, Raskin, and Hyde for specifics.
- <sup>202</sup> Leland, 237
- <sup>203</sup> Lloyd, 11
- <sup>204</sup> Lloyd, 143
- <sup>205</sup> Lloyd, 22
- <sup>206</sup> Goldberg, 80
- <sup>207</sup> Ginsberg, *Death and Fame*, 29-33
- <sup>208</sup> “Ballad of the Skeletons...”, Web
- <sup>209</sup> Ginsberg, *Death and Fame*, 33
- <sup>210</sup> Lloyd, 14
- <sup>211</sup> Wilson, 243
- <sup>212</sup> For criticisms/discussions of this type of “co-optation,” please see Klein, Lasn, and Heath, along with Raskin, Hyde, Finbow, Kramer, and Schumacher.
- <sup>213</sup> Wilson, 243
- <sup>214</sup> In the end it’s difficult to decipher if this video affected young viewer votes of the election itself, but perhaps his messages, more accurately, had greater influence on emerging youth protests such as Seattle WTO protest in 1999. Not sure.
- <sup>215</sup> “Ballad of the Skeletons...”, Web
- <sup>216</sup> Leland, 285
- <sup>217</sup> Leland, 285
- <sup>218</sup> Wilson, 240
- <sup>219</sup> Wilson, 241
- <sup>220</sup> Frank, 26
- <sup>221</sup> Leland, 289
- <sup>222</sup> Leland, 295
- <sup>223</sup> Leland, 242
- <sup>224</sup> “Bob Rosenthal Interview”
- <sup>225</sup> Lloyd, 64
- <sup>226</sup> Morgan, 631
- <sup>227</sup> Thomas Frank, 56
- <sup>228</sup> Leland, 305-6
- <sup>229</sup> “Bob Rosenthal Interview”
- <sup>230</sup> Ginsberg, *Cosmopolitan Greetings*, 78-9
- <sup>231</sup> Shumacher, 635-6
- <sup>232</sup> Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 690-1
- <sup>233</sup> Ginsberg, *White Shroud*, 40
- <sup>234</sup> Ginsberg, *Cosmopolitan Greetings*, 105
- <sup>235</sup> Ginsberg, *White Shroud*, 64
- <sup>236</sup> Ginsberg, *Cosmopolitan Greetings*, 22
- <sup>237</sup> Martin, 83
- <sup>238</sup> Leland, 306

- <sup>239</sup> Ginsberg, *White Shroud*, 51-2
- <sup>240</sup> Ginsberg, *Cosmopolitan Greetings*, 12-13
- <sup>241</sup> Ginsberg, *Cosmopolitan Greetings*, 96-98
- <sup>242</sup> Ginsberg, *Death and Fame*, 20
- <sup>243</sup> Ginsberg, *Death and Fame*, 89-93
- <sup>244</sup> “Joey Ramone, Allen Ginsberg...”
- <sup>245</sup> Ginsberg, *Death and Fame*, 19
- <sup>246</sup> Leland, 301
- <sup>247</sup> The only other contemporary poet I can think of who has also done this is Sylvia Plath.
- <sup>248</sup> *The Source* (1999)
- <sup>249</sup> Wilson, 242
- <sup>250</sup> qtd in Perry, A1
- <sup>251</sup> Harris, 213
- <sup>252</sup> This image, Art Shay’s photograph of Nelson Algren on a Wicker Park street in the 1950s was found online at <http://41media.tumblr.com>
- <sup>253</sup> Algren, *Arm*, 274
- <sup>254</sup> Algren, *Chicago: City on the Make*, 23
- <sup>255</sup> As reads the birthday party flyer.
- <sup>256</sup> A novel Algren didn’t like none too much.
- <sup>257</sup> Drew
- <sup>258</sup> Rotella, 59
- <sup>259</sup> From [www.nelsonalgren.org](http://www.nelsonalgren.org)
- <sup>260</sup> qtd in Lloyd, 11
- <sup>261</sup> Algren and Donahue, 11
- <sup>262</sup> Drew, 11
- <sup>263</sup> Algren and Donahue, 8
- <sup>264</sup> Drew 12
- <sup>265</sup> Drew 197
- <sup>266</sup> Drew 198
- <sup>267</sup> Shay (2007), 16
- <sup>268</sup> Lloyd, 82
- <sup>269</sup> Shay (2007), xi
- <sup>270</sup> Shay (2007), 163
- <sup>271</sup> Horvath, 2
- <sup>272</sup> Horvath, 2
- <sup>273</sup> qtd in Horvath, 2-3
- <sup>274</sup> Algren, *Arm*, 6
- <sup>275</sup> Giles, viii
- <sup>276</sup> Chatterton and Cox, 112
- <sup>277</sup> Chatterton and Cox, 17
- <sup>278</sup> Horvath, 7
- <sup>279</sup> Ward, 112
- <sup>280</sup> Rotella, 26
- <sup>281</sup> Rotella, 63
- <sup>282</sup> Spinney
- <sup>283</sup> Ward, 12
- <sup>284</sup> Lloyd, 88
- <sup>285</sup> qtd in Lloyd, 86
- <sup>286</sup> I spoke with Mark while I was at the Nelson Algren Birthday Party. He answered a few informal questions I asked him. Some of those answers are here.
- <sup>287</sup> Lloyd, 86-87
- <sup>288</sup> Lloyd, 86
- <sup>289</sup> Shay (2007), 2

- <sup>290</sup> Shay (2007), 9
- <sup>291</sup> Shay (2007), 9
- <sup>292</sup> qtd in Howarth, 67
- <sup>293</sup> Shay (2007), 24
- <sup>294</sup> Shay (2007), 24
- <sup>295</sup> Shay (2007), 34-35
- <sup>296</sup> Shay (2007), xi
- <sup>297</sup> Shay (2007), xiii-xv
- <sup>298</sup> Shay (2007), xv-xvi
- <sup>299</sup> Shay (2007), xxx-xxxii
- <sup>300</sup> qtd in Howarth, 76
- <sup>301</sup> Lloyd, 75
- <sup>302</sup> Lloyd, 77-8
- <sup>303</sup> Lloyd, 81
- <sup>304</sup> Lloyd, 81-2
- <sup>305</sup> Lloyd, 84
- <sup>306</sup> Leland, 353
- <sup>307</sup> Leland, 354
- <sup>308</sup> Ward, 96
- <sup>309</sup> Ward, 98
- <sup>310</sup> Ward, 101
- <sup>311</sup> Ward, 106
- <sup>312</sup> Ward, 107
- <sup>313</sup> Rotella, 66-7
- <sup>314</sup> Rotella, 68
- <sup>315</sup> Rotella, 68
- <sup>316</sup> Algren, *Arm*, 9
- <sup>317</sup> *Arm*, 46
- <sup>318</sup> *Arm*, 11
- <sup>319</sup> *Arm*, 12
- <sup>320</sup> *Arm*, 13
- <sup>321</sup> *Arm*, 274
- <sup>322</sup> *Arm*, 18
- <sup>323</sup> From *Oxford American Dictionary*.
- <sup>324</sup> *Arm*, 20
- <sup>325</sup> *Arm*, 290-1
- <sup>326</sup> *Arm*, 200
- <sup>327</sup> *Arm*, 21
- <sup>328</sup> *Arm*, 21
- <sup>329</sup> *Arm*, 21
- <sup>330</sup> *Arm*, 22
- <sup>331</sup> *Arm*, 23
- <sup>332</sup> Lloyd, 245
- <sup>333</sup> Sociologist Ray Oldenberg's concept of a "third place" comes from his book, *The Great Good Place* (1991)
- <sup>334</sup> Lloyd cites 2000 Census Bureau data of the neighborhood, and my investigations of the 2010 Census show a similar trend. Overwhelmingly, rents in Wicker Park are above average, the neighborhood's residents are extremely well educated, and there is an exceedingly above average number of artistic venues and artists. One only need to set foot in Wicker Park for a few seconds to realize most of this.
- <sup>335</sup> This is another guy I had a conversation with at the Nelson Algren Birthday Celebration.
- <sup>336</sup> These tenets of bohemia are paraphrased here as described by Stansell, Wilson, Gelder, Gold, and Goffman in their texts on the subject.
- <sup>337</sup> Lloyd, 96-7

- <sup>338</sup> Lloyd, 104  
<sup>339</sup> Lloyd, 113  
<sup>340</sup> Lloyd, 115  
<sup>341</sup> Lloyd, 118-9  
<sup>342</sup> Lloyd, 127-8  
<sup>343</sup> Lloyd, 231  
<sup>344</sup> Lloyd, 237  
<sup>345</sup> From “Wicker Park Seafood & Sushi Bar Opens at Chicago’s O’Hare Airport.”  
<sup>346</sup> Algren and Donahue, 120  
<sup>347</sup> Algren and Donahue, 124  
<sup>348</sup> Algren and Donahue 124-5  
<sup>349</sup> Algren, *Arm*, 228  
<sup>350</sup> qtd in Giles, 98  
<sup>351</sup> Algren, *Arm*, 203  
<sup>352</sup> Shay (2007), 24  
<sup>353</sup> Leitch, 1.  
<sup>354</sup> Leland, 89  
<sup>355</sup> Leland, 91  
<sup>356</sup> Leland, 162  
<sup>357</sup> Leland, 169-170  
<sup>358</sup> Leland, 224  
<sup>359</sup> Leland, 232  
<sup>360</sup> Shay (2007), xxiv  
<sup>361</sup> qtd in Chatterton and Cox, 132  
<sup>362</sup> qtd in Chatterton and Cox, 132  
<sup>363</sup> This image, of the front cover of Larry Clark’s *Tulsa*, was found online at <http://www.bing.com>  
<sup>364</sup> Davis  
<sup>365</sup> Middleton  
<sup>366</sup> Middleton  
<sup>367</sup> Wofford  
<sup>368</sup> Middleton  
<sup>369</sup> Chancellor  
<sup>370</sup> Watts  
<sup>371</sup> Dobberstein  
<sup>372</sup> Juozapavicius  
<sup>373</sup> Juozapavicius  
<sup>374</sup> Friedersdorf  
<sup>375</sup> Reid  
<sup>376</sup> Speed  
<sup>377</sup> These last two quotes were spoken to me at Zone establishments while I was visiting Tulsa.  
<sup>378</sup> Juozapavicius  
<sup>379</sup> The terms “city of fact” and “city of feeling” are from Carlo Rotella’s book, *The October City*.  
<sup>380</sup> Gentrification data found in *Governing Magazine*. “Governing the States and Localities: Governing Data. Gentrification Maps and Data.” April 2015. Web.; Mike Maciag. “Gentrification in America Report.” *Governing Magazine*. February 2015. Web; Pete Saunders. “Gentrification as Process, Not End-State.” *The Corner Side Yard*. March 2015. Web.  
<sup>381</sup> Tramel  
<sup>382</sup> Graham  
<sup>383</sup> Patti Smith, lyrics, “Rock N Roll Nigger.”  
<sup>384</sup> “Banned Book Awareness: The Outsiders.”  
<sup>385</sup> Smith, Michael  
<sup>386</sup> Brown, 20  
<sup>387</sup> Kjelle, 7-24

- <sup>388</sup> Wilson, 2-3
- <sup>389</sup> Wilson, 11
- <sup>390</sup> Oakley, 126-7
- <sup>391</sup> Wilson, 17
- <sup>392</sup> Medovoi, 24
- <sup>393</sup> Lloyd, 159
- <sup>394</sup> Lloyd 160
- <sup>395</sup> Medovoi, 36
- <sup>396</sup> Medovoi, 34
- <sup>397</sup> Medovoi, 30
- <sup>398</sup> Medovoi, 35
- <sup>399</sup> Medovoi, 36
- <sup>400</sup> Hale, 3
- <sup>401</sup> Hale, 3-4
- <sup>402</sup> For further elaboration, also see Lewis, Lebeau, and Timothy Shay.
- <sup>403</sup> Hale, 2
- <sup>404</sup> This is nothing personal against Jenks, Oklahoma. My good friend Trent Shores lives in Jenks, and he is a good man.
- <sup>405</sup> Hinton, *The Outsiders*, 141
- <sup>406</sup> Hinton, *The Outsiders*, 116
- <sup>407</sup> Inderbitzin, 358
- <sup>408</sup> Hinton, *The Outsiders*, 6
- <sup>409</sup> Hinton, *The Outsiders*, 17
- <sup>410</sup> Note: rodeos are NOT mentioned/depicted in Coppola's *The Outsiders*, which is telling. In that film, we only get the tuff neighborhood cityish fare with Matt Dillon, et al, at the helm. Rodeos are also nowhere near Coppola's *Rumble Fish* and Clark's *Tulsa*. I do not think that Frankie Machine ever attended a rodeo. Perhaps Algren did. I also can't imagine Ginsberg on a bull, but you never know. It should be said that Hinton loves horses and the countryside (i.e. a quiet rural *side* of the country), which is obvious since she has horses and rodeos and such in her novels.
- <sup>411</sup> Hinton, *The Outsiders*, 120
- <sup>412</sup> *The Outsiders*, 14
- <sup>413</sup> *The Outsiders*, 16
- <sup>414</sup> *The Outsiders*, 13
- <sup>415</sup> *The Outsiders*, 6
- <sup>416</sup> *The Outsiders*, 13
- <sup>417</sup> *The Outsiders*, 123
- <sup>418</sup> qtd in Muggleton, 3
- <sup>419</sup> Muggleton, 3
- <sup>420</sup> Muggleton, 5
- <sup>421</sup> Muggleton, 5
- <sup>422</sup> Hinton, *The Outsiders*, 57
- <sup>423</sup> "Banned Book Awareness: The Outsiders."
- <sup>424</sup> "Banned Book Awareness: The Outsiders."
- <sup>425</sup> Smith, E1
- <sup>426</sup> Gillespie, 44-5
- <sup>427</sup> Tribunella, 87
- <sup>428</sup> Tribunella, 87
- <sup>429</sup> Also see: "Top 5 Kids Paperbacks," 2; Littlejohn, 27; Barr, 511-15.
- <sup>430</sup> qtd in Medovoi, 140.
- <sup>431</sup> Hebdige, 17
- <sup>432</sup> Breakdown of Consensus. BoC. This would make a pretty stellar band name I think.
- <sup>433</sup> Hebdige, 17

- <sup>434</sup> Hebdige, 19
- <sup>435</sup> Baird and Goble
- <sup>436</sup> Nicholson, 136
- <sup>437</sup> Medovoi, 29-31
- <sup>438</sup> qtd in Hebdige, 76
- <sup>439</sup> Hinton, *The Outsiders*, 119
- <sup>440</sup> Inderbitzin, 361
- <sup>441</sup> Becker, 14
- <sup>442</sup> Becker, 12-13
- <sup>443</sup> Hinton, *The Outsiders*, 40
- <sup>444</sup> Hinton, *The Outsiders*, 102-3
- <sup>445</sup> Wooley; Kjelle
- <sup>446</sup> Hinton, *The Outsiders*, 155
- <sup>447</sup> Medovoi, 1
- <sup>448</sup> Medovoi, 31
- <sup>449</sup> Medovoi, 37
- <sup>450</sup> Hebdige, 65
- <sup>451</sup> Arguably/Admittedly/Yet, perhaps these imagined time period intersections with lapses and losses of aura in popular culture (and/or popular consciousness) are part of ALL films (and novels) as representations—and, perhaps authenticity is only a pipe dream after all, one that can't exist in novels and films. Anyhow. European wondermind Jean Baudrillard states, “It is always a false problem to want to restore the truth behind the simulacrum.” Anyway. Also, you can read radio broadcaster Walter Benjamin’s ideas regarding aura in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936) if you really want to, but this is not actually the point. Authenticity is in the eye of the beholder, just as the quality of this dissertation is in the eye/gut of the reader.
- <sup>452</sup> Hebdige, 84-85
- <sup>453</sup> Hebdige, 85
- <sup>454</sup> “Open Letter to Tulsa Area Hipsters From Blake Ewing.”
- <sup>455</sup> “The one where Tulsa hipsters get mad about being welcomed to a hipster bar...”
- <sup>456</sup> Wall
- <sup>457</sup> This quote and the following FF Coppola quotes in this section come from Coppola’s Director’s Commentary in [my] *Rumble Fish* DVD. Zoetrope Studios, 1983.
- <sup>458</sup> RC, 98
- <sup>459</sup> Kempley, 21; Malone, 276; for further criticism of the film, see Peter Roffman and Bev Simpson, 49-50 along with RC, 98.
- <sup>460</sup> *Rumble Fish* commentary at Box Office Mojo website.
- <sup>461</sup> RC, 98.
- <sup>462</sup> Lloyd, Jennie
- <sup>463</sup> Smokey as played by a young Nic Cage in his first role wears his father’s (Coppola’s older brother, Augie’s) social club jacket from the 1950s in Queens. It is, in fact, an impressive jacket.
- <sup>464</sup> For a further exploration of the outsider-rebel motif, please see Medovoi’s *Rebels*.
- <sup>465</sup> Lewis, 149-150
- <sup>466</sup> Wooley, 233
- <sup>467</sup> As spoken by Coppola. All of these Coppola quotations in these paragraphs come from his Director’s Commentary of the *Rumble Fish* DVD. Zoetrope Studios, 1983.
- <sup>468</sup> Gelder, 94
- <sup>469</sup> Maslin, 10
- <sup>470</sup> Lewis, 144-5; Wooley, 234
- <sup>471</sup> Commentary on Coppola’s innovative Electronic Cinema techniques is found in the *Rumble Fish* DVD’s Special Features section titled *On Location in Tulsa: The Making of Rumble Fish*.
- <sup>472</sup> Coppola mentions this in the director’s commentary of DVD, *Rumble Fish*.
- <sup>473</sup> Roffman and Simpson, 49-50.
- <sup>474</sup> Muggleton

- <sup>475</sup> All of this stuff, these notes, is from Larry Clark's *Tulsa* (1971)
- <sup>476</sup> Townsend, 10
- <sup>477</sup> Townsend, 101
- <sup>478</sup> qtd in Leland, 223.
- <sup>479</sup> Leland, 224
- <sup>480</sup> Leland, 227
- <sup>481</sup> Hinton, *The Outsiders*, 68
- <sup>482</sup> qtd in Leland, 236
- <sup>483</sup> Leland, 237
- <sup>484</sup> Leland, 238
- <sup>485</sup> Leland, 238
- <sup>486</sup> Townes Van Zandt lyrics: "T for Texas" off *Sunshine Boy* album.
- <sup>487</sup> No album as of yet.
- <sup>488</sup> This comes from a Nov. 4, 2013 [blog.estately.com](http://blog.estately.com) article titled "13 Best U.S. Cities to Live"
- <sup>489</sup> From a "most conservative cities" poll on [alt.coxnewsweb.com](http://alt.coxnewsweb.com)
- <sup>490</sup> This information, Tulsa vs. OKC, appears on countless websites, countless sources, and can be heard from countless lips of countless Sooners.
- <sup>491</sup> Lloyd, 47
- <sup>492</sup> Foucault, 24
- <sup>493</sup> Gelder, 81
- <sup>494</sup> This is from [bluedometulsa.com](http://bluedometulsa.com)
- <sup>495</sup> A lot of this historical information about the Dome and District comes from [www.tulsapreservationcommission.org](http://www.tulsapreservationcommission.org). Also, Census Bureau data confirms quite a bit of these claims. The data, however, as I've mentioned, is not that important here. I am not trying to numerically prove anything. These are ideas, and this is largely a fantasy.
- <sup>496</sup> Banes, 38
- <sup>497</sup> Lloyd, 244
- <sup>498</sup> Lloyd, 246-7
- <sup>499</sup> Speed, Web
- <sup>500</sup> Davis, "Tulsa green campaign..."
- <sup>501</sup> Lloyd, 163
- <sup>502</sup> Lloyd, 161
- <sup>503</sup> "Five kinds of people you'll meet at Tulsa's Blue Dome District"
- <sup>504</sup> Lloyd, 161
- <sup>505</sup> Lanham
- <sup>506</sup> Lloyd, 65-66
- <sup>507</sup> Lloyd, 69-70
- <sup>508</sup> Juozapavicius
- <sup>509</sup> Wigton
- <sup>510</sup> Thompson
- <sup>511</sup> From the Gypsy Coffee House website: [www.gypsycoffee.com](http://www.gypsycoffee.com).
- <sup>512</sup> From [www.thebradyartsdistrict.com](http://www.thebradyartsdistrict.com)
- <sup>513</sup> Lloyd, 239
- <sup>514</sup> Lloyd, 98
- <sup>515</sup> Lloyd, 104
- <sup>516</sup> Gelder, 101
- <sup>517</sup> Lloyd, 114
- <sup>518</sup> Lloyd, 129
- <sup>519</sup> Gelder, 102
- <sup>520</sup> Gelder, 80
- <sup>521</sup> Lloyd, 129

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## **VITA**

## VITA

Born in Singapore, Walter Moore has lived in Indonesia, Texas, Colorado, Oklahoma, Australia, California, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Indiana. After earning a BA in English, he attended law school for one year and four days before deciding on more neo-bohemian pursuits. In between his MFA in Creative Writing and his Ph.D. in American Studies, he worked as an upper school English teacher at the Casady School in Oklahoma City, as an adjunct instructor of English at two community colleges in the NYC area, as an adjunct instructor of English at the University of Rhode Island and Bryant University, and as a Visiting Assistant Professor of English and Creative Writing at Southwestern University in Texas. This past year marks his thirteenth year of teaching in English departments. He has published numerous poems and non-fiction pieces in journals, magazines, and newspapers.

At the end of August (2015), he moved to move to Seattle, Washington.