UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID
FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

TESIS DOCTORAL

San Francisco as Countercultural City: A Spatial Approach through Literature and Culture (1950-1969)

San Francisco como ciudad contracultural: un análisis espacial a través de la literatura y la cultura, (1950-1969)

MEMORIA PARA OPTAR AL GRADO DE DOCTOR

PRESENTADA POR

Pedro Antonio Galán Lozano

Directora

Carmen Méndez García

Madrid, 2018

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For my family

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank Dr. Carmen Méndez for her invaluable effort as advisor to this dissertation. Since the moment she accepted to be a fundamental part of this project, her insight, responsiveness, and affability have been central to the completion of this work. I can only be grateful for her disposition to adjust to my pace and her full understanding in the moments of greater stagnancy.

Although they surely do not know, Dr. Méndez, Dr. Eusebio de Lorenzo, and Dr. Eduardo Valls partly inspired this dissertation during my undergraduate and graduate years. They are all paradigmatic examples of the mark that an enthusiastic professor can leave on a student. Dr. Valls's guidance while I was writing my master's dissertation back in 2011 was moreover especially enlightening, for he taught me many of the secrets behind a good academic work.

My parents, Pedro and Bernardina, are also part of this project. I owe them much of the determination that has been put into this dissertation. They have always encouraged me to devote responsibly to what I have enjoyed the most, for which I am extremely indebted. This project would not have come to an end without their constant trust and support through the years.

Thank you to Xiana for exceeding my expectations and being far more understanding than I ever thought she would be. She has to know that she, in her own way, has made an effort I am very proud of.

The most special thanks goes to Rebeca, my inseparable companion. Throughout this process, she has been caring, supportive, empathic, and compassionate to an

unparalleled extent. A lifetime might not be enough for me to return her generosity. She knows how much we have been through and how much we have been able to accomplish. Once again, we have made it. This dissertation is certainly hers, too.

To all of them, and to all of those relatives and friends who have shown their respect and support for this project all along, I express my deepest gratitude.

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ABSTRACT

ABSTRACT | English

This dissertation is inspired by a personal interest in an approach to the mid-20th century American counterculture that goes beyond the usual historical and cultural critical perspectives. Given the frequent failure of these perspectives to address the importance of the spatial dimension, our intention is to study the relationship between counterculture and urban space in the particular case of the city of San Francisco. We argue that it is not incidental that a large number of social and cultural dissenting movements have emerged in San Francisco over the years. The peculiar history of the city and the energies stemming from it have fueled an intimate and long-lasting dialogue between San Francisco and the counterculture that has turned the city into a hotbed of resistance to the American status quo. Consequently, we propose an analysis of this dialogue, how it takes shape, and how it impacts both on the counterculture and the city.

With the purpose of defining a clear frame of study, the present dissertation puts the focus on the literary and cultural representations of the 1950s and 1960s counterculture. While this phenomenon amalgamated a heterogeneous array of loosely connected forces, it also represents a relatively cohesive ensemble within the social and cultural history of San Francisco and the United States. The significance of the mid-century counterculture in American history lies in its being part of a critical period for the social and economic configuration of the United States the way we know it nowadays.

Within our time frame, we observe two essential countercultural sub-periods in

San Francisco at mid-century: the Fifties and the Sixties. Although both sub-periods belong to their respective decades in terms of time, neither fits in length the notion of decade. The Fifties represent the heyday of the Beat Generation in San Francisco, which we date within the span that runs from 1955 until the gradual decline of this movement in the city between 1958 and 1960. The Sixties, in turn, cover the variety of countercultural tendencies clustered in San Francisco in the second half of the 1960s. We frame this period between the emergence of a sound radical theater scene in San Francisco around 1964 and the rapid deterioration of the hippie subculture in the months that followed the 1967 Summer of Love. We find a close connection between both sub-periods that makes them inseparable from each other, for the San Francisco Sixties certainly build on the foundations set in the Fifties. We note in this close relationship, additionally, a transitional period that outlines sensibilities that had remained unresolved in the Fifties and that would erupt in the Sixties and beyond.

In our study of the area where San Francisco and the counterculture intersect, we choose not to articulate our analysis around a homogeneous critical framework. Instead, this dissertation benefits from an eclectic critical basis that relies on secondary sources pertaining mainly to human geography and philosophy. This corpus finds cohesion in its contribution to the broader field of spatial studies. Among these sources, we can find reference figures in these disciplines such as Henri Lefebvre, Guy Debord, Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, Yi-Fu Tuan, Edward Relph, or Tim Cresswell. Along with the counterculture and San Francisco, spatial studies, therefore, close the triangle of concepts that gives shape to this study.

Our examination of the dialectics between the city and the counterculture at mid-century begins, thus, with the Fifties. We start with Beat author Lawrence Ferlinghetti's

poetry in its expression of an *enclave consciousness* that condenses a feeling of attachment to the North Beach neighborhood among the local Beats. It is particularly appealing to us how the poet alerts the dissenting community of this enclave against the political and financial powers, whose subtle spatial practices allegedly seek to erode North Beach in its condition as countercultural stronghold. Similarly, we place our interest on the social scene that emerges in North Beach during this period, giving birth to the beatnik subculture that surrounds the Beat Generation. We find an essential portrait of this scene in Bob Kaufman's poetry, which addresses the beatniks' anxiety over the racialization of their social space—largely confined to the indoor rather than the outdoor space. We interpret the beatniks' interest in incorporating the African-American to their scene as a misguided attempt to strengthen the contrarian message of their subculture by adding racial traits prototypically ascribed to the black community. Concurrently, though, we try to draw attention to the racist patterns that surface in this incorporation and how harmful they can be for the reputation of the counterculture.

The dissertation moves from North Beach to the South of Market district, San Francisco's former skid row for decades. We delve into the relation between Jack Kerouac and South of Market, which the author portrays as an emblem of the ultimate social frontier of the United States. Kerouac's literature guides us through the city's skid row as a run-down and empty space where all the social outcasts—whom the author seeks to emulate—that do not fit in the normative canon are confined due to their difference and deprived of any feeling of place.

In our examination of the transition period that led to the Sixties, we concentrate on two specific contributions to this interregnum between countercultures. First, this study identifies Thomas Pynchon's novel *The Crying of Lot 49* as an idiosyncratic text

representative of these transitional years. We argue that this novel allegorizes, through a psychogeographical approach to San Francisco's urban space, the drifting atmosphere of the young generations that lacked solid countercultural references in the early 1960s. We also highlight how Pynchon advances the abrupt awakening of American society in the Sixties, motivated, among other phenomenons, by the appearance of the hippie subculture and the extensive use of psychoactive drugs—which, in many cases, penetrated the common American home, exacerbating the gap between generations. This dissertation cannot ignore as well John Wieners's literary input to the actual spatialization of San Francisco's LGBTQ community. While the gay rights movement would unfold on its own from the 1960s onwards, Wieners, from his position in the post-Beat counterculture, represents a central link between both movements, pioneering the spatial consolidation of the city's queer community.

The subsequent configuration of a distinctive Sixties counterculture in San Francisco, according to our study, involves a major shift in the politics of space. Both the radical theater groups—the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Diggers—and the hippie subculture, united around the countercultural community of the Haight-Ashbury district, show a changeover to the city's public space as the instrument to implement alternative way of life. In spatial terms, we read this shift as the determination to create new spaces that defy the rules of access to and utilization of the urban space imposed by the dominant political and financial elite.

We do not wish to overlook the cultural outreach beyond the local sphere acquired by San Francisco thanks to the mid-century counterculture. The Beats' inclination for Eastern philosophy and spirituality leads us to analyze the role of Kenneth Rexroth and, subsequently, of Philip Whalen and Gary Snyder in the expansion

of San Francisco's relevance as a countercultural epicenter of global impact. We explore the dialogue between the contributions of the mentioned authors and how they define a vision of the city as the hub of a cultural contact zone that expands at the regional, supraregional, and trans-Pacific levels. On another note, the capital importance of Ken Kesey as psychedelic and countercultural guru in the Sixties motivates our putting him in contrast with the other great LSD advocate of that time, Timothy Leary. In comparing them, we draw a representation of the traditional East Coast-West Coast dialectics of the American imagination. This way, we review how San Francisco, embodied by Kesey, sets itself up as the national sanctuary of a distinctive West Coast psychedelic counterculture.

By way of the study of the above-mentioned literary and cultural representations, the dissertation concludes that the mid-20th century counterculture, favored by San Francisco's unique historic culture of dissent, establishes a privileged relationship with the city. This close tie prompts a dialogue with San Francisco's space, through which the counterculture, following different strategies, cultivates its disaffiliation from the prevailing status quo—and even challenges it on a first-name basis. In a similar vein, the counterculture contributes to extend the geographical impact of San Francisco, positioning the city at the forefront of cultural opposition in the regional, national, and trans-Pacific realms.

RESUMEN | Español

Este estudio nace de la inquietud por encontrar un enfoque de la contracultura estadounidense de mitad del siglo XX que vaya más allá de las meras aproximaciones críticas de carácter histórico o cultural. En vista de que estos enfoques obvian frecuentemente la importancia del factor espacial, nuestro planteamiento de partida consiste en desmenuzar la relación entre contracultura y espacio urbano en el marco específico de la ciudad de San Francisco. Entendemos que el hecho de que numerosos movimientos sociales y culturales de naturaleza contestataria hayan centrado en San Francisco —siempre alejada de los centros de poder político y económico del país— su foco de acción a lo largo de las décadas no supone una simple casualidad. La historia tan peculiar de esta ciudad y las energías derivadas de ella, las cuales confluyen en una característica cultura de disentimiento, han dado lugar a un estrecho y duradero diálogo entre contracultura y ciudad que ha colocado a San Francisco a la vanguardia nacional del rechazo al *statu quo* estadounidense. Por ello, nos proponemos analizar detenidamente qué origina este diálogo, cómo se materializa y qué reporta tanto a la contracultura como a la propia ciudad.

A fin de establecer unos límites de estudio definidos, esta tesis doctoral se centra en las representaciones literarias y culturales de la contracultura de las décadas de 1950 y 1960. Dentro de la identidad rebelde de la ciudad, consideramos que el fenómeno de la contracultura acaecido dentro del marco temporal propuesto, si bien se halló compuesto por fuerzas heterogéneas caóticamente conectadas entre sí, constituye un conjunto relativamente homogéneo en la historia social y cultural de San Francisco y de

Estados Unidos. El emplazamiento temporal de este fenómeno en la historia reciente del país, asimismo, lo sitúa en un período fundamental para la configuración económica y social de Estados Unidos tal y como la conocemos hoy.

Dentro de nuestro marco temporal reconocemos dos períodos esenciales en los que se divide el desarrollo de la contracultura en San Francisco. El primero de ellos lo denominamos los *Fifties*, o años cincuenta, mientras que al segundo nos referimos como los *Sixties*, o años sesenta. Estas denominaciones, sin embargo, lejos de ajustarse a la extensión estricta de sus respectivas décadas, abarcan los períodos reales aproximados en los que tuvieron lugar sus distintas representaciones literarias y culturales. En los años cincuenta, nos centramos en la vertiente de la generación *beat* que se asentó en San Francisco, cuyos inicios fechamos en 1955, y que se mantuvo vigente como el movimiento contracultural de referencia en la ciudad hasta su progresivo declive, el cual situamos entre 1958 y 1960. Los años sesenta, por su parte, comprenden el explosivo conjunto de tendencias contraculturales que se amalgamaron en la ciudad en la segunda mitad de la década de 1960. Este período lo enmarcamos entre la emergencia de una sólida escena de teatro radical en San Francisco en torno a 1964 y el rápido marchitamiento de la subcultura *hippie* en los meses que siguieron al Verano del Amor de 1967. Encontramos entre ambos períodos una íntima conexión por la cual ninguno de ellos puede entenderse completamente sin el otro, resultando fundamentales las bases sentadas durante los años cincuenta en San Francisco para el posterior desarrollo de los años sesenta. Dentro de esta conexión, observamos, además, la existencia de un tercer período más difuso que ejerce de transición entre los anteriores, y en el que afloran sensibilidades que habían quedado irresolutas durante los años cincuenta y que estallarían con fuerza en años posteriores.

Con el objetivo de analizar el área que resulta de la intersección entre San Francisco y la contracultura, optamos por articular un marco crítico no completamente homogéneo y rígido que nos acerque, de modo consistente a lo largo de la tesis, a dicha área. En nuestro estudio, en cambio, disponemos un aparato crítico heterogéneo basado en fuentes secundarias provenientes de las disciplinas de la geografía humana y la filosofía, el cual encuentra cohesión en su contribución al campo más amplio de los estudios espaciales. Entre estas fuentes, podemos contar figuras de referencia en estas disciplinas tales como Henri Lefebvre, Guy Debord, Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, Yi-Fu Tuan, Edward Relph o Tim Cresswell —entre otros—. Los estudios espaciales, en consecuencia, completan el triángulo de conceptos que estructura la esencia de esta tesis: San Francisco, contracultura y espacio.

Nuestro análisis del diálogo que se establece entre la contracultura y la ciudad californiana a mediados del siglo XX arranca, como hemos expuesto, en los años cincuenta. Comenzamos con la poesía del autor *beat* Lawrence Ferlinghetti en su expresión de una conciencia específica de enclave contracultural que se hace palpable a lo largo de sus textos y que condensa un sentimiento extensible a la comunidad *beat* del barrio de North Beach. Nos resulta de especial interés cómo el poeta pone en guardia al colectivo contracultural de este enclave contra el poder político y financiero, el cual, a través de sutiles prácticas espaciales, trata de socavar dicho enclave en su condición de bastión de la contracultura en la ciudad. De igual modo, nos ocupamos de la escena social que surge en North Beach durante este período, dando lugar a la subcultura *beatnik* que acompaña a la generación *beat*. Encontramos un retrato de referencia en la poesía de Bob Kaufman, quien pone de manifiesto la ansiedad de los *beatniks* por incorporar a su espacio social —eminentemente reducido a espacios cerrados de reunión

en el distrito tales como bares, cafeterías y restaurantes— la figura del afroamericano. Leemos este interés como un intento forzado de robustecer el mensaje contestatario de esta subcultura mediante la adición de rasgos de marginación social atribuidos en la época a la comunidad negra. Al mismo tiempo, sin embargo, también lo interpretamos como una llamada de atención por parte del autor acerca de cómo debilita a la causa contracultural la aparición de patrones racistas asociados a esta incorporación.

Desde North Beach, la tesis se traslada al distrito de South of Market, el que fuera el *skid row* de San Francisco durante varias décadas. Estudiamos la relación que se establece entre Jack Kerouac y South of Market, percibido por el autor como un emblema de la frontera social definitiva en Estados Unidos. La literatura de Kerouac nos guía por el distrito como un espacio deprimido y vacuo donde todos aquellos caracteres sociales que no se ajustan al canon social normativo —como el propio autor *beat,* según la imagen que muestra de sí mismo— se ven confinados y privados del sentimiento de pertenecer a un lugar.

En nuestro recorrido por el período de transición que sirve de puente entre los años cincuenta y sesenta, nos detenemos en dos contribuciones muy concretas a este interludio entre contraculturas. Por una parte, situamos a la novela de Thomas Pynchon *The Crying of Lot 49* como un texto idiosincrático de este período por cuanto alegoriza, desde un acercamiento psicogeográfico al espacio urbano del San Francisco de comienzos de la década de 1960, la deriva en la que se hallaban las generaciones jóvenes de aquellos años sin un referente contracultural específico. Asimismo, ponemos el acento en cómo Pynchon adelanta el despertar abrupto de la sociedad estadounidense que tendría lugar poco tiempo más tarde con el advenimiento de los años sesenta, motivado, fundamentalmente, por el surgimiento de la subcultura *hippie* y el empleo

masivo de drogas psicoactivas. Por otra parte, la tesis no puede ignorar la contribución literaria de John Wieners a la apertura de un espacio en la ciudad para la comunidad LGBTQ. Si bien el movimiento gay caminaría solo desde esta década en adelante, Wieners, desde su posición en la contracultura post-*beat*, actúa como eslabón entre ambos movimientos, avanzando la consolidación espacial de la comunidad homosexual en San Francisco.

La formación de una contracultura propia de los años sesenta, según observamos, conlleva un cambio muy notable en la política de utilización del espacio urbano por parte de las distintas corrientes. Así, tanto los grupos orientados al teatro radical como ejercicio contracultural —la San Francisco Mime Troupe y los Diggers— como la subcultura *hippie* en general, aglutinada en la comunidad contracultural en que se convirtió el distrito de Haight-Ashbury en los años sesenta, muestran un giro hacia el espacio público de la ciudad como instrumento para implementar modos de vida alternativos al que impone la sociedad normativa. En el viraje hacia el espacio urbano público de los años sesenta encontramos una lectura espacial por la cual la contracultura busca generar conceptos de espacio que desafíen las normas que la élite dominante —política y financiera— dicta para su utilización.

Este estudio no quiere pasar por alto las distintas dimensiones geográficas, más allá del ámbito puramente local, adquiridas por San Francisco gracias a la contracultura de mitad del siglo XX. La inclinación de la contracultura por la religión y la filosofía orientales, particularmente en el caso de los *beat*, nos lleva a analizar el papel de Kenneth Rexroth y, posteriormente, de Gary Snyder y Philip Whalen en la expansión de la relevancia de San Francisco como epicentro contracultural de impacto global. Vemos cómo las aportaciones de todos ellos entran en diálogo para articular una visión de esta

ciudad como centro de una zona de contacto que se extiende a nivel regional, suprarregional y transpacífico. Por otra parte, la importancia de Ken Kesey como gurú de las drogas psicodélicas en la contracultura de los Sixties nos invita a contraponer su figura a la de Timothy Leary, el otro gran apóstol del LSD de la época. De una comparación de ambos iconos obtenemos una representación de la dialéctica este-oeste inherente a la cultura estadounidense. De este modo, estudiamos cómo San Francisco, personificado en Kesey, se posiciona como el santuario de una contracultura psicodélica distintiva de la Costa Oeste.

Por medio del estudio de las representaciones literarias y culturales mencionadas, la tesis concluye que, favorecida por una cultura histórica de disentimiento única, la contracultura de mitad del siglo XX establece una relación privilegiada con la ciudad de San Francisco. Esta relación propicia un diálogo con el espacio de la ciudad, a través del cual la contracultura se desvincula, mediante diferentes estrategias, del *statu quo* imperante e, incluso, lo desafía. Del mismo modo, la contracultura colabora a extender el alcance geográfico-cultural de San Francisco, posicionándolo en la vanguardia del mapa contestatario no solo regional, sino también nacional y transpacífico.

San Francisco is not America; it's what's left of America. It's the Great Wall of China of America's forgotten promises! Here in San Francisco have gathered all of society's children, space-age dropouts from the American dream, Horatio Algers in reverse, descending from riches to rags and gathering now on the corners of Grant and Green in their beads and spangles and marijuana smoke to watch the entire structure crumble.

——Jerry Kamstra, *The Frisco Kid*

INTRODUCTION

New York, Chicago, Los Angeles—large cities have been the traditional scenario for most key social and cultural movements in the history of the United States. These spaces offer a wider degree of social heterogeneity that usually triggers a more vibrant cultural life and, hence, major differences in terms of thought. Their larger population, additionally, broadens the outreach of the message of any given dissenting current— both inside and outside the city. Whereas maybe not the most prominent in the American[1] map as far as political significance and large population are concerned, there is one city that catches our attention for its consistent and lasting hosting of alternative, non-normative, and freethinking tendencies: San Francisco. Located in a tiny peninsula at the very edge of the West Coast, where the westbound American vision finds in the ocean its last frontier, few cities have provided a more fertile breeding ground for a number of movements that have had a major impact on the historical development of the United States.

San Francisco represents one peculiar case in the American history of westward geographical expansion. The 1848 California Gold Rush attracted to the area a rapid and massive influx of immigration that turned a small settlement of around 200 residents

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[1] Controversial as it may be, we choose to use the term "American" in this dissertation both as an adjective for everything related to the United States and a demonym for the citizens of that country. In this sense, we follow Kenneth G. Wilson's explanation of the usage of this term in *The Columbia Guide to Standard American English* (1993): "We of the United States of *America*, citizens of only one of many nations in the Americas, North, Central, and South, have preempted the informal name of our country, *America*, and our title, *Americans*. It may be arrogant and inaccurate that we do so, but the fact is that no other citizens of the Americas seem to want to be confused with the *Americans* of the USA. Nor have others coined any other universally recognized names for us. . . . Our flag is almost always 'the American flag.' Only the precision of *The United States of America* and of *a citizen thereof* can be official and usefully substituted . . . . It is not likely that these usages will change soon, so overwhelming is their use both by others and by us" (27-28). We nevertheless favor the use of "the United States" over simply "America" to name the country both due to the former's greater accuracy and the latter's informal nature.

into a boom town of nearly 35,000 by 1852 (Gibson, "Population"). The profile of the

fortune-seekers that got to the San Francisco area in those years was, in many cases, far

apart from the social and moral standards of the Puritan tradition of the United States.

As poet and local cultural icon Kenneth Rexroth generalizes, the city was "settled

mostly, in spite of all the romances of the overland migration, by gamblers, prostitutes,

rascals, and fortune seekers who came across the Isthmus and around the Horn. They

had their faults, but they were not influenced by Cotton Mather" (*Autobiographical

Novel* 366). This disconnection from the cultural foundations of most parts of the

country would give birth to, among other things, one of the most famous red-light

districts in the United States in the 19th century, the Barbary Coast.[2] It would also fuel a

proclivity towards alternative currents of thinking that would shape the city's contrarian

spirit. Thereafter, and in spite of its provincialism, San Francisco would attract a

notorious bohemian community in the 1880s and 1890s that revolved around the

Montgomery Block.[3] In the 20th century, the city would be known for its active labor

movement, which would lead to the bloodily repressed General Strike of 1934.[4] After

World War II, in the late 1940s, the cultural life of San Francisco would find a great

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[2] The Barbary Coast was San Francisco's former red-light district between the mid-19th century and the late 1910s. Its area comprised modern-day North Beach, Chinatown, and Jackson Square. The Barbary Coast earned a reputation for rampant lawlessness, gambling, and prostitution, although it also featured concert saloons, dance halls, and jazz clubs. A major shift in the city government's policy towards this district came in 1911, eventually leading to its demise. The coup de grace to the Barbary Coast was the 1917 Red Light Abatement Act, which shut down its brothels. For further reading on the history of the Barbary Coast, see Herbert Asbury's *The Barbary Coast: An Informal History of the San Francisco Underworld* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1933).

[3] The Montgomery Block, formerly located at 628 Montgomery Street, became renowned in the late 19th century for hosting the city's literary and artistic bohemia. Among the illustrious names that were part of that scene, we can find Jack London, Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce, Frank Norris, or Bret Harte. The Montgomery Block would be demolished in 1959, eventually yielding to the iconic Transamerica Pyramid.

[4] For an analysis of the San Francisco labor movement before World War II and the 1934 General Strike, see "Bohemians, Bridges and Bolsheviks: Radical San Francisco Before Flower Power," by Anthony Ashbolt (*Illawarra Unity*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2012, pp. 27-50) and "The Progress Club: 1934 and Class Memory," by Chris Carlsson (included in *Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture*, edited by he himself, James Brook, and Nancy J. Peters).

stimulus in Kenneth Rexroth and his Libertarian Circle, which focused on humanistic anarchism, uninhibited political and literary discussion, and poetry readings. This was the seed of the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance, which, in turn, created the background for the city's Beat scene. This scene would connect some of the main figures of the Beat Generation coming from their original New York artistic and literary milieu with the writers that were emerging in San Francisco in the first half of the 1950s. After that, the 1960s would give rise to a loosely articulated countercultural movement that drew national attention to the city, one of the main scenarios in the United States to see the public enactment of the postwar generational gap. Although not necessarily a direct consequence of the liberating atmosphere of the 1960s, the first struggles for visibility of the LGBTQ community in San Francisco began in that decade. Going into the 1970s, the gay liberation movement became particularly strong in the city, reaching a historical landmark with the election of Harvey Milk for city supervisor in 1977—the first openly gay candidate elected for public office in California and one of the very first nationwide. But San Francisco's culture of dissent does not end here. From the second half of the 20th century until our days, the city has hosted notorious civil rights efforts by the African-American and Latino communities, neighborhood associations that have confronted eye-to-eye the urban redevelopment plans of the local political and financial powers, housing rights initiatives that have fought to protect the city's ever-endangered tenants, and the local branch of the Occupy movement, which has added a spatial approach in the 2010s to the protest against the social inequality and impoverished democracy caused by the unlimited power of the global financial system. There are some questions, then, that are pertinent. Why has precisely San Francisco been a consistent epicenter of active dissenting activity through the decades? How has a

city that has not even been among the ten most populated in the United States since the 1900s attracted so many rebellious tendencies and movements of national impact? What does this city offer to them?

Answering these questions properly and thoroughly would require a massive analysis covering in depth the history, geography, economy, demographics, and culture of San Francisco from the earliest Spanish settlement until our days. This dissertation, however, intends to contribute modestly to shed light on the dissenting identity of this city. Our interest focuses on the counterculture[5] that flourished in San Francisco during the decades of 1950 and 1960. This period is particularly relevant in American history, for it encompasses the years that followed the historical, economic, and social divide of World War II. The unprecedented levels of prosperity of those years had a huge impact on the United States and configured consumer society the way we know it nowadays. The new-found affluence changed the focus of consumption—it would no longer be oriented primarily towards utilitarian needs but towards comfort and status. It is essential to understand the postwar United States in order to understand the modern-day United States. And in order to understand the postwar United States, it is very necessary to get immersed into the subcultures that exposed at that time the flaws of the status quo and the shortcomings of the official social discourse. Although different from each other

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[5] "Counterculture" (or "counter-culture") is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "a radical culture, [especially] amongst the young, that rejects established social values and practices; a mode of life opposed to the conventional or dominant" ("counter-culture, *n*."). Etymologically, the term is marked by the prefix "counter-," which derives from the Latin *contrā*, meaning "against, in return" ("counter-, *prefix*"). In critical discourse, the scope of "counterculture" may be particularly wide. As Arthur Marwick notes, "there was no unified, integrated counter-culture, totally and consistently in opposition to mainstream culture" (12). Still, Marwick delimits "counterculture" as a term that refers "to the many and varied activities and values which contrasted with, or were critical of, the conventional values and modes of established society" (12). One of the very first and most influential allusions to the notion of counterculture was made by Theodore Roszak in his seminal 1969 study *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition*. Although "counterculture" needs not necessarily apply to a specific period of time, the American counterculture of the 1960s has become a paradigmatic representation of this phenomenon, thus somehow monopolizing the use of the term in critical discourse along with the precursory—and arguably inseparable—1950s American counterculture.

in their form, the countercultures of each of these decades, despite the generational shift, are connected in their substance—their concern with what they see as the social and cultural paralysis of the post-World War II United States. This interconnection, which shows an evolution from the counterculture of the 1950s to that of the 1960s rather than a mere juxtaposition or overlapping between them, is our rationale to group them together for this dissertation as what we deem the San Francisco counterculture.

Our interest is nonetheless far from a mere historicization of the events concerning the counterculture that took place in San Francisco during this period. Nor do we have the purpose of strictly analyzing the philosophical motivations of this historical phenomenon. A close literary and cultural study alone of the representations of the San Francisco counterculture is not our aspiration either. There are already excellent works comprehending all of these fields to which we would have little to contribute.[6] Our approach to the San Francisco counterculture, instead, is spatial. We firmly believe that space is much more than a plain physical and geographical container. Space has a complex meaning stemming from the multiple energies and vectors that

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[6] It is not so common to find scholarly research that treats the countercultural movements of the 1950s and 1960s as a unitary phenomenon. A rare example is Christopher Gair's *The American Counterculture* (Edinburgh UP, 2007). Scott MacFarlane, albeit focused on the 1960s, makes a literary analysis of the counterculture of this decade without ignoring the background of the 1950s in *The Hippie Narrative: A Literary Perspective on the Counterculture* (McFarland, 2007). For a literary and cultural panorama of the Beat Generation as synonymous with the 1950s counterculture, see *The Beat Generation: The Tumultuous '50s Movement and Its Impact on Today*, by Bruce Cook (Quill, 1994), and *The Beats: A Literary Reference*, by Matt Theado (Carroll & Graf, 2002). Michael Davidson, for his part, proposes in *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-century* (1989) an analysis of the San Francisco poetic scene in the 1950s and early 1960s as a literary community where different sensibilities —among them, those of the San Francisco Beats—intertwine under the blanket "San Francisco Renaissance" label. A study focused more specifically in San Francisco as locale of the Beat counterculture from a traditional sociological perspective is Francis J. Rigney and L. Douglas Smith's *The Real Bohemia* (Basic, 1961). As far as the 1960s counterculture is concerned, historical and cultural approaches can be found in the Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle-edited *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and 70s*, Jay Stevens's *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream*, and Bruce Shlain and Martin A. Lee's *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD. The CIA, the Sixties, and Beyond*. On a less generic note, *Hippies of the Haight*, by Sherri Cavan (New Critics, 1972), and *The Haight-Ashbury: A History*, by Charles Perry, examine the 1960s counterculture expressly in the local context of San Francisco. (Here and elsewhere in this dissertation, where not given, the bibliographical references can be found in the Bibliography section.)

intertwine in it. There is much more to it than just its physical geography. Space is generally a cauldron where history, sociology, politics, economy, and culture boil altogether, affecting decisively every activity going on in it. As Michel Foucault asseverates, "We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another" (3). This is how we understand the urban space of San Francisco in relation to the city's counterculture. This dissertation certainly wants to avoid restricting itself to a juxtaposition of the representations of the counterculture and the physical geography of the city—in the form of a literary tour or a dots-on-the-map approach.[7] Rather, we are concerned with the impact that the San Francisco urban space has on the literary and cultural representations of the 1950s and 1960s counterculture. We believe that the set of energies that shapes the city's dissenting identity is present in its physical space. We therefore will try to analyze how the counterculture uses the city's space, and how this space, in turn, defines the strategies of the counterculture. From a perspective oriented towards human geography, we hope to lay out clearly the politics of space that gave the city a prominent place of its own at the forefront of the mid-20th century American counterculture.

Our study acknowledges two major countercultural sub-periods in San Francisco within the 1950-1969 span. We will deem them, for practical purposes, the Fifties and the Sixties hereafter. Although both sub-periods belong to their respective decades, neither fits in length the notion of decade. The San Francisco Fifties, which Part One of this dissertation is devoted to, were dominated by the city's Beat scene. Kenneth

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[7] For a meticulous tour around all the spots that, at one point or another, were significant to the San Francisco Beat scene, see Bill Morgan's *The Beat Generation in San Francisco: A Literary Tour* (City Lights, 2003).

Rexroth's efforts were instrumental to set the foundations of this scene. His gatherings and activities related to the Libertarian Circle in the late 1940s, along with poet Madeline Gleason's resolution in the organization of poetry events, created a basis of unprecedented poetic liveliness in San Francisco that attracted a young generation of poets based both in the city and Berkeley. Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, and Robin Blaser—all of them connected to the Black Mountain poets—led the poetic movement known as the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance, which would put the city on the American poetry map in the late 1940s for the first time. Rather than a phenomenon unto itself, the San Francisco Renaissance can be defined as a label for a largely heterogeneous poetic community loosely unified around oral performance, an openly rhetorical and confessional style, and a thematic penchant for loss and nostalgia (Davidson 36). While this was going on in San Francisco, New York would give birth to the Beat Generation—a group of young writers from the Greenwich Village hipster scene that personified the opposition to the self-satisfaction of American mainstream society during the prosperous Eisenhower era. Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, John Clellon Holmes, Gregory Corso, Herbert Huncke, and Carl Solomon were the main figures of this movement. Attracted by the fresh new dynamism of the San Francisco literary scene, and probably by the vision of the West as a challenging frontier inherent to American culture, both Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg had relocated to San Francisco by 1955. The city would receive additional literary influx in the early 1950s from Oregon with the appearance of Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen and Lew Welch—who had become friends in their years at Reed College—in the local literary landscape. A decisive impulse to this poetry scene was given by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who moved to San Francisco in 1953 and founded City Lights Bookstore,

the first bookstore devoted to all-paperback publications in the United States. In 1955, Ferlinghetti established his own publishing house, which would set in motion its Pocket Poets Series. His publishing effort would be essential in that it publicized not only his own poetry, but also that of other San Francisco authors and, eventually, of a wider range of poets and translations of international poetry. This literary energy would materialize in the Six Gallery reading, organized by Kenneth Rexroth and Wally Hedrick in San Francisco on October 7, 1955. At the event, Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, Michael McClure, and Philip Lamantia presented some of their latest poems, among which Ginsberg's "Howl" had the biggest impact. "Howl," the Eliotesque manifesto of the disaffiliated white middle-class post-World War II generation, discussed overtly, in a litanical and often hallucinatory style, thorny subjects such as madness, drugs, Marxism, corporate capitalism, the anxieties of the atomic era, and, especially, male homosexuality. The Six Gallery reading can be considered the informal beginning of the countercultural Fifties in San Francisco. Some, like Jack Kerouac, argue that it was also the *real* outset of the San Francisco Renaissance. In his 1958 *roman à clef The Dharma Bums*, he recalls the event as

> the night of the birth of the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance. Everyone was there. It was a mad night. . . . [B]y eleven o'clock when Alvah Goldbook [Ginsberg's *alter ego*] was reading his, wailing his poem "Wail" [fictitious title of "Howl"] drunk with arms outspread everybody was yelling "Go! Go! Go!" (like a jam session) and old Rheinhold Cacoethes [Rexroth's *alter ego*] the father of the Frisco poetry scene was wiping his tears in gladness. . . . It was a great night. (*Dharma Bums* 9-10)

Be that as it may, the Six Gallery event was, as Todd Gitlin describes it, "the first time in the American twentieth century [that] poetry read aloud became a public act that

changed lives" (50). Ferlinghetti's subsequent decision to publish the poem in Ginsberg's poetry compilation *Howl and Other Poems* (1956) would cost him and his bookstore manager Shig Murao a highly publicized obscenity trial in 1957. Their acquittal, based on Judge Clayton Horn's interpretation that "Howl" was of "redeeming social importance" (qtd. in Ferlinghetti, "Horn on Howl" 261), entailed the underpinning of the San Francisco Beat scene. We believe that the city's Beat movement, which took shape by the warmth of the San Francisco Renaissance originated in the late 1940s, was San Francisco's authentic counterculture in the 1950s. While the original Renaissance authors were concerned primarily with the articulation of a literary community in the city (Davidson 167), the Beats, as in the case of "Howl," had a more social focus aimed at criticizing the self-satisfaction and conformity of the Eisenhower years, the psychosis of McCarthyism, consumerism, American imperialism, and the prevailing sexual, racial, and family assumptions. Relying on a poetics of vehemence, the Beats' visceral tone would certainly increase their social outreach—and so would their use of the San Francisco space.

Chapter 1.1, "Edenic North Beach: Enclave Consciousness in Lawrence Ferlinghetti's Poetry," explores Ferlinghetti's representation of North Beach, the San Francisco district around which the Beat counterculture revolved. We argue that a feeling of enclave pervades Ferlinghetti's image of North Beach, a countercultural haven at the gates of the San Francisco Financial District and, concurrently, surrounded by a city ruled by the interests of the local financial and political elite. The author's poems ooze consistently an *enclave consciousness* that shapes the image of North Beach as the beatniks' premier stronghold.[8] Through this consciousness, Ferlinghetti raises

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[8] The present study, here and elsewhere, uses the terms "Beat" and "beatnik" in a way that differentiates between a literary and a social perspective on the movement. In this sense, we draw upon Ray Carney's distinction between "Beat" as the literary-cultural phenomenon and "beatnik"—a word coined by San

awareness of two main elements that threaten to dilute the identity of North Beach: the automobile and the spiritual impoverishment of the Roman Catholic Church in a predominantly Italian-American neighborhood. This chapter examines these threats through the lens of Henri Lefebvre's theory of space, which helps us shed light on the spatial strategies used by the Establishment to diminish the strength of this countercultural enclave.

If chapter 1.1 delves into North Beach as an urban enclave, chapter 1.2, titled "Bob Kaufman and the Problematic Racialization of the Beat Social Space," puts the focus on the social space of the district. The beatnik gathering places—coffeehouses, bars, restaurants—are present in Bob Kaufman's poetry, exposing tensions that undermine the countercultural community and its liberating message. More specifically, in Kaufman we find the problems of the beatniks' incorporation of the African-American into their scene. While enhancing on the surface the disaffected identity of the white-centered Beat movement, we see that this incorporation also entails internal strains over the social space that perpetuate certain racist leanings in the United States.

Chapter 1.3, "Placeless and the Hobo: Jack Kerouac in the San Francisco Skid Row," concentrates on Jack Kerouac's San Francisco texts from the perspective of the notions of place and placelessness as developed in human geography. We analyze his interest in the hobo as the quintessential placeless element in American society and, at the same time, typical of the gloomy character that the author ascribes to San Francisco as the end of the American continent. For this purpose, we go over Kerouac's decrepit portrait of the the city's hobohemia, the South of Market district, as a space that is not a

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Francisco journalist Herb Caen from the union of "Beat" and "Sputnik," thus implying the Beats' speculated affiliation with Soviet communism—as the wider social circle that combined the Beats and the sympathizers and "imitators" that followed the Beat stereotype and frequented the Beat gathering spots ("Beat Culture and the New America: 1950-1965").

place for any of its marginal inhabitants—that is, the space that is beyond the frontier of mainstream society at the last psychological frontier of the United States.

Chapter 1.4, "A Trans-Pacific Heterotopia: Beat Orientalism from Kenneth Rexroth to Gary Snyder and Philip Whalen," for its part, looks at the relationship of the Beat counterculture and Eastern religion and philosophy. We discuss Kenneth Rexroth's seminal contribution to this relationship and its repercussion on Gary Snyder and Philip Whalen, the two authors of the San Francisco Beat scene with the deepest Buddhist inclinations. We draw on Foucault's concept of *heterotopia* to study the impact of Rexroth, Snyder, and Whalen on the city's cultural expansion across multiple geographical layers that range from the local to the trans-Pacific sphere.

For this part of the dissertation dealing with the Fifties, our selected literary sources match two essential criteria: they are texts that have not received extensive critical attention and which have a tangible presence of the San Francisco urban space in them. We are not so much interested in figurative or imagined spaces in this dissertation as in concrete representations of the city's space. For these reasons, some figures of the San Francisco Beat scene such as Ginsberg, McClure, or Lamantia are absent from our selection. Besides the fact that, unlike the other two, Ginsberg has received massive scholarly treatment over the last decades, we contend that the spatial presence of San Francisco is not one of the cornerstones of his texts. Both factors combined lead us to consider that Ginsberg's presence in this dissertation would not contribute anything significantly new to our critical perspective. Similarly to Ginsberg, Lamantia and McClure, relevant as they were to the city's Beat scene, do not show a connection to San Francisco as space comparable to that of the selected authors. In Kerouac's case, it is our choice to pass through his iconic novel *On the Road* (1957) just tangentially,

given the immense existing critical corpus on it. Instead, we prefer to favor other less-recognized works by him in the fields of prose and poetry. Our choice of texts, in any case, strives to remain within the time scope of the Fifties as much as possible. Even if we use texts written before or after those years, we make sure that they represent the countercultural spirit of the Fifties and relate to the Beats' use of the space during those years.

Other remarkable absentees from our analysis of the Fifties in San Francisco are women. The Beat movement as a whole definitely was overly male-centered, and so was the San Francisco Beat scene in particular, with women reduced merely to part of the beatnik social entourage that surrounded the city's Beats. There is still noteworthy literature by women that got to break the androcentric cordon of the Beat Generation: Diane di Prima, Joyce Johnson, Hettie Jones, Edie Parker, Elise Cowen, or Anne Waldman.[9] All of them were based in New York during the Fifties, though, and their link to the San Francisco Beat scene or their literary treatment of the city's space are almost nonexistent. In San Francisco, a few female authors rose to prominence in the local literary community around the Fifties—Madeline Gleason, Helen Adam, Joanne Kyger. However, they were, at best, loosely connected to the Beat scene, remaining largely in the diffuse non-Beat sphere of the San Francisco Renaissance.[10] One peculiar case is that of Lenore Kandel, who moved from New York to San Francisco already in 1960. She would make a place for herself in the city's post-Beat poetic scene,

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[9] For further reading on the women that were also part of the Beat Generation in both the East and West Coast, see Brenda Knight's comprehensive—perhaps to the extent of overstretching the scope of the "Beat" label—book *Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution* (Conari, 1996) and the collection of essays *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*, edited by Ronna C. Johnson and Nancy M. Grace (Rutgers UP, 2002). For an anthology of texts by female Beat authors, see the Richard Peabody-edited *A Different Beat: Writings by Women of the Beat Generation* (Serpent's Tail, 1997).

[10] For a reclamation of the female figures of the San Francisco Renaissance, see chapter 6, titled "Appropriations: Women and the San Francisco Renaissance," in Anthony Davidson's *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-century* (1989).

associating closely with the hippie subculture subsequently in the Sixties.[11] The urban space of San Francisco, however, is arguably of little significance in her poetry.

As the turn of the decade approached, the San Francisco Beat scene would be seriously hit by the rampant commodification of the beatnik subculture promoted by the media. The conversion of North Beach into a tourist attraction, along with a real estate market out of control as a consequence of commodification, forced the local Beat scene into severe decline. Some of its main figures, additionally, had relocated outside the city or had engaged in traveling by that time. This combination of factors led, around 1960, to the beginning of a transitional period that marked the end of the Fifties in San Francisco. The remnants of the Beat counterculture and the beatnik subculture would be joined by a new generation who had come of age during the Beat heyday in a feeling of post-Beat uncertainty. It is our contention that this transition sketches sensibilities that had remained unresolved in the Fifties and that were to flare up in the Sixties and beyond. Part Two of this dissertation, therefore, addresses the spatial relationship with the city of those who got caught in San Francisco's unclear countercultural scene between the Fifties and the Sixties. Since it is our wish that the reader gets a more precise picture of this interregnum in San Francisco, which has hardly received critical scrutiny thus far, chapter 2.1 provides a brief contextualization of this period under the title "Post-Beat San Francisco: A Few Ideas for a Cultural-Historical Contextualization."

Chapter 2.2, "Drifting Towards the Sixties in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*," is a reexamination of Pynchon's 1966 novella from a spatial standpoint. We are particularly interested in the protagonist Oedipa Maas's hallucinatory night journey

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[11] For further reading on the impact of Kandel's poetry, see Ronna C. Johnson's "Lenore Kandel's *The Love Book*: Psychedelic Poetics, Cosmic Erotica, and Sexual Politics in the Mid-sixties Counterculture," in *Reconstructing the Beats*, edited by Jennie Skerl (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 89-104).

across San Francisco and how it reproduces the theory of the *dérive* developed by the

Situationist International in the previous decade.[12] We study this psychogeographical

approach to the modern city as Pynchon's instrument to bring to the surface realities and

anxieties that had remained largely ignored by mainstream society and which advance

the countercultural outburst of the Sixties.

Chapter 2.3, titled "John Wieners and Queer Spatialization in Post-Beat San

Francisco," is devoted to the poet John Wieners's use of the city's space to open a real

queer space in San Francisco's countercultural poetry. Even though homosexuality had

been central to the Beat scene, it had not had, except in Ginsberg's case, a specific

weight in the Beat literary production as a purely stand-alone theme. Whereas it had

remained one more piece in the hodgepodge of the Beat Fifties, queerness becomes the

focus of Wieners's San Francisco poetry. We pay attention to how the author

contextualizes homosexuality as a theme with its timid yet increasing spatial visibility in

the city during the early 1960s.

1964 would bring some signals that make us interpret it as the end of the

countercultural transition and the beginning of the Sixties in San Francisco. The radical

theater of the San Francisco Mime Troupe had taken the scene in the early 1960s as a

means of expression of the city's trademark culture of dissent. The theatrical company

turned to the public space gradually during those years, giving satirical performances in

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[12] The Situationist International (1957-1972) was an international organization of intellectuals, artists, and political theorists, prominent mostly in Europe, whose ideological foundations were based upon anti-authoritarian Marxism and avant-garde art movements such as Surrealism and Dada. The focus of the organization would be the articulation of a comprehensive critique of mid-20th century advanced capitalism. Among its most notorious members, we can find Guy Debord, Raoul Vaneigem, Jacqueline de Jong, and Michèle Bernstein. Some central situationist texts are Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), "Report on the Construction of Situations and on the Terms of Organization and Action of the International Situationist Tendency" (1957), and "Theory of the Dérive" (1956); Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967); and the twelve issues of the journal *Internationale Situationniste* published between 1958 and 1969. For a collection of situationist writings and essays on the organization, see *Situationist International Anthology* (1981), edited by Ken Knabb, and *Guy Debord and the Situationist International* (2002), edited by Tom McDonough.

parks that included a vehement social and political critique. The Mime Troupe's satires, with a far-reaching message inasmuch they were performed on the streets, would prompt a harsh confrontation with the local powers which radicalized the company's positions even further. This was the birth of guerrilla theater in San Francisco, a nonviolent approach to public theatrical performance that seeks provocation and confrontation with the authorities drawing on guerrilla warfare-inspired practices. Roughly in parallel, psychedelic drugs were already a reality in San Francisco by 1964. The appearance of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters in the Bay Area countercultural scene represented a boost in the advocacy of psychoactive drugs as a liberation from the normative limits of the understanding. Although not exactly based in San Francisco, Kesey and the Pranksters would become *habitués* of the city's countercultural scene, organizing there and around the Bay psychedelic parties called Acid Tests, where LSD and other mind-expanding drugs were given away for free.

Along with these factors, San Francisco's countercultural scene progressively relocated to the Haight-Ashbury district—closer to the San Francisco State College campus and, by then, more affordable than North Beach in terms of housing (Perry 6). This relocation would entail a shift in the politics of space of the San Francisco counterculture. If the Beat counterculture of the Fifties had relied on a low-key social scene oriented to the indoor space in the North Beach bars and coffeehouses, the counterculture of the Sixties resorted decidedly to the public space for the enactment of its alternative views. A similar shift can also be found in neighboring Berkeley, the other rebellious hub in the Bay Area in the 1960s. In parallel to what was happening in San Francisco, a climate of palpable unrest would emerge on the campus of University of California, Berkeley during the 1964-1965 academic year around the Free Speech

Movement. This movement of student protest, together with timid contributions from Students for a Democratic Society, sought the lifting of the ban of on-campus political activities and would subsequently evolve into the Vietnam Day Committee, the major starting point of the Bay Area anti-Vietnam War movement. The Berkeley student protests would also conflate with the East Bay's active civil rights activism, resulting in numerous sit-ins, marches, and other forms of occupation of the public space.[13]

In San Francisco, rather than settling for the consolidation of a countercultural community, the rebels of the Sixties would turn to a visual, carnivalesque, provoking, and, above all, communal experience. The hippie stereotype—under which an eclectic variety of youngsters coalesced united generally around drugs and their opposition to the United States government, the Vietnam War, and consumer culture—was the most publicized example of this countercultural approach. The city's public space was used to mitigate the disparate eclecticism of the local Sixties counterculture in the form of public gatherings. The Human Be-In, or Gathering of the Tribes, was held in January 1967 in Golden Gate Park as, in the words of the founder of the Haight underground newspaper *San Francisco Oracle* Allen Cohen, "a union of love and activism previously separated by categorical dogma and label mongering" (qtd. in Perry 78). The following summer, the phenomenon known as the Summer of Love would take place in the Haight, with the convergence of around 100,000 people from very diverse parts of the country and the world in a celebration of the hippie countercultural life style that included multitudinous gatherings and concerts featuring music bands of the local psychedelic rock scene such as Jefferson Airplane or the Grateful Dead. As in the case

[13] The events that took place in Berkeley in the 1960s were, at best, vaguely related to the San Francisco counterculture of that decade. Still, we cannot miss the opportunity to acknowledge the obvious geographical and temporal link between both cultural phenomenons. For further historical analysis of the climate of protest in 1960s Berkeley and its spatial connotations, see *A Cultural History of the Radical Sixties in the San Francisco Bay Area* (2013), where Anthony Ashbolt also puts it in relation with the San Francisco counterculture of the Sixties.

of the Fifties, though, the heavy exposure to the media, which reached its peak during the Summer of Love, would result in the dilution of the San Francisco countercultural scene. The cultural assimilation and consequent commodification of the hippie stereotype was crucial to diminish the dissident legitimacy of the San Francisco counterculture. In October 1967, the Diggers, an offshoot of the San Francisco Mime Troupe that would fine-tune the notion of radical theater in the city, staged "The Death of the Hippie," a satirical happening that denounced the absorption of the hippie subculture by the media and mainstream culture. This happening, along with the Diggers' last death throes in the city during the first half of 1968, marks what we believe as the end of the Sixties in San Francisco. The vestiges of the hippie community —mainly the Diggers—would end up relocating to communes in rural areas of Northern California, Nevada, or Colorado where to continue their countercultural experience far from the urban spotlight.

Within the heterogeneous San Francisco scene of the Sixties, Part Three of this dissertation digs into the representations of the counterculture that we consider of greatest spatial relevance. Chapter 3.1, "Dissent on Stage: Radical Theater and the Reclamation of the Public Space," concentrates on the politics of space of the city's radical theater over the Sixties. Through Lefebvre's spatial theory, we look into the Mime Troupe's and the Diggers' reclamation of the public space and how it challenges the city's political and financial elites. Chapter 3.2, "The Sixties Put into Real-Life Practice: The Haight-Ashbury Community," proposes an examination of the countercultural community that emerged in San Francisco's Haight district. In this chapter, we are particularly interested in the shift from individualism to communalism in the city's countercultural community experimented with the advent of the Sixties.

Lastly, with the purpose of enriching the dissertation with a different spatial perspective, chapter 3.3 expands our geographical focus to compare the psychedelic politics of the West Coast and the East Coast, personified, respectively, by Ken Kesey and Timothy Leary. This chapter, "The Kesey-Leary Dichotomy: Shaping a Distinctive West Coast Psychedelic Counterculture," relates both approaches to the East-West dichotomy so present in the cultural imaginary of the United States, which is based largely on geographical and spatial considerations. This antagonism helps us understand the impact of San Francisco—the heart of the West Coast psychedelia—on the American counterculture at an entirely national level. This last chapter also takes the opportunity to discuss tangentially the commune, a paradigmatic space of the Sixties that is otherwise mostly absent from this dissertation. Communes became highly popular in California in the Sixties—even more after the demise of the Haight-Ashbury hippie community. However, no communes would actually get to be solidly set up in the San Francisco urban space neither during nor after the heyday of the Sixties counterculture. Kesey's estate in La Honda, California—a *de facto* commune—is an exception for us in our study in that it represents a geographical satellite of countercultural San Francisco and also serves as the headquarters of a key figure for the counterculture both of the city and the West Coast as a whole.

All in all, our greatest hope is to give a clear picture of the forces in dialogue in the contact zone resulting from the intersection of counterculture, its literary and cultural representations, and space in the context of 1950s and 1960s San Francisco. It is necessary to warn the reader that, in order to pursue this objective, this dissertation does not rely on the traditional homogeneous critical frameworks used to tackle a given corpus of analysis. This study is not just confined to literary criticism. Instead, it is our

intention to *read* the counterculture—that is, to interpret historical facts and events through the literary and cultural marks left by the counterculture. Of course, as we will see in the next section, we must acknowledge that our critical approach finds inspiration in an eclectic array of contributions made by human geography and philosophy to the field of the spatial studies. Yet without overlooking the literary act unto itself, we must keep in mind at every moment that we will be dealing with American history and culture, from whose configuration we want to retrieve the contribution of San Francisco as space.

Note on the Style of this Dissertation

This dissertation follows the latest style guidelines for research papers within the liberal arts and humanities published by the Modern Language Association of America (MLA) in the eighth edition of its *MLA Handbook* (2016). In this new edition, the standards of documenting sources prevail over their particular formats. For this reason, there are only minor changes that apply mostly to the way the bibliographical sources are cited: punctuation becomes simpler and more intuitive, volume and issue numbers are clearly identified, and the city of publication and media type are no longer relevant to the citation.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

In "Of Other Spaces," an unpublished talk given in 1967, Michel Foucault enunciates,

> The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. (1)

We agree with Foucault on the extreme importance of space when it comes to interpret the world and the infinite amount of vectors that compose it. Certainly, space is not just a geographical receptacle where things happen. Instead, space is a vivid entity that surrounds all of us, and which acquires a character, an identity that has an impact on the individuals it contains and on the events that take place in it. As Ana M. Manzanas and Jesús Benito define it, "Space is not neutral or finished; it can be seen as the inscription of history, power, culture, and language, and of subjectivity and personal memories. In its quality as 'living organism,' space is processual and progressive" (2). Indeed, the weight of history, politics, demography, physical geography, economy, art, and culture results in a mix of energies that shapes, in a figurative sense, space. Space, at the same time, affects the actions going on in it, forms them, conditions them.

Fortunately, as Robert T. Tally Jr. explains, "picking up pace after the Second World War, space began to reassert itself in critical theory, rivalling if not overtaking time in the significance it was accorded by critics and theorists, who were then more likely to address spatiotemporality or allow space to have a more equal footing with

time in their analyses" (3). Considering that history had been "the great obsession" of the nineteenth century (Foucault 1), it can be argued, then, that after 1945 space has no longer been a minor player in the critical landscape of literary and cultural studies. Still, prior to that moment, Tally also identifies a "repressed spatiality" in many modernist works, which "is present as a kind of geopolitical unconscious" (36). The importance acquired by space in recent decades has been named the "spatial turn," or, as Tally defines it, "an acknowledgement of the degree to which matters of space, place, and mapping had been under-represented in the critical literature of the past" (16). The spatial turn has supposed a major change in how to explore cultural texts, encouraging a concern with space and spatiality as instrumental agents in the configuration of the literary text and other cultural representations.

It is under the influence of this important shift in cultural and literary criticism that we have gotten to the questions that motivate this dissertation, and which we have already posed in the introduction to the present study: why has precisely San Francisco been a consistent epicenter of active dissenting activity through the decades? How has a city so far from the largest American cities in terms of population—and hence less prone, in comparison, to cultural and social agitation—gathered over the decades so many rebellious tendencies and movements of national impact? What does this city offer to these movements and, more specifically, to its counterculture of the 1950s and 1960s? We believe that the answer can be found in the different dimensions that define its space. We see San Francisco's urban space as the channel through which we can apprehend the relationship that links this city with its mid-20th century counterculture.

We have warned previously that this dissertation does not conform to the traditional scholarly standards that call for elaborated theoretical frameworks to nurture

the critical approach. Our study nonetheless drinks from a diverse combination of contributions to spatiality from the fields of philosophy, human geography, and sociology. Among them, French philosopher Henri Lefebvre has a prominent place. His seminal work *The Production of Space* (1974) addresses, from a Marxist humanist viewpoint, how space is determined by the rules of modern capitalism. Lefebvre's theory is particularly useful for our dissertation in that it helps us understand how modern American cities depend so heavily on powerful financial interests and how this, consequently, informs the concerns of the American counterculture. In fact, if we reduce these concerns to the lowest common denominator, we can isolate one of the most essential triggers of the mid-century American counterculture: post-World War II affluence. Brought to widespread attention by economist John Kenneth Galbraith in *The Affluent Society* (1958), the notion of affluence addresses the unprecedented level of prosperity attained by postwar American society. Affluence switched the focus from the strict provision of such basic needs as food and shelter to the accumulation of objectively superfluous material goods. At the core of affluence we find the massive power and influence of the corporate machine that both serves and perpetuates the affluent society. The interest of capital in preserving this cycle of affluence leads to its constant manipulation of society, which materializes in multiple ways. Among them, Lefebvre finds aggressive spatial practices that seek to clear any hurdle that may obstruct the steamroller of capitalism. As we note in chapter 3.1, suburbanization, such a quintessential phenomenon of the postwar United States, is seen by Lefebvre as motivated by the wish of capital to turn the urban downtown into an exclusive *locus* of decision of the financial and political elite (*Production of Space* 375). The result was the proliferation of suburban areas around the mid-20th century characterized by

impersonality, whose inhabitants would be voluntarily confined to live an everlasting cycle of cultivation of status and accumulation of wealth—thus nurturing the corporate elite without molesting it. Affluence and suburbia, central contributions of capitalism to the recent history of the United States, would be, conversely, decisive factors in the sense of alienation of the young postwar generations.

Lefebvre also underscores that the icons of affluence are used by the elite of capitalism to colonize the urban space. Relying on the promotion of the individualistic qualities of the automobile, the car industry, according to Lefebvre, manages to force urban planners into configuring cities which favor the automobile over of the citizen. Even though this thought reverberates in *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre expresses it best in *Vers le Cyberanthrope* (1971):

> In this society where things are more important than human beings, there is a king-object, a pilot-object: the automobile. Our society, so called industrial, or technical, has this symbol, a thing invested with prestige and power (…) The car is, in the neo-capitalist countries, an incomparable and perhaps irreparable instrument of deculturation, of internal destruction of the civilized world. (qtd. in Lowy, "May 68"; translation his)

Two immediate consequences of this fetishization are the ubiquity of and the dependence on cars. French philosopher Guy Debord, also remarkably influenced by Marxism, shares Lefebvre's view, calling for a "gradual phasing out" of the automobile in the urban space ("Theses" 57). Both Lefebvre and Debord provide helpful perspectives when confronting the Luddite leanings of some of the San Francisco Beats. In particular, in chapter 1.1, we analyze Lawrence Ferlinghetti's vision of North Beach as a countercultural enclave under threat. Throughout his poetic production, Ferlinghetti

presents his enclave as an inconvenient reality for normative culture and for the ever-expanding capitalist machine. He denounces vehemently, in terms comparable to Lefebvre's and Debord's, how the financial elite—and also the political elite, who is implied to be at the service of the former—strives to penetrate and pervert the space of North Beach subtly in order to subdue San Francisco's ultimate countercultural stronghold in the Fifties. Our analysis is assisted by Sidney Plotkin's notion of *enclave consciousness*, which, as developed in "Community and Alienation: Enclave Consciousness and Urban Movements" (1991), refers to as a collective feeling that opposes the external threats faced by a given community—identifiable in Ferlinghetti's vision of Beat North Beach.

But perhaps the most fundamental contribution of Lefebvre's theory to this dissertation is his idea that space is socially produced (*Production of Space* 26). Lefebvre raises concern about how the physical urban space is used by the financial and political powers in order to impose a frame of access and utilization which favors nothing but their own interests and tends to eliminate any trace of difference (*Production of Space* 56; "Space" 192). According to him, citizens are forced to inhabit the urban space under a numbing illusion of collective cohabitation that is just the main means for the state to maintain the social order and, therefore, the status quo. This is what Lefebvre calls *abstract* space—that is, the materialization of the capitalist machine when it is superimposed over the urban space. The abstraction of space, however, can never be complete, for the public space is always subject to the freedom of individuals and, thus, escapes the total control of the authorities (*Production of Space* 57). Abstract space, as Lefebvre asseverates, creates a natural reaction in certain groups to resist its structures. The result is the opening of a *differential* space, or counter-space, where

contrarian minds implement practices that counter the logic of the financial and political

elite (*Production of Space* 56). While we see in chapters 1.1 and 1.2 a "we-feeling" that

informs the San Francisco Beat community of the Fifties, the Beats would never

represent an actual organized threat to the abstract space. We can argue, instead, that

they cared for the defense of their enclave and its indoor social space. However, when it

comes to tackling the Sixties in San Francisco in chapters 3.1 and 3.2, Lefebvre's theory

of the differential space applies especially well to understand the shift in the

countercultural interest in the city's public space. Beginning with the politics of space of

San Francisco's radical theater groups, the city's counterculture would embark in the

definition of a differential space that, in a way, came into being with the emergence of

the Haight-Ashbury hippie community. This can be seen as the first time the San

Francisco mid-century counterculture ever actually locked horns with the financial and

political powers, subverting radically the use of the public space and creating new

spatial practices. While North Beach was an inconvenient dissonant note for those

powers, the Haight community became an offender of the order imposed by the

capitalistic machinery. Lefebvre's theory turns, again, into an excellent guide to

understand the reaction of the Establishment to this frontal attack of the city's

counterculture and the resulting dialectics between both sides.

Whereas Lefebvre is the backbone of our theoretical corpus, Debord's relevance

must also be highlighted. The most prominent among the circle of the Situationist

International, Debord advocates the creation of "situations" in order to regain control

over the urban space. Situations are "temporary settings of life" transformed into "a

higher, passionate nature" (Debord, "Report" 44). Situations are, in fact, the

situationists' answer to the rampant commodification of every ephemeral and enjoyable

experience of life that can be found at the core nature of modern capitalism. Within the broader situationist proposal, we consider that their psychogeographical approach to geography and space is exceptionally appealing for this dissertation. Debord defines psychogeography as "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals" ("Introduction to a Critique").[14] For this purpose, in "Theory of the Dérive" (1956), Debord introduces the *dérive* as the quintessential psychogeographical practice for the individual to grasp the urban space. In a *dérive*, the subjects engage in an unplanned roaming throughout different ambiances of a given city, studying the effects of the geographical milieu and its inherent psychological stimuli on their behavior and actions. In chapter 2.2, we study Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* as a *dérive* that allegorizes—and, concurrently, prophesies—the awakening of American society on the way to the countercultural Sixties. Pynchon's protagonist spends a night adrift in San Francisco passing through some its disadvantaged areas while she opens her eyes to a social reality that her normative frame of intelligibility, like that of the larger society, had kept unacknowledged. We must highlight that the *dérive* we identify in this novel, like that promoted by the situationists, is not exactly comparable to the stroll of the *flâneur*. The *flâneur*, the emblematic urban wanderer popularized in the 19th century by Charles de Baudelaire, would subsequently be brought into the academy by German cultural critic Walter Benjamin as an incisive analyst of urban modernity and its ensuing urban alienation and class tensions (Benjamin 53). We can argue that *flâneurs* take a passive stance while they wander through the city and scrutinize its reality. The *dérive*, on the contrary, engages the subject in an active exercise that differs from a stroll

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[14] A thorough elaboration on the notion of psychogeography can be found in Debord's article "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography," first published in 1955 in the Belgian surrealist journal *Les Lèvres Nues*.

in that it dialogues with—and, therefore is shaped by—the surrounding psychogeography. The active nature of the *dérive* is what makes us favor it in our spatial approach over the passive scrutiny of the *flânerie*.

Our discussion of space and spatiality leads us inevitably to also discuss place in chapter 1.3. The counterculture, after all, in any of its forms, suggests a feeling of displacement within mainstream society. The disenchanted postwar generations would not feel at home within the set of values and anxieties of society at large. When we plunge into Jack Kerouac's literature, in particular, we see that this emotional displacement translates into siding deliberately with the social misfits cast out by the wider community. The message sent by Kerouac is clear: the actual place for the authentic self that does not conform to the official culture of the United States is right where society marginalizes the difference. As Kerouac explores the urban fringe represented by San Francisco's South of Market district, we feel the necessity to turn to human geographers Yi-Fu Tuan's and Edward Relph's studies on space and place and, most importantly, to the analysis of placelessness made by Tim Cresswell in *Place: A Short Introduction* (2004). In Tuan's view, expressed in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977), a place, in contrast to the emotional irrelevance of a space, is a social construct in space shaped by human experience (54). Following Tuan, Cresswell also argues that a place is a particular space that people have ascribed a meaningfulness to, giving birth to a bond of emotional attachment to it (7). Tuan's and Cresswell's approaches to space and place somehow run in parallel to that of French theorist Michel de Certeau. Certeau, however, bafflingly interchanges the names of the concepts. Still, he furthers Tuan's and Cresswell's explanation by raising the subject of urban practice. For Certeau, what turns a place—or space, according to Tuan and

Cresswell—into a space—or place, as named by them—is the application of the people's "vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables" (117). This is what he calls the practicing of a place, which fills it with the "forests of [people's] desires and goals" (xxi)—that is, with the personal attachment that, as mentioned above, for Cresswell gives origin to a feeling of place.

When Kerouac immerses himself into San Francisco's marginal scene and, principally, affiliates with the local hobo subculture, the notion of *placelessness* becomes essential. In *Place and Placelessness* (1976), Relph delves into what he calls "existential outsideness"—that is, a self-conscious disengagement from people and places that generates a feeling of not belonging (51). This sense of placelessness, according to Cresswell, is furthered by mobility (44-45). The transient nature of the hobo, which reflects to a great extent the need for movement present in the American imagination (articulated around the Manifest Destiny doctrine and the myth of the American Frontier), makes him an inherently placeless figure in that he, by nature, has no attachment to any particular place. In chapter 1.3, we see how Kerouac uses the notion of *placelessness*, embodied by South of Market as a space and the hobo as a character, as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, placelessness is the harsh result of the rigid boundaries of social acceptability imposed by normative society. On the other hand, placelessness is an opportunity for the mid-century contrarian minds to find a retreat from the constraints of that society where they no longer feel at home in.

Foucault, whom we have referenced at the beginning of this section, does not give heed to spatiality throughout his work with the same intensity as other fields of study. However, he contributes the valuable concept of *heterotopia*, one that we incorporate to this dissertation in chapter 1.4. In opposition to utopias, which, according

to Foucault, are "sites with no real place" (3), the philosopher draws attention to

> 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 the 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. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.[15] (3-4)

Our vision of San Francisco as a countercultural city with a geographically expansive cultural outreach is heavily informed by Foucault's idea. The general inclination towards Asian religion and philosophy of the local counterculture not only sought new forms of spirituality that made up for the shortcomings of western Christianity. It would also set San Francisco apart from the rest of the country in the sense that it gave origin to a cultural bond with East Asia that other American cities would not cultivate. We contend that this connection with the East stems from the dialogue of the counterculture with nature and Zen Buddhism. In a cultural link that expands to the Bay Area, the American Northwest, and, ultimately, Asia, the San Francisco counterculture defines the city as a heterotopia that, in Foucault's words, "juxtapos[es] in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (6).

The preeminence granted to space in this study might as well lead some readers to wonder about time as an element potentially relevant to our critical approach. In fact, one great contribution to literary theory in the 20th century is Mikhail Bakhtin's notion

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[15] Probably due to his lack of critical interest in spatiality and the ideas of "space" and "place," Foucault uses the terms "space," "place," and "site" in "Of Other Spaces" indiscriminately to refer to the generic notion of space the way Cresswell, Tuan, and Relph—and, for that matter, we—define it: an open arena where the multiple energies of history, politics, economy, sociology, and culture interact. Let this footnote assist the reader in the heterogeneous use of spatial terms that can be found in the wide field of spatial studies.

of the *chronotope,* which elaborates on the impact that the intimate relationship between space and time has on literature. As Bakhtin explains in "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" (1937),

> We will give the name chronotope (literally, "time space") to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. This term [space-time] is employed in mathematics, and was introduced as part of Einstein's Theory of Relativity. The special meaning it has in relativity theory is not important for our purposes; we are borrowing it for literary criticism almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely). We understand the chronotope as a formally constitutive category of literature; we will not deal with the chronotope in other areas of culture.
>
> In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope. (84)

We certainly agree on the role that time has in the articulation of a given literary expression—as well as in other fields. However, this dissertation focuses on how the literary and cultural act interacts with space within a specific time frame. Even though we concede that the representations of the counterculture we analyze are products of their temporal context unto themselves, we also believe that, when put together in the ensemble of the mid-century American counterculture, they establish a dialogue with space whose evolution is subject to historical, cultural, and social developments rather than to specific impositions of their time frame. Consequently, since we consider time not to be the most decisive vector for our analysis, we find Bakhtin's *chronotope* of limited usefulness for our approach.

Despite the eclecticism of our critical corpus, it is our intention to present the

reader with a logically cohesive overview of these sources. Disparate as they may seem, when interwoven, we hope that the concepts summarized guide the reader consistently —finding in the study of space the unifying thread of our analysis of the intimate relation between the American counterculture and San Francisco.

PART ONE: THE FIFTIES

1.1. EDENIC NORTH BEACH: ENCLAVE CONSCIOUSNESS IN LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI'S POETRY

In his essay "Community and Alienation: Enclave Consciousness and Urban Movements" (1991), Sidney Plotkin discusses the positive and negative aspects of enclave consciousness in the urban United States. While he criticizes the possible exclusionary and alienating consequences of a narrow-minded localism when it comes to interacting with neighboring communities, he also concedes the empowering effect of this consciousness on the spatial preservation of a given community. Enclave consciousness is ultimately defined by Plotkin as a "we-feeling" intended to oppose an external threat that puts a certain community at risk (7, 15). In San Francisco, this feeling has traditionally been present and deeply rooted in some of its communities. Richard Edward DeLeon observes a civic awareness in the city that materializes into "a natural defense against forces that work to flatten places into spaces and to dissolve communities into aggregates of individual citizens" (139). As we have highlighted before, San Francisco has been a historical breeding ground for unrest and protest. Chris Carlsson notes, in this sense, that the city's "famous liberalism and tolerance for dissent helps make room for new initiatives that would be more difficult to embark on elsewhere" (86).

The premier enclave for the San Francisco counterculture in the Fifties was the North Beach neighborhood. Originally home to the city's Italian immigrant community, North Beach would be taken over by the local Beat scene and the beatnik community in the 1950s. Its cafés and jazz clubs became central spots around which the Beats

configured their social space in the city. The creation of this space would result in a closely-knit countercultural community aware of the challenge it meant to the dominant order—that is to say, the political and financial establishment. The socially deviant essence of the North Beach community in the Fifties condensed the weariness and unrest of the Beat Generation, for whom the postwar United States was no longer a society they felt any attachment to. Within the Beat scene, the poetry of Lawrence Ferlingetti—a resident of North Beach himself since 1953—arguably constitutes the soundest literary contribution to the spatialization of the San Francisco Beat community and, chiefly, to the self-assertion and preservation of North Beach against the standardizing machinery of normative American society. Our analysis hereunder will concentrate on how enclave consciousness shapes Ferlinghetti's literary representation of North Beach as a countercultural community at loggerheads with the forces of the dominant order.

In his inaugural address as San Francisco's first Poet Laureate in 1998, Ferlinghetti recalls,

> When I arrived in the City in 1950, . . . San Francisco looked like some Mediterranean port – a small white city, with mostly white buildings – a little like Tunis seen from seaward. I thought perhaps it was Atlantis, risen from the sea. I certainly saw North Beach especially as a poetic place, as poetic as some quarters in Paris, as any place in old Europa, as poetic as any place great poets and painters had found inspiration. ("Acceptance Speech")

The poet lauds the city's Mediterranean character and finds North Beach as inspiring as the most emblematic *quartiers* of Paris. By drawing a parallelism between North Beach and some of the most iconic locations in Europe, Ferlinghetti presents us with a vibrant

and poetic space that nurtures artistic creation and uninhibited thought. Concurrently, the comparison implies an exaltation of San Francisco's intrinsic exotic nature. In an examination of the city's cultural uniqueness, Geoff Ward contends,

> In an important sense [San Francisco] *is* an island, separated from the mainland as much by cultural self-imaging as by the San Andreas fault. . . . A concern with the literature of San Francisco must entail reading San Francisco itself as a literary construction, an island within an island. The sense of California as an imperilled paradise, an Eden that might become Atlantis overnight, finds its sharpest identification in the image of this city in particular. (57)

As Ward suggests, San Francisco, located at the very top of the homonymous peninsula and surrounded by the waters of the ocean and the Bay, constitutes an enclave isolated from the continent. Restricted contact with the *mainland* United States would stimulate the development of a differentiating character. The city's resulting cultural alienation, simultaneously, would favor the cultivation of a self-image of uniqueness. The influential local journalist Herb Caen,[16] who would deem San Francisco "Baghdad by the Bay" in 1949 for its unconventionality, abridges this self-concept as he celebrates San Francisco as a city

> where ideas are traded, opinions clash and eternal conflict may produce eternal truths . . . . [W]here you can sign a petition, boo the chief justice, fish off a pier, gaze at a hippopotamus, buy a flower at the corner, or get a good hamburger or a bad girl at 4 a.m. . . . [,] where sirens make white streaks of sound in the sky and foghorns speak in dark grays. ("A City Is like San Francisco")

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[16] Herb Caen (1916-1997) was a largely authoritative commentator on the life and idiosyncrasy of San Francisco for over five decades. His columns for the *San Francisco Chronicle* ultimately earned him a Special Pulitzer Prize in 1996 "for his extraordinary and continuing contribution as a voice and conscience of his city" ("1996 Pulitzer Prizes").

The image projected by San Francisco has always conditioned heavily the perception that outsiders have of it. An archetypal example of this is the way the city is described by Jack Kerouac in *On the Road* (1958), where it is consistently portrayed as a mythical place in the eyes of his East Coast-bred narrator:

> We began rolling in the foothills before Oakland and suddenly reached a height and saw stretched out ahead of us the fabulous white city of San Francisco on her eleven mystic hills with the blue Pacific and its advancing wall of potato-patch fog beyond, and smoke and goldenness in the late afternoon of time. . . . [T]hat pan-fried chow mein flavoured air that blew into my room from Chinatown, vying with the spaghetti sauces of North Beach, the soft-shell crab of Fisherman's Wharf – nay, the ribs of Fillmore turning on spits! Throw in the Market Street chili beans, redhot, and french-fried potatoes of the Embarcadero wino night, and steamed clams from Sausalito across the bay, and that's my ah-dream of San Francisco. Add fog, hunger-making raw fog, and the throb of neons in the soft night, the clack of high-heeled beauties, white doves in a Chinese grocery window... (*On the Road* 160-61, 164-65)

In the Fifties, with the consolidation of a hipster community, North Beach catalyzed much of the energy stemming from the uniqueness and diversity described above. The district would become San Francisco's countercultural enclave, where the dominance of the financial and political establishment and the validity of the prevailing social, family, and sexual values were often more intensely contested.

Ferlinghetti delves into his discovery of North Beach as he reminisces, "It didn't take me long to discover that in Italian, bohemian North Beach, I had fallen into a burning bed of anarchism, pacifism, and a wide open, non-academic poetry scene, provincial but liberating" ("Introduction" xi). He brings attention to some of the distinctive traits of North Beach. Its predominantly Italian heritage—with its traditions

of anarchism,[17] café chatter, and public display (Walker 12-13)—provides a strong Mediterranean flavor. We cannot overlook, moreover, that North Beach is partially the successor of the defunct Barbary Coast, San Francisco's infamous red-light district until the 1910s. Both factors would coalesce decisively in the entrenchment of a space open to activism and dissent. After the end of World War II, as poet Philip Lamantia explains, "San Francisco was terribly straight-laced and provincial, but at the same time there were these islands of freedom—in North Beach at bars like the Iron Pot and the Black Cat, where intellectuals met to talk. There was a whole underground culture that went unnoticed by the city at large. An amazing music scene was going on, black music" (qtd. in Peters 203). North Beach, furthermore, began to host an intense cultural and political activity led by the author and activist Kenneth Rexroth's Libertarian Circle, as Nancy J. Peters explains:

> The anarchist Libertarian Circle . . . met for big parties at Fugazi Hall on Green Street in North Beach, and the writers and artists of the Rexroth group were joined by old Italian anarchists, longshoremen, doctors, cabbies, professors; sometimes as many as two hundred people attended these gatherings, which featured political debate, dancing, picnics, and hiking trips. . . . Literature began to be a communal experience, with poetry readings and discussions drawing substantial audiences. (203-04)

Rexroth's role as precursor of the San Francisco Beat scene is truly essential, for he set its literary and political foundations. A space for free-thinking literary discussion would grow around Rexroth, resulting in the birth of the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance. It is this context that would eventually attract the East Coast Beats, who used to gravitate until then around New York's own countercultural enclave, the Greenwich Village.

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[17] For a broader understanding of the repercussion of anarchism in San Francisco, see chapter 1.4, "A Trans-Pacific Heterotopia: Beat Orientalism from Kenneth Rexroth to Gary Snyder and Philip Whalen."

This taste for the popularization of literature and art, along with an intense activity of political dissent, would also attract Ferlinghetti. His poetic production incorporates all of this energy, spatializing North Beach as a liberating stronghold surrounded by the numbness of the postwar United States. Ferlinghetti captures the essence of the enclave in "A North Beach Scene":

> Away above a harborful
> of caulkless houses
> among the charley noble chimneypots
> of a rooftop rigged with clotheslines
> a woman pastes up sails
> upon the wind
> hanging out her morning sheets
> with wooden pins
> O lovely mammal
> her nearly naked breasts
> throw taut shadows
> . . . .
> So caught with arms upraised
> she tosses back her head
> in voiceless laughter
> and in choiceless gesture then
> shakes out gold hair (*San Francisco Poems* 32-33)

In this poem, Ferlinghetti draws the attention to a female that we read as North Beach itself. The metaphor initially highlights the Mediterranean character of the neighborhood, which makes it a differentiated enclave surrounded by the corporate-oriented city center. While located in downtown San Francisco, bordering the Financial District, North Beach traditionally has put great emphasis on the preservation of its identity and heritage, thus remaining largely out of tune with the tendency of modern

Western cities to model the urban space after private enterprise and financial interests (Lefebvre, *Production of Space* 376). By catching North Beach "with arms upraised" and sending out a "voiceless laughter," the author references the increasingly carefree and tolerant atmosphere of the neighborhood in the 1950s. North Beach, moreover, is presented as shaking out "gold hair," that is, showing both the city and the nation its radiant vitality, which had gone unnoticed until then. This vitality, by contrast, is not exempt from an external menace, as Ferlinghetti suggests in "The Old Italians Dying" (1979):

> For years the old Italians have been dying
> all over America
> . . . .
> You have seen them on the benches
> in the park in Washington Square
> the old Italians in their black high button shoes
> the old men in their old felt fedoras
>   with stained hatbands
> have been dying and dying
>   day by day
> You have seen them
> every day in Washington Square San Francisco (*My Rivers* 219)

Here, the author laments the incursion of gentrification and commodification in North Beach. Ferlinghetti alludes to them indirectly as tools with which the city's financial elite threatens the unique internal social and economic relations that make the neighborhood a countercultural bastion. For the enclave-conscious Ferlinghetti, according to Plotkin's analysis, North Beach is a space subject to manipulation by greedy forces from above and predatory interests "aimed at controlling, exploiting and

ultimately destroying the enclave" (17).

In Ferlinghtetti's literature, the threat posed by those forces becomes a powerful source of unity among the members of the North Beach community. Plotkin points out, as a matter of fact, that the condition for enclave consciousness to take root in a community is the presence of a common threat (15). This idea reverberates in Ferlinghetti's inaugural address as he protests, "But this past weekend North Beach looked like a theme-park, literally overrun by tourists, and kitsch was king. What happened to it? What makes for a free poetic life? What destroys the poetry of a city?" ("Acceptance Speech"). The author answers his own question by singling out a great peril for a rational use of the space of the enclave: "Automobiles destroy [a city], and they destroy more than the poetry. All over America, . . . cities and towns are under assault by the automobile, are being literally destroyed by car culture" ("Acceptance Speech"). Ferlinghetti, unlike many of his fellow Beats,[18] demonizes the appropriation of the urban space by car culture, for it often goes just against the interests of the community. In a sense, he concurs with Guy Debord's thesis that road traffic is a double-edged sword: while it seeks order in the form of an organized traffic flow, it also implies harm to old urban districts (*Society of Spectacle* 32). Ferlinghetti bitterly complains that the space in the urban United States is planned to favor the continuous proliferation of vehicles to the detriment of its citizens. His model of city echoes that of Debord, for whom "it is not a question of combating the automobile as an evil in itself. It is the extreme concentration in the cities that has led to the negation of its role. Urbanism should certainly not ignore the automobile, but even less should it accept it as

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[18] A paradigmatic example of this is Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road* (1958), where the vehicle becomes inseparable from Beat icon Neal Cassady's *alter ego* Dean Moriarty, who evokes the American cowboy in his restless search for experience and movement throughout the American geography. This illustrates how even part of the Beat counterculture failed to stay away from what Guy Debord denounces as the misleading identification spread by developed capitalism of individual freedom with the automobile ("Theses" 56).

its central theme" ("Theses on Traffic" 57). Ferlinghetti's poem "In Goya's Greatest Scenes We Seem to See" (1958) furthers his denigration of car culture as an enemy of the countercultural enclave:

In Goya's greatest scenes we seem to see
                    the people of the world
        exactly at the moment when
            they first attained the title of
                        'suffering humanity'
. . . .
We still are ranged along the roads
        plagued by legionnaires
            false windmills and demented roosters
They are the same people
                    only further from home
        on freeways fifty lanes wide
. . . .
            The scene shows fewer tumbrils
                        but more strung-out citizens
                            in painted cars
            and they have strange license plates
        and engines
                that devour America (*Coney Island* 9-10)

The author draws a parallelism between Francisco Goya's *The Disasters of War* series[19] and the mid-century American society. The apocalyptic tone of the poem makes a hyperbolic comparison between the effects of car culture and the suffering and destruction of war. That is, in a figured sense, Ferlinghetti hints that the automobile is

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[19] The *Disasters of War* (the original title in Spanish is "Los desastres de la guerra") is a series of prints created by the Spanish painter Francisco Goya between 1810 and 1820. The series is renowned worldwide for its gritty depiction of the violence and atrocious consequences of the 1808 Dos de Mayo Uprising, the Peninsular War, and the subsequent restoration of the absolute Bourbon monarchy in Spain in 1814.

equally devastating not only for the enclave but for the United States as a whole. A similar image is evoked in "Home Home Home" (1979):

> Where are they going
> all these brave intrepid animals
> Fur and flesh
> in steel cabinets
> on wheels
> high-tailing it
> Four PM Friday freeway
> over the hidden land
> San Francisco's burning
> with the late sun
> in a million windows
> The four-wheeled animals
> are leaving it to burn
> They're escaping (*My Rivers* 230)

Ferlinghetti rails anew against the "four-wheeled animals" that colonize an urban space appropriated from its citizens. The poem describes a Friday afternoon rush-hour scene where vehicles that do not really belong to the city—yet use and monopolize its space—leave it for the suburbs or some weekend retreat. These lines are of great power, for the author targets, at once, the American suburban culture and car culture as quiet enemies of his North Beach enclave. Suburbia, in particular, symbolizes the very opposite to what North Beach represents. An archetypal emblem of what the Beat counterculture saw as the numbing social and cultural standardization of the mid-century United States, the suburbs embody the success of capitalism in dispersing its middle and working classes far from the nucleus of power and decision—the urban downtown—(Lefebvre, *Production of Space* 375) under the misleading promise of a less hectic—and hence

more family-friendly—environment. This strategy also conceals the objective of a relative and short-term satisfaction of the material appetites of those individuals, deadening—or rather, tricking—their conscience. The suburban space is thus reduced, in Lefebvre's view, to "individual boxes sprinkled with a few illusions" (*Production of Space* 357). The resulting quiet, family-friendly environment is nothing but what Michel de Certeau calls unpracticed space: a space devoid of any hint of public social and cultural vitality (xxi, 117).[20] "Home Home Home" implies Ferlinghetti's critique of a society that cooperates passively with the strategies of the hegemonic elites, who dominate the arrangement of space according to their predatory gains. This society concentrated in suburbs represents one end of the capitalistic practice of space that subjugates the middle-class American society and that leads to the other end: the corporate workplace that, in Ferlinghetti's poem, is symbolized by the million windows —a reference to the glazed aesthetics typical of office buildings—which reflect the sun. A usual way to unite both ends is the vehicle, which many suburban citizens use for their daily commute. Ferlinghetti vilifies the commute as an invasion of vehicles that contributes to perpetuate the machinery of corporate capitalism and, consequently, incites the dominant elite to keep conditioning the urban space in its favor.[21] The poet, in a way, echoes Robert Goodman's theory of "asphalt's magic circle," which Henri Lefebvre summarizes:

In the United States the federal government collects a certain percentage on petrol sales,

20 Further study of the critique of mid-century American suburbia can be found in chapter 2.2, "Drifting towards the Sixties in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*."

21 A Luddite vein present in some Beat authors arguably underlies Ferlinghetti's critique of car culture as well. Allen Ginsberg's apocalyptic references to "Moloch" in "Howl" as the monstrous embodiment of the corporate and mechanized United States seem to be in accordance with Ferlinghetti's tone. The Beats' loathing of the prevalence of the machine over the human being, in fact, underpins the already strong connection between them and the Romantics—whose Luddite leanings are epitomized, yet not reduced to, Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein*.

so generating vast sums of money for urban and inter-urban highway construction. The building of highways benefits both the oil companies and the automobile manufacturers: every additional mile of highway translates into increased car sales, which in turn increase petrol consumption, hence also tax revenues, and so on. . . . It is almost as though automobiles and motorways occupied the entirety of space. . . . This sequence of operations implies a productive consumption: the consumption of a space, and one that is doubly productive in that it produces both surplus value and another space. (*Production of Space* 374-75)

As per this theory, the automobile and its related industries and infrastructures make up a system extremely profitable both for the political and financial establishment.[22] Implied in "Home Home Home," moreover, is the physical presence of North Beach at the foot of corporate San Francisco. Ferlinghetti's enclave remains a besieged space antipodal to the values represented both by American suburbia and the capitalist system. The author grants North Beach its place in the poem *in absentia* as a redoubt that resists the spatial strategies of the city's dominant forces to preserve its aesthetic charm and countercultural identity—in other words, to preserve its space oriented towards the members of its community.

Although to a lesser extent than the automobile, Ferlinghetti is quite forthright about the harm that religion could inflict to the enclave. In a community with such a hefty Italian heritage as North Beach, Roman Catholicism remains a highly influential force. While not a poet with a spiritual bent, Ferlinghetti does not seem to oppose the presence of an institution that serves the religious needs of his community in a constructive way. However, he looks on the Catholic Church as a flawed organization that fails to live up to its moral authority—as he allegorizes in "They Were Putting Up the Statue" (1958):

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[22] For further reading on this notion, see chapter III of Robert Goodman's *After the Planners* (Penguin, 1972).

They were putting up the statue

    of Saint Francis

  in front of the church

    of Saint Francis

      in the city of San Francisco

in a little side street

    just off the Avenue

        where no birds sang (*Coney Island* 17)

The poem describes the erection of a statue of Saint Francis in front of North Beach's National Shrine of Saint Francis of Assisi. Ferlinghetti satirizes, as Saju Mathew notes, "the practice of putting up statues of saints in every street in a desperate bid to make money by way of offertories. The Church needs money rather than spiritual enlightenment" (161). Ferlinghetti's underlying critique, therefore, aims at the moral decline of the Church, which makes a use of space driven by spurious interests—partly spurred by the increasing secularization of society—rather than by an orientation to serve the community. The poet spots in these practices an incursion of rapacious capitalism into the space of the enclave. Some further elaboration on this point is given as the poem goes on:

And a lot of young reporters

      in button-down clothes

  were taking down the words

      of one young priest

  who was propping up the statue

      with all his arguments (*Coney Island* 17)

Ferlinghetti portrays the priest as a salesman to stress the materialistic drives of the Church and the resulting vacuity of the monument itself. Monumental space, like that

used by the Church in the poem, is defined by Lefebvre as a "collective mirror" that offers a community "an image of membership . . . under the conditions of a generally accepted Power and a generally accepted Wisdom" (*Production of Space* 220). The religious congregation, which represents a relevant portion of a community like North Beach, finds unity around the power of God and the wisdom of the Catholic faith. Ferlinghetti's poem discusses, by contrast, the unrest that emerges from the loss of prestige of the monument (Lefebvre, *Production of Space* 222)—that is, of the religious symbol. The author expresses overtly his disappointment with the commercialization of faith in "Christ Climbed Down" (1958):

> Christ climbed down
> from His bare Tree
> this year
> and ran away to where
> no intrepid Bible salesmen
> covered the territory
> in two-tone cadillacs (*Coney Island* 69)

In a Lefebvrian vein, Ferlinghetti implicitly condemns the Church's value-oriented approach to space and the resulting distancing from its spiritual mission (Lefebvre, *Production of Space* 257). By incorporating capitalistic strategies to its spatial practices, the Church thus becomes a hazard for the enclave that resists the financial and political establishment.

Facing such chief spatial challenges as car culture and the morally-impoverished Church, Ferlinghetti declares North Beach a symbol of the antagonism of his generation to the social and moral rigidity of the postwar United States. As Maurice Yaofu Lin points out,

"Starting from fish-shape Paumanok . . . I strike up for a New World," sings Whitman in "Starting from Paumanok." Echoing Whitman, Ferlinghetti would also strike up for his new world by, as he calls the third volume of his poetry, "Starting from San Francisco." . . . [T]he city came to stand as a symbol for the ideal community that he had been seeking. For San Francisco, the starting point of his journey, is invariably also his destination. (171-72)

Our only objection to Lin's interpretation would be his deeming San Francisco Ferlinghetti's ideal community. Although Ferlinghetti professes a deep love for his adoptive city in his texts, we are seeing how this notion of ideal community actually zooms in on North Beach. The city, poetic and tolerant as it may be, remains ultimately subject to the domination of the hegemonic financial and political forces, which, in turn, dictate largely the values of normative society. North Beach, contrariwise, is Ferlinghetti's liberated zone, surrounded by those forces. In *Starting from San Francisco* (1961), indeed, Ferlinghetti takes a poetic journey that begins and ends in San Francisco. In the process, he makes a powerful reference to Walt Whitman— powerful in that it evokes Whitman's romantic and pure vision of the United States and his trademark poetic exaltation of the American democracy. Ferlinghetti hints that North Beach is a sort of epitome of Whitman's United States: a virtuous community with healthier democratic values. In Ferlinghetti, as a result, North Beach symbolizes a Garden of Eden where an unblemished community resists capitalistic greed and social intolerance. In this sense, the poet prophesies, in a reference to Percy Byshee Shelley,[23] "The world's Great Age begins anew / Our iron brood will cease and the Serpent die forever as a new race of longhaired golden progeny descends from on high in Jefferson

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[23] "The world's great age begins anew" is one of the most recognizable lines of Shelley's 1822 verse drama *Hellas*.

Airplanes" (*Tyrannus Nix?* 48-49). With "longhaired golden progeny," Ferlinghetti references the stereotypical hippie aesthetics of the Sixties. He thus lauds the counterculture of that period as the logical heir of the Beat movement of the Fifties. The author also mentions Jefferson Airplane, the San Francisco-based music band that pioneered psychedelic rock in the Sixties, as he makes a double entendre with the name of the mythical band and the "high" of widespread drug consumption among the Beat "progeny." This nod to the San Francisco countercultural scene of the Sixties entertains the idea that the "Great Age" in which the Serpent disappears from Eden begins in San Francisco (Lin 194). Ferlinghetti furthers his certainty in the Edenic condition of his community and its spiritual quality in "After the Cries of the Birds" (1968):

> hurrying thru eternity
>   to a new pastoral era
>   I see the shadows of that future
>   in that white island
>   which is San Francisco
>   floating in its foreign sea
>   seen high on a hill (*Secret Meaning* 32)

These lines evoke Geoff Ward's affirmation that San Francisco is an island, and also contribute to his point that "San Francisco is the City not of actuality but of possibility, a visionary *topos* . . . of the Romantic imagination" (58). Ferlinghetti, in addition, proposes the vision of his countercultural community as a "city upon a hill"—that is, a beacon watched by all of those who see in its Edenic nature a valid alternative to mainstream American society. This vision of North Beach, for that matter, would have a huge impact on the counterculture of the Sixties. The communal experiments that took place around that time in Northern California—by the warmth of the countercultural

movement that took over San Francisco simultaneously—would find great inspiration in the image of "liberated zone" defended by Ferlinghetti's enclave. In fact, in "The Counterculture as Commons: The Ecology of Community in the Bay Area" (2012), Jeff Lustig elaborates on the influence of the North Beach countercultural community on the communes of the Sixties:

> The beatniks showed it was all a lie. When they opened up a liberated zone in San Francisco, they showed American youth it was possible—pundits, parents, and the Chamber of Commerce notwithstanding—to chuck the whole hunkered-down existence . . . . Those who migrated to the communes of California followed their lead. Spiritual descendants of Walt Whitman, they were seekers and wanderers . . . . The North Beach bohemians had set the example by ditching the rat race and deciding to live a full life *now,* today, not after the house was paid off or the career ended. They showed that dropping out was possible. (31-32)

In this examination of Lawrence Ferlinghetti's poetry, we have noticed the extensive presence of North Beach as a countercultural enclave within the spatial layout of San Francisco. North Beach is shown as a space surrounded by a city dominated by hegemonic financial and political elites and their aggressive spatial practices. Ferlinghetti's enclave, on the contrary, is a community determined to defend its identity of disaffiliation from the social and capitalistic values of the postwar United States. The author's poems describe a community besieged by the dominant culture, whose use of space attempts to absorb North Beach into the spatial dynamics of the city as at large. Ferlinghetti identifies in car culture and the moral decadence of the Catholic Church the two major threats to his community—for they imperil it through one of its most valuable treasures: space. His poetry can thus be defined as enclave-conscious, as it is fully aware of the vital importance of space and, moreover, shows a tenacious capacity

to question the authority coming from the outside (Plotkin 19). In contrast with the forces that hem in the enclave, Ferlinghetti disseminates throughout his poems an Edenic vision of North Beach as a countercultural stronghold that, descending from the Whitmanian tradition, proposes a romantic yet feasible alternative to the larger society.

1.2. BOB KAUFMAN AND THE PROBLEMATIC RACIALIZATION OF THE BEAT SOCIAL SPACE

We have examined in the previous chapter Lawrence Ferlinghetti's concern with the external forces that imperil the space of the North Beach countercultural enclave. However, the enclave was not an exclusive domain of the Beats and the beatnik subculture, for the neighborhood always retained a diverse social composition and, hence, varied sensibilities. The beatnik community concentrated around North Beach would be the result of the coalition of the district's Beat and beatnik residents with other sympathizers coming from different areas of the city and beyond. At an internal level, the social scene of the San Francisco Beats gravitated around certain specific gathering places within the North Beach enclave such as coffeehouses, restaurants, bars, and jazz clubs (Starr, "Individual Resistance" 42). Among them, the Co-Existence Bagel Shop, The Place, Vesuvio's, Caffè Trieste, Gino and Carlo's Bar, The Cellar, and the Coffee Gallery were the main spots where the beatniks would converge for poetry readings, jazz performances, or organized group discussions. Moreover, as Clinton R. Starr puts it, these places became "key institutions through which beatniks attained a sense of community and of shared values and assumptions. This community affinity stimulated the development of countercultural politics, daily forms of resistance against pervasive social norms, particularly heterosexuality and racial segregation" ("Individual Resistance" 42). Racial intermixing was precisely commonplace in San Francisco's beatnik scene. The archetypal beatniks—usually male and ethnically white—would welcome African-Americans eagerly in their social milieu as symbols against the racist

assumptions of American society in the 1950s, where white Anglo-Saxons had the cultural hegemony. For the beatniks, furthermore, the African-American—particularly males—was the epitome of disaffiliation at large from normative society. Discussing the postwar hipster subculture, which was the seed of the Beat social basis, Norman Mailer describes a "particular part of a generation [that] was attracted to what the Negro had to offer":

> The bohemian and the juvenile delinquent came face-to-face with the Negro, and the hipster was a fact in American life. . . . And in this wedding of the white and the black it was the Negro who brought the cultural dowry. Any Negro who wishes to live must live with danger from his first day . . . . The cameos of security for the average white: mother and the home, job and the family, are no even a mockery to millions of Negroes; they are impossible. The Negro has the simplest of alternatives: live a life of constant humility or ever-threatening danger. . . . So there was a new breed of adventurers, urban adventurers who drifted out at night looking for action with a black man's code to fit their facts. The hipster had absorbed the existential synapses of the Negro, and for practical purposes could be considered a white Negro. (586-87)

The primitivism and social disenfranchisement ascribed to the African-American would be essential to the beatniks' romanticization of this figure. This intense symbolism would turn problematic for the black beatniks, as their presence in the social scene of the North Beach counterculture became heavily fetishized. For the white beatniks, blackness would mutate into a commodity rather than a human condition whose background and complexity ever got to be fully understood by them. This racial maladjustment would lead to the often-overlooked alienation of the African-American within the social space of the Beat counterculture.

Even though systematic racial intermixing is present in a number of Beat texts,[24]

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[24] See Kerouac's novels *On the Road* (1957) and *The Subterraneans* (1958) for paradigmatic examples of

we find in Bob Kaufman's poetry a particular shrewdness in analyzing the politics of black alienation in the social sphere of the North Beach countercultural enclave. The son of a German-Jewish father and a Caribbean-American Catholic mother who also practiced Voodoo, Kaufman felt more at home than most on the racial, religious, and social fringes. Even within the Beat movement itself, he stands out as one of the very few black figures of reference—the other relevant African-Americans linked to the Beat Generation, albeit only to its New York scene, being LeRoi Jones (later to be known as Amiri Baraka) and Ted Joans. Among Kaufman's literary work, substantially influenced by surrealism and jazz rhythms, some of his poems provide a meticulous insight into the actual position of the African-American in the San Francisco counterculture in the Fifties. It is our intention in this chapter to explore in Kaufman's poetry how the black beatnik relates to the forces that dominate the San Francisco Beat social space from the inside.

Kaufman's San Francisco poems certainly present the emblematic Co-Existence Bagel Shop, among the several meeting places named above, as his favorite Beat den in North Beach. In fact, we find "den" appropriate as a term to refer to this gathering space, given the sense of secrecy implied in it. The San Francisco Beats and their beatnik entourage would keep a relatively low profile in terms of social stir. Unlike the Sixties counterculture, which would put the focus on the public space as an immediate way to reach the conscience of society, the Beats were more concentrated on a community where to lead a life disengaged from the cultural, racial, and sexual constraints of normative society. In other words, the Beats, more individualistic than their countercultural heirs, did not intend primarily to change society. Within the North Beach enclave, spaces like the Co-Existence Bagel Shop were especially suitable for

the Beat Generation's romanticization of blackness.

them. While effectively *public*, these walled spaces remained largely hidden from the larger society. Kaufman's use of the Co-Existence Bagel Shop shows that it had everything the beatniks could expect from a Fifties countercultural den. As Maria Damon describes it, "it is interracial, it is hip, it is emancipated from the tedium of the workplace and its schedules" (144). Its location, on upper Grant Avenue, where North Beach and Chinatown overlap, played with the intersection of counterculture and race on the San Francisco map. Its name, in addition, was ironically irreverent. Former Poet Laureate of the United States Robert Hass highlights that "the idea of the bagel, because it was Jewish, seemed vaguely incendiary, as did the idea of co-existence" (qtd. in Berman "Bagel Shop"). Superposing a Jewish concept on an area of such an intense Italian identity is suggestive of a teasing nonsense typical of the Beat counterculture (Berman "Bagel Shop"). But the most striking irony lies in the fact that, as Judy Berman underscores, the Co-Existence Bagel Shop reportedly never served bagels ("Bagel Shop"). Halfway between a Jewish deli and a coffeehouse, we can see that the essence of the Bagel Shop was subversive by nature. For the North Beach countercultural community, it embodied the practice of what Starr defines as "making the scene":

> When bohemians spoke of "making the scene," they meant above all else hanging out in a café, restaurant or bar, one of the "drink-and-think shops" that provided stimulating conversation and a broad range of artistic, literary and musical performances. Eileen Kaufman, wife of Bob Kaufman, recalled that "spontaneity was the key word in our life style [sic] in North Beach. This is what made it 'the scene,' for one never knew in advance just who might show [up] to read a poem, dance, play some jazz, or put on a complete play." (*Bohemian Resonance* 192)

Its spontaneous and bohemian atmosphere, along with the consistent presence of jazz and discussion of high culture turned the Bagel Shop into a quintessential Beat den—

that is, a small-scale representation of the countercultural social space. So much so that painter Arthur Monroe recalls the Bagel Shop as "the capital of North Beach . . . . Here the elite of the Beat munched on sandwiches and ideas...drank of poetry and beer...played chess and took on and were taken on by the police. This was the scene" ("The Decade of Bebop").

Jazz was ubiquitous in the social sphere of the San Francisco counterculture during the Fifties. While the primary black neighborhood of the city was already the Fillmore District, which housed some of the most prominent jazz clubs in San Francisco, by the early 1950s jazz and many African-Americans had joined the North Beach public scene to become an essential part of it. The North Beach countercultural community became fascinated with the uninhibited energy of the moment, improvisation, and primitivism associated to jazz. To put it shortly, jazz would mean to the beatniks the most authentic expression of the self amidst a time when they saw the individual subsumed in the numbing homogeneity of American society. Poetry and jazz would become closely knit in the North Beach social scene, as Kaufman describes in "West Coast Sounds – 1956":

> San Fran, hipster land,
> Jazz sounds, wig sounds,
> . . . .
> Rexroth, Ferlinghetti,
> Swinging, in cellars,
> . . . .
> San Franers, falling down. (*Solitudes* 11)

Kenneth Rexroth had popularized public poetry readings to jazz accompaniment in post-World War II North Beach and Lawrence Ferlinghetti would follow that practice

closely deep into the 1950s. Kaufman depicts them "swinging," that is, reading poetry to the rhythm of jazz in "cellars," which is a pun suggestive both of the relative secrecy surrounding the beatnik dens, hidden from any interference from mainstream society, and of the Beat meeting spot The Cellar, which used to host regular readings by Rexroth and Ferlinghetti. More than artistic, the weight of jazz in North Beach, though, was racial. The key to understand this importance is given by Mailer in "The White Negro":

> In his music [the African-American] gave voice to the character and quality of his existence, to his rage and the infinite variations of joy, lust, languor, growl, cramp, pinch, scream and despair of his orgasm. For jazz is orgasm, it is the music of orgasm, good orgasm and bad, and so it spoke across a nation, it had the communication of art even where it was watered, perverted, corrupted, and almost killed, it spoke in no matter what laundered popular way of instantaneous existential states to which some whites could respond, it was indeed a communication by art because it said, " I feel this, and now you do too." (586)

The white beatniks, disenchanted with the social limitations of normative American society, would easily relate to the primitive sensations transmitted by jazz. They would make the connection between an essentially black musical style and and the perception of the African-American as a symbol of wild energy repressed through centuries of slavery, segregation, and institutional racism. The incorporation of jazz and black hipsters to the Beat den, however, would involve a racialization of that social space that exposed the tensions inherent to the racial politics of the North Beach Beat community.

In its comprehensive snapshot of the beatnik social milieu at the Co-Existence Bagel Shop, Kaufman's poem "Bagel Shop Jazz" identifies his fellow African-Americans as

> Coffee-faced Ivy Leaguers, in Cambridge jackets,
>
> Whose personal Harvard was a Fillmore district step,
>
> Weighted with conga drums,
>
> The ancestral cross, the Othello-laid curse,
>
> Talking of Bird and Diz and Miles,
>
> The secret terrible hurts,
>
> Wrapped in cool hipster smiles (*Cranial Guitar* 107-08)

Kaufman describes these black regulars of the Bagel Shop primarily as more streetwise than their white counterparts. Unlike the latter, the Bagel Shop African-Americans have learned through the hardships of black life. Kaufman equals one single step on the Fillmore district to first-class education at an Ivy League institution. The privation and suffering endured by African-Americans, according to the author, give them an edge over the white beatniks in terms of perspicacity. Under their hip mask, they are fully aware of who they are, where they come from, and the historical weight of their skin color. In contrast with them, Kaufman presents the Bagel Shop white beatniks as

> Turtle-neck angel guys, black-haired dungaree guys,
>
> Caesar-jawed, with synagogue eyes,
>
> World travelers on the forty-one bus,
>
> Mixing jazz with paint talk,
>
> High rent, Bartok, classical murders,
>
> The pot shortage and last night's bust.
>
> Lost in a dream world (*Cranial Guitar* 107)

The author emphasizes how the stereotypical white beatniks, generally of white and middle-class background, live "lost in a dream world" that has little to do with "the secret terrible hurts" of their black counterparts. The poem shows them concerned with "high rent"—which is just an unreachable privilege for the black beatnik—and the

shortage of marijuana, an objectively unnecessary commodity. They also express interest in high culture (painting and Béla Bartók's musical compositions), probably due to the college education they had access to—unlike the average African-American, barred from colleges either by educational segregation or by plain lack of financial resources. Yet the white beatniks' most noteworthy trait given here by Kaufman is ethnicity. The author describes them as "black-haired" and "Caesar-jawed, with synagogue eyes," which hints at people of Mediterranean and Jewish descent (Damon 141). Kaufman seems to be aware of a preexisting racial tension underlying the interaction between black and white beatniks—many of the latter of which had, indeed, Jewish or Italian ethnic background. As Damon points out, "both Jews and Italians had to work to establish their whiteness on first arriving in the United States, and they did so by distinguishing themselves from—that is, repudiating their possible alliances with—African-Americans" (141). We can conclude from this fact that the coalition of white and black beatniks departs from a strained—even if not consciously acknowledged—relationship from the racial point of view.

This is the starting point of "Bagel Shop Jazz," where desire plays a central role in the white beatniks' incorporation of blackness to their social scene. In this sense, Damon asseverates that "the white ethnics envy what they perceive as their Black comrades' authenticity and soulfulness without specific knowledge of the "secret terrible hurts" that have shaped these outsider subjectivities, and which they themselves can only intuit; likewise they covet their groundedness and hipness" (141). Behind the white beatniks' alliance with the black hipsters we can observe a mindless, and even reckless, perspective of the history of oppression that defines the African-American identity. The characteristics ascribed to the black beatniks are generic and stereotypical

—that is to say, a slanted vision of blackness widespread among the white beatniks. This vision would be particularly exacerbated by the presence of women in the North Beach social realm. In such a tremendously male-centered environment as the Beat scene, women would remain set aside in literary and spatial terms as a mere part of the Beat entourage. Still, they would retain a great conductive power as indispensable mediators for the white beatniks' desire towards blackness (Damon 141). In "Bagel Shop Jazz," Kaufman portrays them as

> Mulberry-eyed girls in black stockings,
> Smelling vaguely of mint jelly and last night's bongo
>   drummer,
> Making profound remarks on the shapes of navels,
> Wondering how the short Sunset week
> Became the long Grant Avenue night,
> Love tinted, beat angels (*Cranial Guitar* 107)

Kaufman's presumably white female beatniks lead a middle-class life during "the short Sunset week,"[25] yet choose the liberating atmosphere of North Beach ("the long Grant Avenue night") to cap their week outside the norm. Their presence in the social space of the counterculture is relevant to our analysis in that it would arouse competition between white and black beatniks. Starr notes that interracial sexual intercourse between white women and African-American men was a frequent reality in the beatnik subculture ("Individual Resistance" 48). This competition makes the white beatnik fear

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[25] This is a reference to the Sunset District. Located in the west-central area of San Francisco, it was originally developed as a suburb within the city in the 1930s. By the 1950s, it had already earned a reputation as a middle class district with a large Irish-American population. Lorri Ungaretti describes the essentially suburban character of the Sunset as he explains, "There is a sameness of the central Sunset, block after block of quiet streets where the houses look all the same" (qtd. in Weinstein, "Brightening the Sunset"). This character would inspire Malvina Reynolds's 1962 satirical song "Little Boxes," which takes aim at the phenomenon of suburbia—already treated in chapter 1.1 of this dissertation—and its associated conformist middle-class attitudes.

and, concurrently, desire the sexuality of the African-American. As Damon comments,

> Beat discourse (especially by white male Beats) about Black men is generally characterized by an admiring, hyperbolic description of hetero-machismo or preternatural musical talent. Often this rhetoric includes envious anecdotes about how much easier it was for Black men to pick up cute chicks than it was for the writer. Black men, in these accounts, are either saintly musicians or hustlers on the prowl. (148-49)

White desire for blackness is channeled through jazz music. The result, however, is the appropriation of such a powerful African-American symbol by the white beatniks. In "San Francisco Beat," Kaufman attacks the "imitation Negroes" (*Solitudes* 31) that appropriate black ways of artistic expression in order to racialize their social space without even bothering to understand the historical memory of African-Americans. In another description of the Beat social scene of San Francisco, Kaufman's "Why Write About" identifies "SICK MIDDLE CLASS CHICKS, / NYMPHO, CACAUSOIDS, EATING SYMBOLS, / LITTLE OLD BOYS, IN MONDAY BEARDS" (*Cranial Guitar* 77, capitals in original). We interpret the use of the misspelled term "Cacausoids" far from its scientific meaning; instead, we find an allusion to the white beatniks, who "eat" the symbols of blackness, like jazz, in order to hybridize their white identity with African-American traits that help them position themselves before the normative white-centered society as a counterculture—thus making them, as Kaufman deems them, "Caucasoids," or false Caucasians that forcibly introduce blackness into their identity.

Our review of Kaufman's literary treatment of the social space of the Fifties counterculture leads us to conclude that the black beatniks that are eagerly welcome in the Beat social scene reveal themselves as instruments used by the white beatniks to

racialize their social space. The black hipsters, similarly to the jazz accompaniment performed for the poetry reading, are merely part of the entourage surrounding the strongly male- and white-centered Beat scene. In the same way as Beat poetry still remains poetry without its jazz accompaniment, the white Beat scene would have remained so without the black beatniks. The incorporation of the African-American can be read as a *mise-en-scène* that addresses the white beatniks' need to racialize their social space in order to strengthen their dissenting identity. This racialization is driven by an ignorant desire for stereotypical features ascribed to African-Americans. The outcome presented by Kaufman is the white beatnik's appropriation of the African-American's cultural symbols and burden of oppression, while failing to acknowledge the black historical memory. It is our point that this politics of the social space guided by racial desire is one of the biggest missteps of the San Francisco beatnik community, for it, after all, only further reinscribes the racist practices present in the United States that the counterculture so intensely rebuked. As Kaufman exposes, this failure represents a waste of the power of the Beat social space and, still more, a crucial undermining of the message of racial integrationism sent by the counterculture to the larger society.

1.3. PLACELESSNESS AND THE HOBO:

JACK KEROUAC IN THE SAN FRANCISCO SKID ROW

One of the most genuine hallmarks of the Beat counterculture is its admiration for—and association with—the social characters placed on the fringes of normative culture. At the core of the Beat social base, the hipster—usually of white and middle class background, as we have noted in the previous chapter—would choose to flirt with the urban underground scene in an attempt to subvert the social, racial, and sexual assumptions they were expected to comply with. In her essay "Born 1930: The Unlost Generation" (1957), Caroline Bird gives a definition of the 1950s hipster:

> The hipster is an *enfant terrible* turned inside out. In character with his time, he is trying to get back at the conformists by lying low. . . . He takes marijuana because it supplies him with experiences that can't be shared with "squares." . . . He may earn his living as a petty criminal, a hobo, a carnival roustabout or a free-lance moving man . . . . As the only extreme nonconformist of his generation, he exercises a powerful if underground appeal for conformists, through newspaper accounts of his delinquencies, his structureless jazz, and his emotive grunt words. (qtd. in Mailer 582-83)

The aim of the hipster, therefore, is to get rid of every single trace of the "square" way of life—that is, that which is confined to the normative limits set by the American society of the time. These limits are referenced by Japhy Ryder, protagonist of Jack Kerouac's novel *The Dharma Bums* (1958) and literary *alter ego* of the Beat author Gary Snyder, as he abjures

the general demand that they consume production and therefore have to work for the privilege of consuming, all that crap they didn't really want anyway such as refrigerators, TV sets, cars, at least new fancy cars, certain hair oils and deodorants and general junk you finally always see a week later in the garbage anyway, all of them imprisoned in a system of work, produce, consume, work, produce, consume. (*Dharma Bums* 73)

This is Kerouac's take on the contemporary American Way of Life—a sort of "jail" where the individual is imprisoned within a restrictive frame based solely on perceivable achievement and conspicuous consumption. He sees this frame as intended to pursue, in Lawrence Ferlinghetti's words in his poem "In Goya's Greatest Scenes We Seem to See" (1958), "imbecile illusions of happiness" (*Coney Island* 9)—a distorted version of the concept of individual fulfillment and happiness engraved in the American consciousness ever since the Declaration of Independence.[26] It is those illusions which give sense to the American Dream the way it is understood in postwar American society. To Kerouac, as to the rest of the Beats, the several disposable goods mentioned above by Ryder—among many others—are empty emblems that do not honor the essence of the American Dream.

In Kerouac's literature, the marginal characters the hipster seeks to resemble are called *fellaheen*.[27] This term, according to Robert Holton, is used by Kerouac to encompass "all those peoples—in North America and throughout the world—who appeared to him to be culturally situated outside the structures and categories, the desires and frustrations, of modernity" (267-68). In an American context, those who

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[26] The Declaration of Independence of the United States (1776) puts great emphasis on the inalienable rights that, according to the Founding Fathers, were bestowed by God upon humankind: "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" ("Declaration of Independence: A Transcription").

[27] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *fellaheen* is the plural form of the Arabic term *fellah*, meaning "a peasant in Arabic-speaking countries." Etimologically, *fellah* comes from *fellāḥ*, Arabic for "husbandman," and *falaḥa*, Arabic for "to till the soul" ("fellah, *n*."). It seems clear that Kerouac plays with the parallelism between the underprivileged position of the peasant, or *fellah*, and that of the marginal characters he refers to with this term.

drift outside the limits of intelligibility of the dominant ideology—those who violate the essential sameness it imposes (Adorno and Horkheimer 117)—are what Kerouac deems the *fellaheen*. For the author, from a spatial approach, these are frequently the homeless, or, the *placeless*—that is, the individuals who lack a deep rooting in a given space and, simultaneously, are denied a place in the larger society. In this chapter, we shall study the impact that placelessness in the San Francisco urban space has on Kerouac's literature.

In *Place: A Short Introduction* (2004), spatial theorist Tim Cresswell draws upon humanistic geographers Yi-Fu Tuan's and Edward Relph's work[28] to set the difference between space and place. According to Cresswell, places are "spaces which people have made meaningful. They are all spaces people are attached to in one way or another" (7). In short, as Tuan contends, spaces are open arenas that favor movement and action, yet have no social implications for the human being. Places, on the contrary, are social constructs in space shaped by human experience (54). Tuan's views on space and place share a common thread with other spatial theorists like Michel de Certeau. The French scholar, however, bewilderingly uses both terms just the other way around: whereas he describes place as an empty physical layout, space is the result of human practice over that place. "Space is a practiced place," asseverates Certeau (117).[29] Regardless the signifiers used, the signifieds are clearly defined. Human experience—or practice—gives way to the attachment to a certain location and prompts its own meaningfulness.

The sense of place has a great enemy in mobility—or movement, for that matter. The absence of attachment to a particular location caused by regular geographical

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[28] For further reading on the notion of place, see Relph's *Place and Placelessness* (1976) and Tuan's *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977).

[29] For the sake of clarity and coherence, where Certeau is quoted indirectly in this dissertation, we shall use the notions of "space" and "place" with the meaning that Cresswell, Tuan, and Relph—and, in short, a vast majority of human geographers and spatial theorists—give them.

movement makes that location something temporary and ephemeral—in other words, a non-place determined by transiency (Cresswell 44-45, Augé 110). The resulting failure to connect with the world through place is defined by Relph as "existential outsideness." While "to be inside a place is to belong to it and identify with it, and the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is the identity with the place,"

> Existential outsideness involves a selfconscious and reflective uninvolvement, an alienation from people and places, homelessness, a sense of the unreality of the world, and of not belonging. From such a perspective places cannot be significant centres of existence, but are at best backgrounds to activities that are without sense, mere chimeras, and at worst are voids. (49, 51)

In the Beat universe, outsideness is frequently present. And, following Relph's theory, the Beats' thirst for frantic movement is definitely central to their outsideness. Taking Kerouac's novel *On the Road* (1957) as a paradigmatic example of this, the Beats see movement as a natural expression of the individual. Even at the cost of the feeling of place, the unleashing—in whatever form—of the authenticity of the self prevails.

Allen Ginsberg's poetics, which favors the long line meant to determine the reader's breathing, or Michael McClure's organic poetry, which reflects the verbal impulses of the author's body's thought, represent the Beat tendency to rely largely on individual subjectivity.[30] Kerouac parallels the literary style of these authors—central figures of the San Francisco Beat scene and contemporaneous to him themselves. In his brief essay "Essentials on Spontaneous Prose" (1958), Kerouac defines the foundations of his language and style:

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[30] For further reading on Ginsberg's poetics, see *On the Poetry of Allen Ginsberg*, edited by Lewis Hyde (U of Michigan P, 1984). For further reading on McClure's poetics, see Stan Brakhage's "Chicago Review Article" (*Chicago Review*, vol. 47/48, no. 1/4, 2001/2002, pp. 38-41).

METHOD   No periods separating sentence-structure already arbitrarily riddled by false colons and timid usually needless commas—but the vigorous space dash separating rhetorical breathing . . .

TIMING   Nothing is muddy that *runs in time* and to laws of time—Shakespearian stress of dramatic need to speak now in own unalterable way or forever hold tongue—*no revisions* (except obvious rational mistakes . . .)

MENTAL STATE   If possible write "without consciousness" in semitrance (as Yeats' later "trance writing") allowing the subconscious to admit in own uninhibited interesting necessary and so "modern" language what conscious art would censor. ("Essentials" 531-32)

His literary style certainly searches for the most elementary stratum of the self. The result is a text that reflects, both in form and content, a philosophy of prevalence of the individual and the subjective over collective norms and constrictions.[31] Kerouac's fascination with marginality stems from the radical individualism advocated by the Fifties counterculture. For the author, in the social composition of San Francisco, this philosophy materialized in the figure of the transient, placeless worker: the hobo.[32] [33]

In Kerouac's reclaiming the American individualistic ethos, the hobo is central

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[31] Kerouac's writing style has perhaps its most prominent and enduring peer-promoted tribute to date in the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, founded by Anne Waldman and Allen Ginsberg at Naropa University in 1974. Inspired by Kerouac's legacy, the School focuses on academic programs on creative writing. For further reading, see *Talking Poetics from Naropa Institute: Annals of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, Volume One* (Shambhala, 1978) and *Talking Poetics from Naropa Institute: Annals of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, Volume Two* (Shambhala, 1979), both of them edited by Anne Waldman and Marilyn Webb.

[32] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term "hobo" emerged in the Western United States and is documented to be first used in 1889 ("hobo, *n.*"). Its etymology, however, remains unclear, leading to numerous conjectures that try to establish its origin. A discussion on the possible etymology of this term can be found in Anatoly Liberman's "On Hobos, Hautboys, and Other Beaus" (*OUPblog*, 12 Nov. 2008, blog.oup.com/2008/11/hobo/. Accessed 10 Feb. 2017).

[33] A critical reading of Kerouac in terms of marginality shows other characters on the fringes of the social norm that the author also celebrates: African-Americans, prostitutes, tramps, bums, winos. For focus purposes, however, the essential characteristics inherent to the hobo make him of particular interest from our spatial approach to Kerouac in terms of place and placelessness.

among all the fringe characters. In Nels Anderson's view, "the hobo was American in the same sense the cowboy was. The cowboy emerged in the frontier history for the same reason the hobo did; there was a labor market need for him. The cowboy was a hobo type" (xiv). Kerouac's allusions to the lone migrating man who fends for himself in constant movement paying no mind to collective constrictions—a figure that remains fundamental in the American imagination—are recurrent in his literature.[34] Although not so comfortable aesthetically for the larger society in his condition as a homeless man, the hobo preserves the traits of Americanness found in the cowboy. In addition, he stands out among his fellow homeless skid rowers[35] as a productive figure in terms of labor. Ben L. Reitman makes a clear distinction between three types of vagrants the larger community would easily confuse: "There are three types of the genus vagrant: the hobo, the tramp, and the bum. The hobo works and wanders, the tramp dreams and wanders and the bum drinks and wanders" (qtd. in N. Anderson 87). However productive he can be indeed, the hobo carries a heavy stigma before normative society: his homelessness, that is, his lack of place. Insomuch as home remains a category that defines normality in an idealized view revolving around the heterosexual family, the hobos' disconnection from the most basic forms of place has been perceived traditionally as a threat to the established standards of family, order, safety, and property. The hobo's mobility, an instrumental factor in his placelessness, makes him unpredictable, which furthers social distrust towards him (Cresswell 109, 111, 112, 116,

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[34] The ultimate example of which is Kerouac's longtime friend and fellow Beat Neal Cassady, who is thoroughly described as a sort of mid-century cowboy in the form of his literary *alter egos* Dean Moriarty in *On the Road* and Cody Pomeroy in *Visions of Cody* (1972). For a deeper analysis of Cassady as a countercultural icon, see chapter 3.3, "The Kesey-Leary Dichotomy: Shaping a Distinctive West Coast Psychedelic Counterculture."

[35] The term *skid row* is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "any run-down area of a town where the unemployed, vagrant, alcoholics, etc., tend to congregate" ("skid row, *n*.," def. a). According to this dictionary, this term derives directly from "skid road," a term used chiefly in North America since the late 19th century to refer to "a downtown area frequented by loggers" ("skid road *n*.," def. b).

117). The same society that scorns the placeless, however, takes care of compartmentalizing them within the urban space. The spatiality of the skid row is the result of the strategic effort of the hegemonic class, with the cooperation of the larger society, to reconstruct the city according to the dominant financial, political, and social values (Lefebvre 375, Cresswell 113).

The space where the hobo community clusters in Kerouac's San Francisco is the South of Market district—also known as SoMa. Its major thoroughfare, Third Street, is referred to by Leo Percepied, the narrator of *The Subterraneans*, as "wild Third Street" as Mardou Fox—the African-American woman who is the object of his desire in the novel—is described wandering about it "among the lines of slugging winos and the bloody drunken Indians with bandages rolling out of alleys and the 10 cent movie house with three features and little children of skid row hotels running on the sidewalk and the pawnshops and the Negro chickenshack jukeboxes" (*The Subterraneans* 30). The gentrification this neighborhood has undergone in recent decades should not mislead us: in the early 1950s, South of Market still "had a substantial concentration of homeless, drug-addicted, or alcoholic street people" (Rubin 250). Kerouac's short story "October in the Railroad Earth"[36] (1957) begins drawing the attention to the social contrast taking place South of Market between its marginal individuals and those the Beats see as "squares":

> THERE WAS A LITTLE ALLEY IN SAN FRANCISCO back of the Southern Pacific station at Third and Townsend in redbrick of drowsy lazy afternoons with everybody at work in offices in the air you feel the impending rush of their commuter frenzy as soon

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[36] The title itself is a reference to the hobo. Hobos are closely linked to the American railroad imaginary of the 20th century, for they used the railroad network, as freight hoppers, as their most common means of transportation—and the most useful to their itinerant life style. As a curiosity, Kerouac himself would engage in migrant labor for a time in the early 1950s.

they'll be charging en masse from Market and Sansome buildings on foot and in buses and all well-dressed thru workingman Frisco of Walkup ?? truck drivers and even the poor grime-bemarked Third Street of lost bums even Negroes so hopeless and long left East and meanings of responsibility and try that now all they do is stand there spitting in the broken glass sometimes fifty in one afternoon against one wall at Third and Howard and here's all these Millbrae and San Carlos neat-necktied producers and commuters of America and Steel civilization rushing by . . . not even though time to be disdainful, they've got to catch 130, 132, 134, 136 all the way up to 146 till the time of evening supper in homes of the railroad earth ("Railroad Earth" 119)

Kerouac pictures a typical scene South of Market in the 1950s. The author opposes the disenfranchised Americans that inhabit it to the corporate workers that rush through it on their way to the train that will return them to their suburban lives. This description emphasizes the abrupt social gap between those outside the American Way of Life —"lost bums even Negroes so hopeless"—and those who work for the machinery of the corporate United States—the "neat-necktied producers and commuters of America." The comparison of both stereotypes, at a larger scale, points at the fracture of the social homogeneity so heartily pursued in the mid-century United States. In this pursuit, according to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's point of view, "[i]ndividuals are tolerated only as far as their wholehearted identity with the universal is beyond question. . . . [P]seudoindividuality reigns. The individual trait is reduced to the ability of the universal so completely to mold the accidental that it can be recognized as accidental" (124-25). As Kerouac highlights, the imposed universalization results in the tendency of those on the normative side of society to reject and even vilify the individuals who break uniformity. The author proves sympathetic to the marginality that pervades the South of Market neighborhood, thus making it a symbol of his stance against the larger community. It is also reasonable to find irony in Kerouac's words. Are

the "neat-necktied" workers of the corporate United States the only ones who *produce*? Definitely they are not. The author appears to jibe the "square" notion of objective achievement that grants greater social recognition to white-collar work—as a totem of middle-class *perceived* success—over other kinds of labor.

Placelessness, however, was not new to SoMa in postwar San Francisco. After the 1906 earthquake, the swift rebuilding of the city that followed led to a great influx of both skilled and unskilled workers from all over the country. This prompted the restoration of South of Market as a homeless single men's quarter, where residential hotels flourished anew because of the resulting great lodging demand. As Averbach notes, "fifty-eight hotels and eighty lodging houses had been built by 1907 alone, the largest numbers being found along Third, Howard, and Folsom streets. Their greatest overall concentration was between First and Sixth, Market and Bryant streets" (204). SoMa would keep attracting homeless migratory workers during the following decades. The district thus became San Francisco's hobohemia,[37] home to the hobos' main institutions:

> The hotels and lodging houses whose proprietors acted as bankers so that men spending their regular off-seasons in San Francisco had safekeeping for their money and would not spend it on a single spree; saloons which fed their patrons smorgasbord "free lunches" for ten or fifteen cents and sometimes doubled as informal employment agencies; and pawnshops on Third, lower Market, and the Embarcadero where a hobo might put up a tool or some clothing to pay for food, drink, or shelter when he could not stretch his winter's "stake" far enough. (Averbach 204-05)

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[37] Hobohemia, currently a term seldom used, refers to a low-rent urban district where hobos and some artistic bohemians mix. "Hobohemia," as Nels Anderson defines it, "was the great labor market where the hobo spent or lost his earnings and started again on the road. There he was met by the horde waiting for a 'live one': moochers and hangers-on who borrowed or begged, gamblers and tricksters, procurers who had prostitutes 'working' for them, and a variety of 'jack rollers,' who lived by robbing" (xvi).

Until the redevelopment of the neighborhood in the 1970s, life in the San Francisco hobohemia revolted around two main epicenters of activity. One ran up Third Street, where men gathered to gamble at cards. The other one was the core of the city's skid row—Howard Street's stretch between Third and Fourth streets. Here, men spent their time out on the street, looking at the blackboards advertising work, drinking, and pitching pennies on the sidewalk (Averbach 203). This section of SoMa was known among the hobo community as the "slave market." The nickname stems from the abusive practices of the employment agencies located along this block, which took advantage of the hobos' underprivileged position by charging substantial fees in exchange for precarious employment (Averbach 206). As Averbach notes, "the semi-transient community South of Market was founded on blatant exploitation, and it understood its position as such" (209). Hobos, however, failed to organize themselves in unions. Instead, they would deal with this situation by reinforcing their individual selfhood. Samuel Wallace remarks that, "if employers were going to exploit [the hobo], he would do as little work as possible. If a decent wage was to be denied the homeless man, he would seek other satisfactions. Pride or skill in one's work counted for little. Instead, one proved himself in drink, travel, and experience" (80-81). This underlying individualistic bent is something Kerouac identified himself with particularly.

Of all of the hobos' informal institutions mentioned above, dining saloons stand out in "October in the Railroad Earth" as spaces for Kerouac's assimilation in the South of Market marginal community. During the first half of the twentieth century, affordable eateries crowded the San Francisco skid row in response to the predominance of low-income migratory workers in the district. As Kerouac recalls,

> DESPITE THE FACT I WAS A BRAKE MAN making 600 a month I kept going to the
> Public restaurant on Howard Street which was three eggs for 26 cents 2 eggs for 21 with
> this toast (hardly no butter) coffee (hardly no coffee and sugar rationed) oatmeal with
> dash of milk and sugar . . . . Public Hair restaurant where I ate many's the morn a 3-egg
> breakfast with almost dry toast and oatmeal a little saucer of, and thin sickly dishwater
> coffee, all to save 14 cents so in my little book proudly I could make a notation and of
> the day and prove that I could live comfortably in America while working seven days a
> week and earning 600 a month I could live on less than 17 a week which with my rent
> of 4.20 was okay ("Railroad Earth" 122-23)

He admits that, despite earning a more than decent salary,[38] he enjoyed mingling with

the hobo community in public restaurants. That is, even though he could afford a more

mainstream place to eat, he opted for public restaurants where the South of Market

hobos got their inexpensive meals in much more precarious conditions.

Another symbol of Kerouac's association with the San Francisco hobos'

institutions are the residential hotels—also known as single room occupancy hotels—

that inundated the neighborhood at the time. This sort of lodging houses offered

affordable rent housing—to the detriment of roominess and amenities—specifically

intended for low-wage workers, seasonal transient laborers, and recent immigrants

(Groth 133-37). In "October in the Railroad Earth," Kerouac rejoices in his experience

as another skid row hotel guest:

> And there's my room, small, gray in the Sunday morning, now all the franticness of the
> street and night before is done with, bums sleep, maybe one or two sprawled on
> sidewalk with empty poorboy on a sill—my mind whirls with life. . . . There I am in my
> little room . . . . It's so thrilling to feel the coldness of the morning wrap around my
> thickquilt blankets as I lay there, watch facing and ticking me, legs spread in comfy

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[38] According to the San Francisco Bay Area census data, the median income of a family in San Francisco in 1949 was $3,923, whereas in 1959 it increased up to $6,717 ("San Francisco City and County. Decennial Census Data 1950-1960").

skidrow soft sheets with soft tears or sew lines in 'em, huddled in my own skin and rich and not spending a cent on ("Railroad Earth" 126-27)

Ray Smith reproduces this pattern of association with hobo-oriented institutions in *The Dharma Bums*, where he recounts, "We went into San Francisco . . . and then went up to Skid Row in a drizzling rain to get cheap haircuts at the barber college and pook around Salvation Army and Goodwill stores in search of long underwear and stuff" (*Dharma Bums* 144). But it is perhaps in *San Francisco Blues* (1991) where we can observe the potential that the residential hotel has for Kerouac as epicenter of and gateway to the skid row life. The residential hotel grants the author a privileged insight into the daily life of an urban space taken over by squalor and marginality. One of the things Kerouac shows fascination with is the unleashing of the lowest human passions and habits. The sordid activity of prostitutes in his surroundings captures his attention in the 15th chorus:

> Sex is an automaton
> Sounding like a machine
> Thru the stopped up keyhole
> —Young men go fastern
>   Old men
>   Old men are passionately
>   breathless
> Young men breathe inwardly
> Young women & old women
> Wait
>
> There was a sound of slapping
> When the angel stole come
> And the angel that had lost

Lay back satisfied (*Book of Blues* 16)

Even the author's passions can be noticed as his role as observer and narrator turns into a sort of blind voyeurism. Alcoholism joins prostitution in Kerouac's romanticization of SoMa. In "October in the Railroad Earth," he pays tribute to

> winos with no money, who found 21 cents left over from wine panhandlings and so stumbled in for their third or fourth touch of food in a week, as sometimes they didn't eat at all and so you'd see them in the corner puking white liquid which was a couple quarts of rancid sauterne rotgut or sweet white sherry and they had nothing on their stomachs, most of them had one leg or were on crutches and had bandages around their feet, from nicotine and alcohol poisoning together ("Railroad Earth" 122-23)

Street alcoholics (winos) and prostitutes are totally antagonistic to the values imposed by normative society. The former challenge the sense of public decency that advises to avoid—or, perhaps, conceal—alcoholism. Plus, once this habit turns into mental disorder, it becomes an abject deformity that has no place in normative society. Prostitutes, for their part, are seen as immoral social characters *per se*, for they represent both hypersexuality and the commercialization of the human body. We can notice in these excerpts the author's willingness to melt into the city's skid row. This behavior is to be read as a reaction against the normative and consumption-ridden suburban life promoted by the official American society.

Getting back to the hobos, a consequence of their social isolation would be their inability to command respect from the larger community. As Averbach puts it,

> The face they presented to other segments of the urban population was not that of a roving, exploited proletariat following seasonal work at sea or in the California and

western hinterlands and constantly forced to move in search of new, poorly-paid work. Rather, when the community at large encountered the single, unattached workers who made up the "homeless," hotel-residing population, they saw them between jobs as they tried to live on whatever money they had been able to make the previous season. (206-07)

Hobos South of Market were rejected by mainstream society and vilified as winos, misfits, and failures—in short, elements connected to the underworld (Walker 6, Averbach 211). Wallace points out that "whether the skid rower was truly vagrant, or simply an unemployed migratory or casual laborer made little or no difference to the community at large; neither worked much while living on skid row, neither had family or resources" (80-81). The rejection results in the marginalization of those who do not comply with the patterns imposed by the society. The Establishment of these patterns involves, in Adorno and Horkheimer's words, that "anyone who does not conform is condemned to an economic impotence which is prolonged in the intellectual powerlessness of the eccentric loner. Disconnected from the mainstream, he is easily convicted of inadequacy" (106). This is the case of the hobo, who would be affected, additionally, by what Gowan calls "the aestheticization of homelessness, a shift in focus from the problems of the homeless to the problems caused by homeless people—chiefly, the aesthetic or economic problems created by homeless people panhandling or otherwise occupying public space rendering it ugly or disorderly" (52). Kerouac reclaims this reality as he vindicates the homeless who are confined to a space at the service of a hegemonic class (Lefebvre, *Production of Space* 375) that forces them out of society because of their not sharing the values and anxieties of the wider community.

From a spatial perspective, placelessness is a crucial theme in Jack Kerouac's San Francisco texts. Disappointed with a society that had become conformist, self-

complacent, and untrue to the real values of the American identity, the author finds in the hobo—with his radically individualistic and transient nature—a marginal symbol of a generation that, represented by the Beat movement in the artistic field, sought a more authentic way to live the individual experience. Just like the hobo cannot connect with the world through a feeling of place—that is, through attachment to a particular space, — Kerouac also finds himself placeless in the 1950s mainstream American society. The San Francisco skid row, a space made of and for placelessness, becomes his ultimate escape from the "square" way of life, perhaps because the city, as Ann Garrison notes, "is the end point of the country's westward movement . . . . There's no place left to go once you've chased your dream all the way to the Pacific, so if you're still depressed or anxious, or if you feel like you've failed, it may seem like the time and place to give up" (118). South of Market, the symbolic end of the end of the United States in social and geographical terms—that is, what is left at the other side of the last frontier—during Kerouac's time in San Francisco, is certainly the right space for the author's generation to disengage from the official American socio-cultural complex.

1.4. A TRANS-PACIFIC HETEROTOPIA:

BEAT ORIENTALISM FROM KENNETH REXROTH

TO GARY SNYDER AND PHILIP WHALEN

As we have already observed in chapter 1.1, San Francisco has favored over the years the cultivation of its uniqueness in relation to the rest of the country. But not only is the resulting isolation geographical, social, and cultural; it also has an impact on spirituality. The great flow of external influence received by the city since its foundation —coming mainly from Asia-Pacific, Southern Europe, and Latin America—has been instrumental to the formation of its heterogeneous spiritual composition. This diversity has prevented the marginalization of alternative religions by the dominant Christian denominations. The San Francisco Beats, in their unceasing quest for new spiritual frontiers that could make up for the shortcomings they saw in Christianity, capitalized greatly on the easy access to Eastern philosophy and religion in the Bay Area. Zen Buddhism became the main spiritual source among the Beats, leaving a huge mark on their literary production. We find it pertinent, therefore, to explore the role of San Francisco right where Beatness and Orientalism intersect.[39] It is our intention to analyze the spatial contribution of San Francisco and its surrounding region to this relationship and discuss the resulting effect on a local, regional, and trans-Pacific level.

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[39] The term *Orientalism*, popularized by Edward Said, has been of widespread use in the last decades in critical discourse—more specifically, in postcolonial studies—to refer to the stereotyped and patronizing representation of the Orient by Western scholarship and art, thus perpetuating the West's imperialistic views. However, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term can also be defined as the "knowledge of the languages, cultures, etc., of the Orient" ("orientalism, *n*.," def. 2). The latter, and not the former, is the sense of the word that we use throughout this dissertation to refer to the Beats' inclination for Eastern spirituality and philosophy. In any case, for further reading on postcolonial sense of the term, see Said's influential book *Orientalism* (Pantheon, 1978).

To understand San Francisco's embrace of Eastern culture, we must draw upon the vision of the city as a modern version of post-imperial Italian city-states, as suggested by Gray Brechin and Rob Wilson. Founded in 1776 by Spanish colonists, the municipal incorporation of San Francisco did not take place until 1850—over two hundred years after the establishment of the Plymouth Colony. Its short history, along with its location on the northern tip of the San Francisco Peninsula, are two main reasons why the city has developed its unique character. Kenneth Rexroth, forefather of the San Francisco Beat scene, underlines that the original settlers of American San Francisco "had their faults, but they were not influenced by Cotton Mather" (*Autobiographical Novel* 366). In fact, the city is one example of isolation from the cultural mark left by the Puritan wave that expanded westward all the way to the Pacific coast.[40] Albeit never effectively independent like a city-state, American San Francisco always enjoyed a high degree of *de facto* cultural autonomy. An integral part of this independence has been the cultivation of the image of the city as the ultimate frontier at the very end of the land. Lawrence Ferlinghetti once deemed it "this far-out city on the left-side of the world" ("Acceptance Speech"). The Eurocentrism of cartography, however unconsciously, definitely conditions this description. For not only is San Francisco located at the end of the North American subcontinent; it also represents the far west of the world as traditional cartography lays it out—Europe at the core of the map, the American continent to the west, and Asia to the east—and, consequently, a gate to the Far East. Besides the obvious historical and cultural differences, the city has benefited from cartography to further its symbolic significance at the abyss of the West Coast.

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[40] Other examples of this cultural isolation in the United States are the state of Louisiana, heavily influenced by its Creole and Cajun heritage, or the contact zones where American and Mexican culture intermix in the Southwestern states.

Returning to the strictly American realm, Beat authors, like Jack Kerouac, have had a leading role in nurturing a romanticized vision of San Francisco as the very last American frontier. "No more land! We can't go any farther 'cause there ain't no more land!" (*On the Road* 161), yells Neal Cassady's *alter ego* Dean Moriarty in *On the Road* upon arrival in San Francisco. In this novel, references to the city as the end of the continent are pervasive. Not less noteworthy is Kerouac's reiteration of the "end-of-the-continent sadness" or the "end of land sadness" he finds in San Francisco in *On the Road* and "October in the Railroad Earth," respectively (*On the Road* 161, "Railroad Earth" 120). The city, following Kerouac's depiction, not only represents the end of the land, but, concurrently, the horizon of the American energy and thirst for movement stemming from the Manifest Destiny doctrine.

In San Francisco, both objective factors—geography, cultural disengagement from normative society—and subjective factors—symbolic perception of the enclave as the end of the American land—came together to inform a vaster entity that exceeds the limits of the City and County of San Francisco and even of the nine-county Bay Area. What Brechin and Rob Wilson regard as the city's greater *contado*[41] goes well beyond the administrative and statistical criteria that define space in the Bay Area. "San Francisco," Rob Wilson affirms, "has long served as a 'contado' of vast urban periphery ('hinterlands' of the countryside) providing material resources (water, timber, stone, agriculture, shipping and so on) as well as huge labor needs and inputs to build up the wealth and splendor of the 'imperial city' a la Rome or Constantinople" ("Imperialist Nostalgia"). The geographical outreach of this *contado* extends roughly to the High

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[41] *Contado*, which derives from *comitatus* (Latin for "county"), is a medieval Italian word that refers to the countryside surrounding a city. Brechin and Rob Wilson use it to compare San Francisco's influence over its surrounding region to the territorial practices of the medieval Italian city-state. Despite San Francisco's significant Italian heritage, there is no documented connection between it and Brechin's and Rob Wilson's use of the term *contado*.

Sierras to the north, to Big Sur to the south, and as far as Northwestern Nevada to the west (Brechin 40, R. Wilson "Worlding San Francisco").

Discussing the relationship between the city and its surrounding area, Brechin highlights the parallelism with post-imperial Italy:

> Italians . . . with their long experience with city states, have understood this relationship, though more in economic than ecological terms. For them, the civilized world was a duality made of the city and its *contado*—that is, the territory that the city could militarily dominate and thus draw upon. The contado provided the city with its food, resources, labor, conscripts, and much of its taxes, while its people . . . received a marketplace and a degree of protection. (xxiii)

The San Francisco *contado*, indeed, like the contemporary metropolitan area it was to become, soon turned heavily dependent on its hub. The progress of the city it served, in turn, became subordinated to the contributions of the *contado* in terms of resources and workforce, forging a harmonic and symbiotic coexistence (Brechin 16). The increasing demand for manpower caused by this economic symbiosis, along with—once again— the strategic location of San Francisco as a port city, soon prompted the arrival of successive waves of both national and foreign immigration seeking opportunities in a growing labor market. Among the expatriates, Italian and Pacific Rim immigrants stood out due to the strong cultural influence they brought to the city.

The Italian community was a major contribution to San Francisco's idiosyncratic culture of dissent. As Marcella Bencivenni explains,

> By the beginning of the twentieth century, . . . Italian immigrants possessed a rich radical political culture that, paralleling that of the motherland, covered the entire spectrum of class-based radicalism—socialism, syndicalism, anarchism, and, later on,

communism. . . . Italian immigrant radicals constituted an important minority among their co-nationals in the United States and exerted an influence within the American labor movement in general and the Italian community in particular, far greater than their number would suggest. (18)

The specific nature of Italian immigration made anarchism particularly popular with this group. A large proportion of Italians who went to the United States did not intend to settle permanently but to return to their country once they had made enough money. The consequent indifference to American politics and customs—boosted, at the same time, by the discrimination they endured—helped anarchism remain strong among the community (Bencivenni 18-19). Indeed, around the turn of the century, San Francisco's anarchist movement was dominated by Italians (Sensi-Isolani 192). The local labor movement and ideological dissent benefited from the Italian anarchist input. The popularity of anarchism motivated the development of a local current of literary libertarianism that materialized in the foundation of Kenneth Rexroth's San Francisco Libertarian Circle[42]—initially christened as Anarchist Circle—in the late 1940s. Blending European and American anarchism with Asian thought, Rexroth's Libertarian Circle represents a pioneering effort in shaping a local current of religious anarchism that spread through the San Francisco Beat scene.

In retrieving the anarchist classics—Mikhail Bakunin, Piotr Kropotkin, Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman,— Rexroth, as Michael T. Van Dyke contends,

> found an anarchism that was rooted in human personality, a practical theory for direct action in the interests of an integrated society, and somewhat surprisingly, a radical stance that did not disallow his mystical leanings. They provided theoretical

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[42] Here and elsewhere, we will refer to Rexroth's group as the San Francisco Libertarian Circle, since this is its final and most well-known name.

fundamentals for a modern anarchist movement, but not programs to be systematically carried out. (233)

This approach, which can be defined as radical humanism in that it celebrates the potential of human intellect and free will (Van Dyke 233), took root easily in a city that, by the late 1940s, had already become "a self-consciously anarchist milieu where openness to and dialogue with both cultural and individual others were encouraged" (J. Brown 208). In *An Autobiographical Novel* (1961), Rexroth concentrates the essence of the Circle:

There was no aspect of Anarchist history or theory that was not presented by a qualified person and then thrown out to discussion. Even in business or organizational meetings, we had no chairman or agenda, but things moved along in order and with dispatch. Our objective was to refound the radical movement after its destruction by the Bolsheviks, and to rethink all the ideologists from Marx to Malatesta. In addition to the meetings of the Libertarian Circle, once a week we had poetry readings. And besides our monthly dances, we had picnics during the summer in Marin County. At the dances we always had the best local jazz groups, but for the old-timers we always had to have an accordion, guitar, and fiddle to play polkas, schottisches, and Italian and Jewish folk dances. This also contributed to the foundation of the San Francisco Renaissance and to the specifically San Francisco intellectual climate which was about as unlike that of New York as could be conceived. Our connections were entirely with the British and European movement and with circles in Bombay and the French Concession in Shanghai, a refuge for revolutionaries opposed to the Kuomintang — who were incidentally, exterminated to the man by Mao. All in all, it was the most intensive reeducation program I have ever known, and its results have spread far beyond it. (*Autobiographical Novel* 512)

When Rexroth mentions the Bolsheviks, he obviously refers to the Moscow-affiliated Communist Party of the United States of America. After its central role in the 1934 General Strike, the Communist Party proved unable to lead the local radical movement

during the Popular Front years,[43] mostly because of the rigid party policies imposed from Moscow. Besides the stagnation of its radical movement in those years, the city had never gotten to have a true literary vanguard with nationwide outreach before World War II. Instead, it had remained largely provincial and locally-focused in terms of intellectual life (Rexroth, "San Francisco Renaissance"; Philip Lamantia qtd. in Peters 203). Rexroth's initiative has major credit for putting an end to the literary wasteland San Francisco had become. "Between 1946 and 1952," as Nancy Peters remarks,

> Rexroth held Friday evening soirées at his home at 250 Scott Street to discuss poetry and ideas. Regular participants included William Everson, Robert Duncan, Philip Lamantia, Muriel Rukeyser, Morris Graves, Gary Snyder, James Broughton, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Michael McClure . . . . The anarchist Libertarian Circle met on Wednesdays on Steiner Street, where a community of free spirits drank plenty of red wine and set about refounding the radical movement. They met for big parties at Fugazi Hall on Green Street in North Beach, and the writers and artists of the Rexroth group were joined by old Italian anarchists, longshoremen, doctors, cabbies, professors; sometimes as many as two hundred people attended these gatherings, which featured political debate, dancing, picnics, and hiking trips. (203)

The Libertarian Circle brought to the city literary meetings that sparked dynamic and radical thought and discussion among the local intellectuals. It also popularized public poetry readings, which were often performed to jazz accompaniment. The literature and ideas that were discussed transcended the city's purely intellectual underworld, for they became more and more widely available to people unconnected to those circles. This new intellectual status quo set the ideological and literary grounds for the San Francisco

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[43] The Communist Party, following the resolution of the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935, implemented the Popular Front strategy during the 1935-1939 period. Similar to the initiatives successfully launched in France and Spain, the party would seek a mild alignment with the Democratic Party and other liberal forces to its right. The party would also shift its priorities towards an active support of African-American civil rights and the defense of the Spanish Republic during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).

Renaissance—by whose warmth the San Francisco Beat community would originate and come to be the main local countercultural current in terms of national impact. Yet the effort of the Libertarian Circle was not just about giving voice to a local poetic movement so as to catch regional and national attention; it prompted the creation of an alternative focal point in the country other than the New York literary establishment around which normative literature, academia, and publishing houses revolved. This new focal point involved, like Rexroth says above, an "intensive reeducation," not of the poets themselves but of the environment in which they would produce their texts within society. The effort proved fruitful, for by the mid-1950s, as Rexroth comments, "it was no longer necessary to educate somebody to make an anarchist poet out of him. He had a milieu in which he could naturally become such a thing" (*Autobiographical Novel* 235).

The configuration of this local milieu where literature, anarchism, and humanism coalesce owes much to Rexroth's encounter with philosopher Martin Buber's book *I and Thou* (1923), a moment Rexroth remembers as a "tremendous, shaking experience" (*Autobiographical Novel* 511). According to Buber's theory, humans are defined by two dimensions: I-It and I-Thou. Whereas the former represents an objectifying dimension that enables the self to assert itself before the world, the latter refers to a purely dialogical level that positions the "I" before the other individuals, accepting their condition as interlocutors. In fact, Buber puts great emphasis on dialogue as a fundamental fact of human existence. That is, while dialogue enables our mutual enrichment in an exchange of thoughts and values, it also demands respect for the others and their otherness. This dialogical approach was present in the essence of Rexroth's Libertarian Circle, where deep ideological discussion was stimulated and public

readings took poetry out of the printed capsule to stage a moment of poetic democratization and direct speech from I to Thou (Rexroth *Autobiographical Novel* 515). By extending poetry to the regular citizen, an unmediated I-Thou connection is achieved: poetry speaks directly, frankly to the others, while the others nurture the former with an endless source of everydayness to be celebrated in Whitmanesque fashion. Rexroth's vision thus managed to overcome the habits of objectification—an exacerbation of the I-It dimension—sponsored by the state in its quest for social control (J. Brown 210). The I-Thou connection, under Rexroth's guidance, contributed to a sense of communitarianism in the San Francisco literary scene he theorizes about in his long poem "The Dragon and the Unicorn":

> A community of love is
> A community of mutual
> Indwelling, in which each member
> Realizes his total
> Liability for the whole.
> A collectivity is like
> A cancer disorganizing the
> Organism which produced it.
> The healthy organism
> Itself, responds instantly,
> As a whole, to the injury
> To the slightest of its parts. (*Longer Poems* 241-42)

Rexroth's communitarianism is heavily influenced not only by the anarchist classics but also by Buber. Buber's community is a community of choice where individuals associate freely around a center disregarding traditions or ideological and financial considerations that may be deemed coercive (Buber, "Comments" 244; Friedman 238).

With this background, by the time the Libertarian Circle meetings had turned into the Six Gallery reading and the San Francisco Beat scene was already a reality, poetry had become a true social force in the city (Rexroth, "Disengagement" 54)—just like jazz or Herb Caen's columns already were.

In Buber's I-Thou dimension, the unmediated relationship with the other leads ultimately to a direct connection with the "eternal Thou"—that is, God, who is continuously present in human consciousness and manifestations. "Through every single Thou the basic word addresses the eternal Thou" (*I and Thou* 75), asseverates Buber. Buber's intermingling of anarchism and religious mysticism arguably opened a way for Rexroth and the San Francisco Beats to incorporate spirituality to their poetics of dissent. In the context of postwar San Francisco, spirituality took form as a crucible of religions where Buddhism had gained major relevance over other non-Christian confessions mostly due to the impact of the city's large Asian population.

The first documented Chinese immigrants that got to Northern California reached the coast in the early 19th century. Yet it was not until the mid-century Gold Rush that successive waves of Chinese immigration would begin to arrive in the area— only to be limited by the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act[44] in 1882 (Burgan 23). The need for labor force in the city's *contado*—especially the rampant building of railroads—was key in attracting large numbers of Chinese. The San Francisco Chinatown, the oldest Chinese neighborhood in the United States, was a reality by 1848. Japanese immigration, for its part, began to arrive in California in significant numbers after Japan allowed open emigration to the United States in 1885. Initially settled in downtown San Francisco in two separate enclaves—one in the South of

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[44] The Chinese Exclusion Act was a federal law signed by President Chester A. Arthur in 1882 with the purpose of prohibiting specifically Chinese immigration. It would be partially repealed by the Magnuson Act of 1943 and repealed in its totality by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

Market area and the other adjacent to Chinatown,— the Japanese community moved *en masse* to the Western Addition[45] after the 1906 earthquake to give birth to San Francisco's Japantown (Laguerre 54-56). As two well-established communities into the post-World War II years,[46] the cultural influx brought by the Chinese and Japanese to the city was enormous. The first Buddhist temples had appeared in San Francisco in the 1850s to serve the social, emotional, and spiritual needs of the first Chinese émigrés (Burgan 22). Although it was not the only religious confession among the city's Asian immigrants, Buddhism was the most popular with them. In the case of the Japanese in San Francisco, a majority of them were Jodo Shinshu Buddhists—a school of Pure Land Buddhism.[47] In 1898, they would organize the Young Men's Buddhist Association, which would be recognized as the leading institution for Buddhism in the United States (Masatsugu 429-30). Buddhism, therefore, was already recognizable in the cultural landscape of postwar San Francisco, yet relegated behind the official Christian ideology of the United States. The San Francisco Beats, influenced by Kenneth Rexroth's seminal anarchist poetry of I-Thou, would find that their spiritual side—in other words, the ultimate connection with God—could no longer be satisfied by Christianity. Rexroth himself had already shown an appetite for Eastern literature and thought, which he had contributed to make widely available thanks to successive translations of then-invisible Chinese and Japanese poetry. Rexroth's orientalist bend opened the gates of the East to

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[45] The Western Addition is a neighborhood in San Francisco that bounds with Pacific Heights to the north, Van Ness Avenue to the east, the Haight-Ashbury to the south, and the Richmond District to the west. It is usually subdivided into smaller neighborhoods, among which we count the Fillmore, Japantown, or Alamo Square. For further reading on the historical evolution of the Western Addition, see chapter 41of Gary Kamiya's *Cool Gray City of Love: 49 Views of San Francisco* (Bloomsbury, 2013).

[46] Although consolidated in the racial landscape of the United States, the Japanese community would still carry a heavy burden stemming from massive and systematic internment in government camps during World War II under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's infamous Executive Order 9066.

[47] Pure Land Buddhism is one of the most popular traditions of Buddhism in East Asia. Its main textual basis consists of the Pure Land sutras: the *Infinite Life Sutra*, the *Amitabha Sutra*, and the *Amitayurdhyana Sutra*. Further reading on this tradition can be found in *In One Lifetime: Pure Land Buddhism*, by Shi Wuling (Amitabha, 2006).

the North Beach countercultural community. Besides intellectual access, spatial proximity was arguably a factor as well, for the Beat bastion of North Beach was adjacent to Chinatown, whereas Japantown and its Buddhist institutions were still less than three miles away.

Among the different currents of Eastern thought and religion present in the city, Zen Buddhism would have the greatest impact on the San Francisco Beats. A school of Mahayana Buddhism[48] born in China as *Chán*, it spread to Vietnam, Korea, and Japan, where the local variant became known as Zen. Western scholarship and intellectuals began to get familiar with Zen not especially through their own research but thanks to Zen "missionaries" who went to the United States to serve groups of Japanese immigrants. Among them, names such as Soyen Shaku, Nyogen Senzaki, and Shigetsu Sasaki stand out as pioneers. Yet, probably, the most influential Zen teacher in the United States would be Daisetz Teitaro (D.T.) Suzuki. In transplanting Japanese Zen to the United States, the success of Suzuki's outreach lied on his ability to explain it in an appealing and easily assimilable way from an American perspective. To a nation with so strong a tradition of individualism and celebration of the self, Suzuki would define Zen as "concerned with the absolute individual self," getting to declare at some point that, against the demands of the state, "anarchism is best" (qtd. in J. Brown 214). According to James Brown's observation,

> In the act of bringing Zen before the masses, Suzuki translated Zen into an American idiom that hit some of the keynotes of American left libertarianism: a rejection of

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[48] Mahayana is the majoritary branch of Buddhism, which claims the path of the Bodhisattva seeking complete enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. The Mahayana tradition tends to be more religious in nature than its other counterparts—Theravada and Vajrayana—in that it often includes veneration of celestial beings and rituals. For further reading on the different Buddhist schools, see Bhikku Sujato's *Sects and Sectarism: The Origins of Buddhist Schools* (Buddha Educational Foundation, 2007).

cultural conditioning, institutionalism, and traditionalism; an affirmation of individualism and radical self-reliance in the Thoreauvian vein; and a language of revolutionary aspiration. (219)

D.T. Suzuki's Zen, moreover, advocates individual feeling and unmediated experience as the means to apprehend the world against Western rationalism (Sharf 5). The mysticism of Zen is based on the notion of *satori*, the moment of enlightenment and comprehension when the individual experience becomes purely immediate—that is, when the individual realizes, through meditation, about the transiency of existence. These core ideas of Zen relate particularly well to the transcendentalist ethos that pervades the Beat politics of the individual.[49]

The combination of libertarianism and religious mysticism of Zen Buddhism would definitely connect with Kenneth Rexroth's inclination for Buber's I-Thou theory. With a solid rooting in the local Japanese community, it was inevitable that Rexroth and, subsequently, the new generation of San Francisco poets of the 1950s would get attracted by the escape it offered from the normative set of values implied in the postwar American Way of Life. As Brown puts it,

> The explicit critique of Western materialism in Suzuki's Zen and Japanese exceptionalism and its emphasis on transcultural individual liberation confirmed the individualist, left libertarian premises of Beat dissent against cold war culture while giving Beat poets a contemplative practice from which to criticize the West's failure to present life as it really was. (215)

Several members of the San Francisco Beat circle adhered, in varying degrees, to the Buddhist current that would spread through the North Beach community. Allen

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[49] For an extensive study of the influence of Asian spirituality on American Transcendentalism, see *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions*, by Arthur Versluis (Oxford UP, 1993).

Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Diane di Prima, and Michael McClure were among them. The writers who best represent the essence of the confluence of Beat orientalism with the San Francisco countercultural space, though, are Philip Whalen and Gary Snyder. Two of the authors who took part in the seminal Six Gallery reading in 1956, they would be the most committed to Buddhist thought and practice among their fellow Beats.

Before the Six Gallery reading, Snyder was already a regular at talks on Buddhism in Berkeley—another hub for orientalism in the Bay Area,[50]— where he would meet Anglican-turned-Buddhist Alan Watts.[51] Much like Rexroth, he got engaged in the translation of Chinese and Japanese traditional poetry. His interest in Zen Buddhism would lead Snyder to leave for Japan in 1956 with the purpose of studying and practicing it thoroughly. He would thus become the first San Francisco Beat to emigrate to Asia, spending over ten years moving back and forth between Japan and California. His deep knowledge of Zen Buddhism and Japanese culture influenced greatly other Beats' contact with Eastern spirituality. One of them is Philip Whalen, who would be introduced to Buddhism by Snyder in the 1950s. Whalen turned Zen into his path in life, making it also the central theme of his poetic production. After spending two years in Kyoto, he would return to San Francisco to pursue his Zen education at the San Francisco Zen Center, where he would be ordered monk in 1973. In their setting the Eastern spiritual tone of the Beat community, we believe that the true nature of San Francisco as a space of trans-Pacific outreach finds in Snyder and Whalen its most explicit representation.

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[50] The study and practice of Buddhism had gained prominence in Berkeley since the late 1940s. Founded in 1949, the Institute of Buddhist Studies, housed in the Berkeley Buddhist Temple, would gradually expand its scope of regulars from the Japanese-American community of the University of California campus to western scholars, artists, and authors interested in Buddhism (Mitchell 50).

[51] Alan Watts (1915-1973) was a British philosopher and writer who contributed to the popularization of Zen Buddhism in the West and, more specifically, in the San Francisco Bay Area. He would be a major influence on the Beats' inclination for Eastern spirituality.

In order to interpret this outreach, we must turn inevitably to Michel Foucault. In a talk given in 1967 entitled "Of Other Spaces," Foucault first poses his notion of *heterotopia* in human geography. "There are . . . real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society," expounds the French philosopher, "which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (3). Foucault describes a heterotopia as a space that involves more layers of meaning than it may seem and creates connections to other physical places that are not necessarily close. Snyder himself, although born in San Francisco, was raised in Washington and, subsequently, Oregon, where he would eventually graduate in anthropology and literature from Reed College. His years in the Pacific Northwest, where wilderness plays a major role, got him in intimate touch with nature. When he and his friends from college Philip Whalen, Lew Welch, and William Dickey, as Snyder recalls, "started hearing little echoes of things in California", they "ended up there" ("Art of Poetry"). Yet the sense of place we find in his poetry, as well as in Whalen's, does not have to do with the city itself but with the extensive nature of San Francisco's region of influence. The several geographical and cultural layers that shape this influence, by our understanding, seem to represent a Foucaldian heterotopia. In one of Snyder's early San Francisco poems, "North Beach Alba," Snyder elaborates on the prevalence of the natural over the urban:

> Waking half-drunk in a strange pad
> making it out to the cool gray
>   san francisco dawn—
> white gulls over white houses,
>   fog down the bay,

tamalpais a fresh green hill in the new sun,
driving across the bridge in a beat old car
to work. (*Back Country* 75)

While the poem begins as a paean to San Francisco at dawn and the nighttime "kicks" it offers—the author's poetic persona wakes up in someone else's apartment after a night of alcohol and, presumably, sex,— Snyder transmits a feeling of comfort in leaving the city. On his way up north of the Golden Gate Bridge towards Marin County, the poet focuses his attention on his main totem in the San Francisco hinterland, Mount Tamalpais. In fact, even though the literary and social activity of the San Francisco Beats was mostly located in the city and, more specifically, in North Beach, it is Mount Tamalpais and its surrounding area of Mill Valley and Corte Madera what Snyder would actually call home prior to leaving for Japan in 1956. Similarly, in Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums*, Snyder's *alter ego* Japhy Ryder announces his plans to settle in Marin County for a spiritual break: "I'm goin [*sic*] to Marin County in a few weeks, . . . go walk a hunnerd [*sic*] times around Tamalpais and help purify the atmosphere and accustom the local spirits to the sound of sutra" (*Dharma Bums* 77). Both in Snyder and Whalen, Mount Tamalpais has an intense symbolism that, according to the former, lies in "its proximity to the ocean, its central relationship to the whole Bay Area, its way of relating across to Mt. Diablo and to Mt. St. Helena and to the northern Bolinas Ridge" (qtd. in Robertson 132-33). Some twenty miles north of San Francisco, Mount Tamalpais epitomizes the greatness of nature in the city's hinterland of the northern Bay Area—for it figuratively connects San Francisco, to its immediate south, with the East Bay (the Diablo Range), the northernmost counties of Napa and Sonoma (Mount Saint Helena), and Bolinas Ridge, which gives way to the Bolinas Bay, a portion of the

California coast that looks straight to Japan on the map from the other side of the Pacific Ocean. Thus Mount Tamalpais becomes a sort of trans-Pacific nerve center of the imagination that relates San Francisco to its Bay Area and the East through orientalism and consciousness of nature. The peak is sacralized by Snyder and Whalen as the ultimate spiritual refuge for the disaffiliated, as the latter evokes in "Invocation and Teophany":

> spray left cheek and lens of eyeglasses
> my head will ache later
>
> clearly the mountain
> Tamalpais, Bolinas Ridge walks up
> out of the water into bright
>
> blue air, black and hard-running as it is
> full sunlight (360)

In the description of this ecstatic instant, Whalen lauds his moment of "teophany" in Mount Tamalpais as a further stage of disengagement from society, more individualistic and in communion with the natural surroundings than the urbanity of the North Beach enclave. Whalen, in fact, would practice periodical circumambulations around the peak. In Zen Buddhism, circumambulations are rites of walking meditation that are part of the spiritual path towards enlightenment. Whalen immortalizes the one he engaged in with Snyder and Ginsberg in 1965 in "Opening the Mountain, Tamalpais: 22:x:65," where he describes the summit as "Prajnaparamita Sutra, as many / others as could be remembered in music & song" (486). Prajñaparamita, in Mahayana Buddhism, refers to the perfection in seeing the nature of reality. And transcendent reality, in Snyder's and

Whalen's view, is concentrated symbolically in Mount Tamalpais, for it unites East and West in a coalescence of Zen ecstasy and fusion with the land.

Rather than Beat-constructed, this profound imbrication of the human being with the natural space is an intrinsic value of Zen Buddhism. In his essay "The Role of Nature in Zen Buddhism," Suzuki defends,

> While separating himself from Nature, Man still is part of Nature, for the fact of separation itself shows that a Man is dependent on Nature. We can say this: Nature produces Man out of itself; Man cannot be outside of Nature, he still has his being rooted in Nature. Therefore, there cannot be any hostility between them. On the contrary, there must always be a friendly understanding and a sympathetic communication between Man and Nature. Man came from Nature in order to see Nature in him, that is, Nature came to itself in order to see itself in Man. (119)

Suzuki's point has been defended by Whalen and, especially, by Snyder, who has directed it towards a militant environmentalism that has turned him into a pioneer of ecocriticism.[52] Snyder draws a space where San Francisco cannot be understood without its bioregion, that is, without being one with its hinterland ("Coming in to the Watershed" 85). His Zen-inspired approach to nature proposes, at a local level, a "watershed/bioregion/city-state" sense of place:

> Imagine a Renaissance-style city-state facing out on the Pacific, with its bioregional hinterland reaching to the headwaters of all the streams that flow through its bay. The San Francisco/Valley rivers/Shasta headwaters bio-city region! . . . Such a non-nationalistic idea of community, in which commitment to pure place is paramount, cannot be ethnic or racist. Here is perhaps the most delicious turn that comes out of thinking about politics from the standpoint of place: anyone of any race, language,

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[52] Prominent examples of Snyder's ecocriticism are his collection of essays *The Practice of the Wild* (Counterpoint, 1990) and his article "Coming in to the Watershed: Biological and Cultural Diversity in the California Habitat" (1993).

religion, or origin is welcome, as long as he or she lives well on the land. ("Coming in to the Watershed" 85)

In a heterotopian perspective of the city that goes hand in hand with Brechin's and Rob Wilson's idea of the *contado*, Snyder redesigns San Francisco in such a way that it is not only a city, but also a metropolitan area and a bioregion. The key to link all of these layers, as he sees it, is the network of natural connections of its surrounding hinterland.

With the Far East always in their spiritual and geographical horizon, Whalen's and Snyder's poetry nonetheless outgrows the San Francisco bioregion. Given their Northwestern origin, San Francisco is just the core of a much broader region in the northwestern corner of the country that shares with the city its isolation from the centers of political and cultural power of the nation. In "Nooksack Valley," Snyder evokes the Northwest as a symbol of his own regional identity:

> At the far end of a trip north
> . . . .
> Steelhead run now
>   a week and I go back
> Down 99, through towns, to San Francisco and Japan.
> All America south and east,
> Twenty-five years in it brought to a trip-stop
> Mind-point, where I turn
> Caught more on this land—rock tree and man,
> Awake, than ever before, yet ready to leave. (*Riprap* 15)

In Timothy Gray's interpretation,

By reflecting on his position on the Washington coast, where "all America [is] south and

east" of where he stands, Snyder echoes Thoreau, who while standing on the eastern

reaches of the continent at Cape Cod famously claimed that he was able to "put all

America behind him" . . . . This is exactly what Snyder aspires to do, literally and

figuratively, in the months just prior to his departure for Asia. He feels "caught" (on the

land, in the past) and is anxious to begin the next phase of his Pacific Rim education.

He hopes Route 99's asphalt trail will lead him far beyond San Francisco, across the

ocean to Japan. (23)

Snyder's fixation with Asia becomes more evident as the spatial scope of his poetry gets

wider across the Pacific edge of the United States. Not only is he caught in the land, as

Gray notes pertinently; he is also caught in the spiritual and cultural dejection of the

larger society. Similarly, Whalen also extends the regional outreach of his poetry in

"Sourdough Mountain Lookout":

> HERACLITUS: "The transformations of fire
> are, first of all, sea; and half of the sea
> is earth, half whirlwind. . . .
> It scatters and it gathers; it advances
> and retires."
> . . . .
> BUDDHA: "All the constituents of being are
> Transitory: Work out your salvation with diligence." (42-43)

Atop Washington State's Sourdough Mountain—a correlate of Mount Tamalpais in the

broader Northwest,— very close to the Canadian border and less than a hundred miles

from the Pacific coast, Whalen reflects on the Buddhist notion of the transiency of

existence. He underpins Buddha's words ("All the constituents of being are / Transitory:

Work out your salvation with diligence") with another by Greek philosopher Heraclitus,

who describes the world as an ever-flowing system of transformations. The flux of

things Whalen refers to seems to note the pointlessness of remaining caught in an unwanted society, for, as he argues in "Scenes of Life at the Capital," "There's probably *Some* sensible human way of living in America / Without being rich or drunk or taking dope all the time" (594). Snyder sketches this way of living in America in "Hunting 9":

> Sealion, salmon, offshore—
> Salt-fuck desire driving flap fins
> North, south, five thousand miles
> Coast, and up creek, big seeds
> groping for inland womb
>
> Geese, ducks, swallows,
>   paths in the air (*Myths & Texts* 28)

The author finds in fish and bird migration across the Pacific Rim a metaphor for his visionary escape from the brink of the United States. Just like these creatures embark in a constant flow around the Rim in search for resources to survive, Snyder finds in trans-Pacific contact with Asia his alternative to the cultural and spiritual insufficiency of the mid-century United States.

We have seen that a spatial dialogue between Snyder's and Whalen's texts can be traced. In this interconnection, San Francisco sticks out both as the countercultural and intercultural hub of a much wider space that extends further than the city's local region of influence. San Francisco, where both writers became part of the Beat movement and emblems of the Rexroth-instigated libertarian orientalism, is thus turned into a heterotopia that, in Foucault's words, "is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (6). The spirit of the anarchistic-orientalist milieu configured by Rexroth is extrapolated to the northern

section of the Pacific coast of the United States and all the way to Asia's Far East. As Snyder himself puts it, his sense of place, at a trans-Pacific scale,

> goes from around Big Sur on the California coast all the way up the Pacific coast through British Columbia, through southeast Alaska, out through southwest Alaska, out onto the Aleutian chain, and then comes down into Hokkaido and the Japanese islands, and goes down through Taiwan. Now that's the territory I have moved and lived in and that I sort of know. So that's my place. ("Art of Poetry")

Our analysis of the spatial contribution of San Francisco to the orientalist inclination of the local Beat community shows a city with a heavy background of European and Asian cultural influence that fueled the appearance of Kenneth Rexroth's San Francisco Libertarian Circle. This group proved to be crucial as a precursor of the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance, which, in turn, originated the city's Beat scene that would lead the local countercultural movement in the Fifties. Rexroth's intermingling of anarchism and Eastern religious mysticism yielded to Philip Whalen and Gary Snyder, whose texts broaden the spatial outreach of San Francisco to turn it into a heterotopia of the Pacific Rim. We come to the conclusion that the sense of place of both authors lies in an interconnection of multiple geographical layers that originate from San Francisco's aforementioned background of alien cultural influence. We also contend that they position the city prominently both on the local, regional, and trans-Pacific spheres. For San Francisco claims, before the rest of the nation, its condition as an alternative space that escapes white and Christian cultural homogeneity in postwar American society while, at the same time, having the virtue of becoming the quintessential contact zone between the United States and the Far East.

PART TWO: SAN FRANCISCO'S TRANSITION

FROM THE FIFTIES TO THE SIXTIES

2.1. POST-BEAT SAN FRANCISCO: A FEW IDEAS

FOR A CULTURAL-HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION

Of course, the transition from the Fifties to the Sixties in San Francisco would not be instantaneous, for there was no overlapping between the city's Beats and the hippies of the Sixties in the leadership of the local counterculture. As the cultural splendor of the North Beach Beat community languished, the new generation was still trying to find its way in the countercultural scene. There is little critical elaboration on this period in San Francisco during the early 1960s. Yet we find it necessary to give the reader some clues to understand that, loose and disconcerting as it may seem, this period still has a sort of cohesive identity stemming from the countercultural energies then floating in San Francisco.

As Hunter S. Thompson recalls, with a certain distance, in a 1964 article,

> As recently as 1960, San Francisco was the capital of the Beat Generation, and the corner of Grant and Columbus in the section known as North Beach was the crossroads of the "beat" world.
>
> It was a good time to be in San Francisco. Anybody with half a talent could wander around North Beach and pass himself off as a "comer" in the new area. . . . It was a time for breaking loose from the old codes, for digging new sounds and new ideas, and for doing everything possible to unnerve the Establishment. (265)

While Thompson still identifies signs of vitality in North Beach in 1960, the undesired commodification of the beatnik stereotype by the media had already arrived by the end of the 1950s. At the turn of the decade, as Charles Perry notes, "North Beach was a

tourist trap full of topless bars" (6). Some of the gathering spots of the local Beat community were made unavailable to its members. As an example, the Beats were forced out permanently of one of their emblematic meeting places, The Place, in 1959 due to the pressure coming from some hostile neighbors (Schwartz and Peterson, "Historical Essay"). The police harassment aimed at the North Beach social scene would also culminate in the final closure of the iconic Co-Existence Bagel Shop in October 1960 (Agee 70).[53] The skyrocketing rent prices would discourage many from staying in the neighborhood. In addition, some of the San Francisco Beats had dispersed after engaging in active traveling or relocating elsewhere by then. Allen Ginsberg, along with Peter Orlovsky, had left the city for Morocco in 1957, from where they would move shortly after to Paris for a few years, joining fellow Beat author Gregory Corso. Jack Kerouac, for his part, had also moved to Florida in 1957, where he would be awaiting the release of On the Road. Gary Snyder, as we have seen previously, would leave San Francisco for Japan in 1956 as well. While some of the Beats would still continue to live in the city, Thompson finds that the spirits had become dampened by the early 1960s among the remnants of the North Beach beatnik subculture, with many "looking back with humor and affection on the uproar they caused, an drifting by a variety of routes toward debt, parenthood, and middle age" (265).

The aforementioned factors coalesced to dilute the vigor of the San Francisco Beat scene. Dispersion and commodification were key to the decline of the local Beat counterculture somewhere around 1960. The effective end of Beat San Francisco, as Thompson chronicles, would be striking and abrupt: "Since then, things have died

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[53] For further reading on the insistent pressure put by the San Francisco Police Department on the Beat social scene, see chapter two of Christopher Lowen Agee's *The Streets of San Francisco: Policing and the Creation of a Cosmopolitan Liberal Politics, 1950-1972* and Gary Kamiya's article for the *San Francisco Chronicle* "Beatniks' Battle with S.F. Police Goes National with Poems" (20 Mar. 2015, www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Beatniks-battle-with-S-F-police-goes-national-6148365.php. Accessed 22 Dec. 2016).

down. The 'beatnik' is no longer a social lion in San Francisco, but a social leper; as a matter of fact, it looked for a while as if they had all left" (265). This turning point gave way to a transitional period in the San Francisco counterculture in which a generational shift would begin to take shape. However, there would be no direct successors to the Beats. In his introduction to *Slow Learner* (1984), Thomas Pynchon offers a first-hand view of the immediate post-Beat years—those which run roughly from 1960 to 1964:

> We were at a transition point, a strange post-Beat passage of cultural time . . . . We were onlookers: the parade had gone by and we were already getting everything secondhand, consumers of what the media of the time were supplying us. This didn't prevent us from adopting Beat postures and props, and eventually as post-Beats coming to see deeper into what, after all, was a sane and decent affirmation of what we all want to believe about American values. (*Slow Learner* 9)

Pynchon's is one rare allusion to the concept of *post-Beat* in its strict sense of what came immediately after the years of Beat ebullience. In his early twenties at that time, Pynchon's words describe a generation who was too young and/or distant from the Beat powerhouses in San Francisco and New York when the Beat movement was at its height. As a *Newsweek* journalist mentions tangentially in a profile of Corso published in 1963, there was something going on in post-Beat San Francisco, but "nobody yet knows the name of the movement of the new decade except that it isn't Beat" ("Bye, Bye, Beatnik"). Or, as Perry defines it,

> There was a new generation of bohemian-minded kids who were very interested in . . . mind drugs. They were also interested in such traditional bohemian subjects as art, psychology, pacifism, exotic religions and anything else that stretched the limits of understanding. They had no name for themselves comparable to the Beat Generation, though the Beats derisively called some of them hippies (junior grade hipsters). (6)

The feeling of post-Beat uncertainty described by Pynchon also has a cultural interpretation. As the author recalls, "The conflict in those days . . . [i]n its literary version . . . shaped up as traditional vs. Beat fiction" (*Slow Learner* 8). While the Beats had become a solid link between modernism and postmodernism, the new disaffiliated generation of the post-Beat years had still gaps to fill in the transition from the Fifties to the Sixties. As we discuss later, there are seminal figures of the San Francisco Sixties that can be considered, simultaneously, missing links that bridge this period of pronounced cultural uncertainty and the actual Sixties. One is R.G. Davis, founder of the San Francisco Mime Troupe. Beginning in 1959, the radical theater practices of his company would be central to stir up the crestfallen countercultural energy of the city. His challenge to the city authorities, enacted between 1964 and 1965, would subsequently be critical to the formation of a loosely cohesive Sixties counterculture. Another connecting figure is Ken Kesey, who would be essential both from the literary and the broader cultural angles. In literary terms, Peter O. Whitmer and Bruce VanWyngarden draw an analogy that illustrates Kesey's importance in paving the way to the Sixties: "The continuity from Beat to hippie can also be found, in perfect alphabetical order on the shelf of any large bookstore: Kesey comes immediately after Kerouac, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* sits right next to *On the Road*" (99). Published in 1962, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is neither a text from the Fifties nor from the Sixties, but, rather, a sign of the transition between both periods. From a cultural—or countercultural—perspective, fundamental as he is to the articulation of the drug politics of the Sixties, his crew of Merry Pranksters would be instrumental as a bridge to the Sixties as well in that they heralded the hippie life style even before an actual hippie community had emerged.

In the context of San Francisco, the transition that followed the Fifties is a period that outlines sensibilities that had remained unresolved and that were to burst in the countercultural Sixties and even beyond. This is precisely what Part Two of this dissertation works through—the spatial relationship with the city of those discordant minds and identities that surfaced too late for the Fifties and too early for the Sixties.

2.2. DRIFTING TOWARDS THE SIXTIES

IN THOMAS PYNCHON'S *THE CRYING OF LOT 49*

At this point of our research on the spatial impact of San Francisco on the mid-century American counterculture, we must take the time to study the role of the city in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966). This text, a quintessential postmodern novel, stands out particularly in the context of transition between what we have called the Fifties and the Sixties in the San Francisco counterculture, for Pynchon grasps masterfully the complex *zeitgeist* of this period. In Pierre-Yves Petillon's view,

> The achievement [of *The Crying of Lot 49*] is all more impressive because the mood it captures is slightly off-key, the mood of an "awkward" transition between two epochs, a transitional period. *The Crying of Lot 49* is not a novel of the sixties as, say, Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is a novel of 1960-62, or Richard Brautigan's *Trout Fishing in America* is a novel of 1963 . . . . [R]ather, it is a novel moving from 1957 to 1964 which portrays how it felt to live through that period of "transition," a novel about those seven years spent brooding and "waiting" for the new times to be born. (129)

This is the premise our approach is based upon: *The Crying of Lot 49* constitutes a link between the Beat period of the San Francisco counterculture and the movement that exploded loudly in the second half of the 1960s. It is in this countercultural vacuum where Pynchon's novel fills a literary void between periods.

Our initial assumption is that the author's choice of San Francisco as a central setting of this novel is not merely incidental. Within roughly the 1960-1964 span, the city's counterculture was a community in transition as well. The Beat movement, albeit

widely visible, had remained low-key in terms of social impact while American society was still reveling in the stunning prosperity of the 1950s. The San Francisco counterculture, in the early 1960s, found itself adrift in an interregnum that would precede the great social and ideological disruption that was to come with the several alternative currents flourishing in the second half of the decade. This state of mind conditions extensively the spatial presence of San Francisco in *The Crying of Lot 49* and the use the text makes of it.

One could draw many parallels between Pynchon's novel and Kerouac's San Francisco texts. Indeed, both authors disclose a range of outcasts that mainstream American society ignored for the purpose of keeping up the official self-complacent sociopolitical discourse of the mid-century United States. Petillon elaborates on this comparison:

> *The Crying of Lot 49* is haunted by scattered reminiscences of Kerouac's *On the Road*. Both works convey the sense of a world "blooming," as if awakening from a long sleep. Very much like Kerouac's, Oedipa's experience is one of moving "across the tracks" toward an invisible, hidden America: a sad world of "shacks and rags" whose peculiar note of "tristessa" (to quote the title of another Kerouac book) is echoed in the Tristero [*sic*].[54] Largely from Kerouac as well is derived the sense that as one crosses over to the other side of the tracks, one falls out of the official grid superimposed on the land and into a sort of twilight zone . . . where, emerging from time into "timeless shadows," one becomes a "ghost". (130)

We can infer that the ghost Petillon refers to is Oedipa Maas, whose leap "across the tracks" in Pynchon's novel takes place as she drifts through San Francisco in a surrealistic night journey that immerses her in the city's underworld. From a spatial

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[54] Throughout the novel, Pynchon alternates the spelling only between "the Trystero" and "Tr*i*stero" (without article; emphasis added), seemingly using them interchangeably.

perspective, this trip can be read as a representation of Guy Debord's notion of the *dérive*. This concept, a central principle of the situationist theory, is proposed by the French philosopher as a revolutionary approach to the urban space that consists of roaming through its different ambiances without a planned purpose. A *dérive* differs from a stroll in the constructive nature of the former, for it relies on the effects of the geographical milieu and its stimuli on the behavior and emotions of the individual. In Debord's own words,

> In a dérive one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. The element of chance is less determinant than one might think: from the dérive point of view cities have a psychogeographical relief, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes which strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones. . . . [T]he dérive includes both this letting go and its necessary contradiction: the domination of psychogeographical variations by the knowledge and calculation of their possibilities. . . . The ecological analysis of the absolute or relative character of fissures in the urban network, of the role of microclimates, of the distinct, self-contained character of administrative districts, and above all of the dominating action of centers of attraction, must be utilized and completed by psychogeographical methods. ("Dérive" 50)

Oedipa's delirious *dérive* comes to an end South of Market, right where Kerouac's literary *alter egos* blend into the city's marginal scene as a silent way to drop out from the mainstream. After getting off a jitney on Howard Street in the early morning, Oedipa takes a "walk towards the Embarcadero" (*Crying* 86). That is, she ends up her frantic immersion into the presumable reality of the Trystero in the same area whose flophouses and marginal characters and behaviors so inspired Kerouac. In fact, it is

among what Kerouac would call the *fellaheen* scene of the South of Market district that Oedipa eventually finds the key to understanding what the muted horn sign—which has come to obsess her—is about. There she finds another silent, underground empire,[55] an equivalent to Kerouac's *fellaheen* underworld.

Pynchon's novel is heavily influenced by the Beat period and is still nourished by its anxieties. Yet it displays its own personality and succeeds in grasping the mood of the interlude between the Fifties and the Sixties in San Francisco. Understanding the confusion that marked this period is crucial to fully comprehend the relevance of this novel in this time frame and its interaction with the city's space. The generational shift that took place at the time pushed the Beats to the background of the counterculture— even if some of their core values would thereafter be borrowed. In this regard, Theodore Roszak highlights that "in a historical emergency of absolutely unprecedented proportions, we are that strange, culture-bound, animal whose biological drive for survival expresses itself *generationally*. It is the young, arriving with eyes that can see the obvious, who must remake the lethal culture of their elders, and who must remake it in desperate haste" (47-48). The generation that came to maturity under the Beat influence found itself amid a bewildering changeover. Pynchon, part of this generation himself, makes a solid description of this time in his introduction to *Slow Learner* (1984):

> We were at a transition point, a strange post-Beat passage of cultural time, with our loyalties divided. As bop and rock'n'roll were to swing music and postwar pop, so was this writing to the more established modernist tradition we were being exposed to then

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[55] The motto of the Trystero network is W.A.S.T.E., an acronym for "We Await Silent Tristero's Empire." It is one of the multiple examples of wordplay used by Pynchon in his novel. In this particular case, the author seems to take the opportunity to disorient the reader by opening the possibility that the "silent empire" might as well just be a delusion, with its network of communications being just "waste" that ends up in a street waste bin.

in college. Unfortunately there were no more primary choices for us to make. We were onlookers: the parade had gone by and we were already getting everything secondhand, consumers of what the media of the time were supplying us. (*Slow Learner* 9)

The author bemoans not being able to get involved in the atmosphere of the Fifties. His generation had seen the Beats shake core assumptions of American culture, yet could not make part of the movement in due time nor partake in its manifestations. As Pynchon reminiscences,

> I enjoyed only a glancing with the Beat movement. Like others, I spent a lot of time in jazz clubs, nursing the two-beer minimum. I put on hornrimmed sunglasses at night. I went to parties in lofts where girls wore strange attire. I was hugely tickled by all forms of marijuana humor, though the talk back then was in inverse relation to the availability of that useful substance. In 1956, in Norfolk, Virginia, I had wandered into a bookstore and discovered issue one of the *Evergreen Review*, then an early forum for Beat sensibility. It was an eye-opener. (*Slow Learner* 8)

Unlike the countercultural movement that took the spotlight in the late 1960s, the Beats did not manage to turn the mainstream United States upside down. Society was not yet fully aware of the generational and cultural conflict that challenged the official national happiness of the Eisenhower era. "The conflict in those days was, like most everything else, muted," affirms Pynchon (*Slow Learner* 8). Given that Oedipa's obsession is the mysterious muted post horn, Pynchon's statement is very telling about the apparent meaning of the central motive in *The Crying of Lot 49*.

Oedipa is presented as an archetypal mid-century suburban middle-class wife with firm Republican leanings. When she is designated co-executor of her late ex-lover's estate, a set of stamps makes her acquainted with the muted post horn. The

confusion this enigmatic symbol brings to her comfortable life in the well-to-do

fictional community of San Narciso, California, becomes a central theme in *The Crying

of Lot 49*. Oedipa's fixation with the meaning of the symbol eventually turns into a

delirious night in San Francisco where the sense of reality is notably blurred. Beginning

in North Beach, Oedipa's night in the city feels like an earthquake that puts her San

Narciso-centered reality into disarray. Perhaps subconsciously, she is in need of this

night journey.[56] The way she lets herself take over by San Francisco and its own reality

—that is, by its psychogeopraphy—hints to a repressed sensibility that, according to

Debord, is precisely that of the *dérive* ("Dérive" 53). Also in Oedipa's case, this

psychogeographical sensibility involves the search for, in Greil Marcus's explanation,

> what lettrist Ivan Chtcheglov called "forgotten desires"—images of play, eccentricity,
> secret rebellion, creativity, and negation. . . . [I]mages of refusal, or . . . images society
> had itself refused, hidden, suppressed, or "recuperated"—images of refusal, nihilism, or
> freedom that society had taken back into itself, coopted or rehabilitated, isolated or
> discredited.[57] (4-5)

These signs of rebellion had been restrained during the Beat era by society at large,

successfully producing characters like Oedipa. Her repressed sensibility, however,

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[56] Although analytical psychology is not the focus of this study, we cannot ignore the weight of the Jungian archetypal night journey of the hero on Oedipa's night in San Francisco. In a way, this literary archetype is present in Pynchon's novel, for Oedipa embarks in the cyclical migration of the hero. Oedipa suffers from a moral or spiritual crisis that leads her to seek insight in the underworld, where she takes a journey that provides her with knowledge after interacting with it. Eventually, at the bottom of her descent, she emerges with an improved consciousness prior to returning home. Oedipa, in fact, somehow fits Carl Gustav Jung's description of the hero: "He is first and foremost a self-representation of the longing of the unconscious, of its unquenched and unquenchable desire for the light of consciousness. But consciousness, continually in danger of being led astray by its own light and of becoming a rootless will o'[*sic*] the wisp longs for the healing power of nature, for the deep wells of being and for unconscious communion with life in all its countless forms" (301). For further inquiry into the archetypal night journey of the hero, see *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 5: Symbols of Transformation* (1956), edited by Gerhard Adler and R.F.C. Hull.

[57] Theorist and poet Ivan Chtcheglov (1933-1998), also known as Gilles Ivain, was a key member of the ephemeral Lettrist International, forefather itself of the Situationist International. Chtcheglov's seminal essay "Formulary for a New Urbanism" (1953) would inspire the situationists' theses.

appears to surface. Oedipa, getting ahead of the larger society, finds her own epiphany in her San Francisco *dérive*: there is not only one American Way of Life.

Just as Oedipa is driving across the Bay Bridge, about to make her arrival in San Francisco, she already encounters an omen of things to come:

> It was the middle of rush hour. Oedipa was appalled at the spectacle, having thought such traffic only possible in Los Angeles, places like that, looking down at San Francisco a few minutes later from the high point of the bridge's arc, she saw smog. Haze, she corrected herself, is what it is, haze. How can they have smog in San Francisco? Smog, according to the folklore, did not begin till farther south. It had to be the angle of the sun. (*Crying* 74)

By referencing the city's trademark fog, Pynchon suggests that Oedipa is penetrating into uncertainty—that is, a whole new reality for her. Even while San Francisco awaits on the horizon, the city is already having a psychogeographical effect on her in that the geographical environment is affecting—and even taking control of—her emotions (Debord, "Critique"). In parallel, the text hints at Oedipa's ignorance of any reality other than her own suburban life and stereotypes. For her, the United States end where Southern California ends. Her childish astonishment with San Francisco's climate and traffic certainly point in this direction.

Starting at a North Beach gay bar where a stranger with a Tristero post horn pinned in his lapel gives her a clue about the possible meaning of this symbol, the San Francisco night unfolds before Oedipa as she leaves the bar to reenter "the infected city" (*Crying* 80). In her paranoid obsession with the Trystero, Oedipa finds out an underworld similar to that described by Kerouac. As she drifts through the city at night, Oedipa witnesses a profusion of muted post horns everywhere from Chinatown, to the

Fillmore, to Skid Row—that is, to the racially and socially discordant areas of the city. The symbol—or, alternatively, the acronym W.A.S.T.E.—is often related in some way or another to different characters that have one thing in common: they are all individuals on the margins of American society. Her obsession with the post horn leads her to encounters with a Mexican anarchist; "a drifting, dreamy cloud of delinquents in summer-weight gang jackets with the post horn stitched on in thread" (*Crying* 83-84); "an uncoordinated boy who planned to slip at night into aquariums and open negotiations with the dolphins" (*Crying* 85); a facially-deformed welder; or "a Negro woman with an intricately-marbled scar along the baby-fat of one cheek who kept going through rituals of miscarriage" (*Crying* 85). What Oedipa's quest for meaning unveils before her is a subterranean society that both normative American society and herself had deliberately ignored. These outcasts, as Natalie Wilson argues, "serve as deviations from the cultural norm and are not constructed via cultural discourses as bodies that matter in society" (114).[58] In other words, Oedipa discovers, as though it were a brand new phenomenon, what Michael Harrington calls "the other America" in his homonymous study published in 1962, just in the middle of the transitional period in question:

> The other America, the America of poverty, is hidden today in a way it never was before. Its millions are socially invisible to the rest of us. . . . Poverty is often off the beaten track. It always has been. . . . They [the poor] have no face, they have no voice. . . . They are dispossessed in terms of what the rest of the nation enjoyed, in terms of what the society could provide if it had the will. They live on the fringes, the margin. They watch the movies and read the magazines of affluent America and these

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[58] Natalie Wilson's point is heavily influenced by Judith Butler's theory, whose gender-focused perspective on the abject body is easily applicable to social position, race, physical deformity, or mental disorder. For Butler, the abject becomes so when it exceeds the frame of purity defined by society—where we find only "what qualifies as bodies that matter, ways of living that count as 'life,' lives worth protecting, lives worth saving, lives worth grieving" (16).

tell them that they are internal exiles.[59] (101-03)

Even though economic criteria are fundamental in order for the prevalent ideology to marginalize the underworld that makes up the Trystero, racial, sexual, physical, and psychic criteria also play a major role—not to say these factors often lead to economic exclusion as well. It is safe to say that the Trystero is the literary representation of the other United States: that of the poor, the underprivileged, homosexuals, hobos, the non-white, the physically deformed, the mentally disturbed. The Trystero might as well include the rebellious children of affluent American society, who, as suggested by Roszak above, were eager to distance themselves from the generation of their parents. As John Johnston argues, "How could any such grouping be unified, except in the negative unity of their difference? They cannot be, except by an order of signs that remains as ambiguous, heterogeneous, and forever contingent upon other circumstances as they themselves are" (69). The muted post horn, consequently, is the symbol that unites them in the void they find outside normative American society.

Oedipa, in the end, proves to be much more than just a literary character. Her early blindness to anything foreign to her impermeable and comfortable suburban reality resembles the blindness of normative American society to its ignored reality. As Johnston points out, "As she later acknowledges, Oedipa has been blind to what official discourse (sanctified reason, approved forms of sanity, the "common sense" of the dominant political order) and its communication channels exclude and repress, even though this other reality has always been present, easy to see 'if only she'd looked'"(70). *The Crying of Lot 49* is a novel of the transitional period of the counterculture in that it draws attention to the "silent empire" of the Trystero that had

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[59] Harrington's study *The Other America* was published in 1962, just in the middle of the transitional years we are analyzing.

remained unacknowledged by the larger American society. To put it another way, this text grasps the feeling of uncertainty of the generation that was caught up in the deceptively calm waters of the immediate post-Beat years. It also prophesies the countercultural outcry that marked the late 1960s. Oedipa's own crisis of "what to believe in" during and after her odyssey through San Francisco (Duyfhuizen 80) therefore represents the cultural and generational crisis that was brewing during the first half of the 1960s.

The contrast between San Francisco and fictional San Narciso is instrumental for the analysis of space in the novel. Both communities function as spaces that affect the forces in dispute in *The Crying of Lot 49*. In this case, San Francisco is defined as cultural space by its opposition to what San Narciso represents. The narrator introduces to us the impersonal nature of Oedipa's city:

> San Narciso lay . . . near LA. Like many places in California it was less an identifiable city than a group of concepts – census tracts, special purpose bond-issue districts, shopping nuclei, all overlaid with access roads to its own freeway. . . . She [Oedipa] drove into San Narciso on a Sunday, in a rented Impala. Nothing was happening. She looked down a slope, needing to squint for the sunlight, on to a vast sprawl of houses which had grown up altogether, like a well-tended crop, from the dull brown earth; and she thought of the time she'd opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. (*Crying* 14)

We are presented with a city that lacks a character. A paradigmatic American suburb, San Narciso is anything but a community. Instead, it appears to be an urban area whose only piece of identity as a city is its detachment from neighboring suburbs for

administrative and statistical purposes. Following Michel de Certeau, San Narciso is an empty space, since there is no urban practice in it (117). Hyperbolic as Pynchon's description may be, we can easily infer that nothing outside the norm usually happens in San Narciso. That is, unlike livelier and more diverse cities like San Francisco, life in Oedipa's suburb is mostly domestic, and the few bits of public life rely on the basic pillars of American suburbia: the freeway, the shopping mall, and the generally out-of-town workplace. San Narciso is an empty grid because it lacks citizens that add their own "vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables," and who break the standardization by filling the streets with the "forests of their desires and goals"—that is, because its urban space is "unpracticed" (Certeau xxi, 117). The comparison with a printed circuit evidences an urban layout that makes San Narciso no different from the average American city. As Debra A. Castillo puts it, the city is presented as "a 'circuit card' of hieroglyphic streets and houses reflecting back (how can it not do so, with Narcissus as a nominal referent?) the observing eye of the automotive self" (28). In the mid-century United States homogeneity proves essential even in terms of urban layout when it comes to preserving its symbols of progress and delusional success. In this novel, then, San Narciso stands for the official United States itself, the one promoted and legitimized by the dominant ideology. Pynchon's portrait of San Narciso underpins this feeling: "Smog hung all around the horizon, the sun on the bright beige countryside was painful; she and the Chevy seemed parked at the centre of an odd, religious instant. As if, on some other frequency, or out of the eye of some whirlwind rotating too slow for her heated skin even to feel the centrifugal coolness of, words were being spoken" (*Crying* 15). This excerpt suggests the image of San Narciso as a fortified community isolated from any external influence—a symbol of mainstream American society. The

alternative frequency the narrator mentions suggests a concealed reality whose presence is vaguely known and heard yet haughtily ignored from inside the fortress. We can argue that the narrator evokes a powerful image that shows the unofficial portion of American society knocking at the gates of its official counterpart. In the transitional years of the counterculture that frame this novel, Pynchon already warns that the discontented are beginning to be heard—although still weakly.

Unlike San Narciso, San Francisco offers a friendly image in *The Crying of Lot 49*. Contrary to Oedipa's community, not only does San Francisco let in the noise coming from the unofficial United States; it also allows the marginal to be part of its identity. San Francisco guides Oedipa through its underworld during her nighttime odyssey and shows her the alternative reality that San Narciso and she herself—both in their own way—had locked outside. The city is "infected" (*Crying* 80) in that it leaves room for the non-normative values the prevailing ideology had prevented from spreading through the white, self-complacent, middle-class United States. In light of the cultural and generational conflict addressed by Pynchon, San Francisco—that is, the emblem of the alternative society—enfolds Oedipa—or, normative society—to the point that,

> The city was hers, as, made up and sleeked so with the customary words and images (cosmopolitan, culture, cable cars) it had not been before: she had safe-passage tonight to its far blood's branchings, be they capillaries too small for than peering into, or vessels mashed together in shameless municipal hickeys, out on the skin for all but tourists to see. (*Crying* 81)

Oedipa's *dérive*, crucially fueled by her emotional disorientation—an element central to the psychogeographical experience (Debord, "Dérive" 52),— thus turns out successful.

In her accomplished psychogeographical takeover of the city, Oedipa manages to create a "situation." Debord defines the construction of situations as "the concrete construction of temporary settings of life and their transformation into a higher, passionate nature" ("Report" 44). Situations are a response to the capitalistic conversion of the enjoyable and ephemeral experiences of life into commodities.[60] A situation is intended to reclaim control over those experiences by setting up a temporary atmosphere favorable to the fulfillment of true human desires. Oedipa's situation, in fact, does favor her quest for meaning. In parallel, this quest, in the form of a *dérive*, proves prophetic if we consider the cultural conflict of the Sixties. While the overt generational discrepancy of the Sixties would become fully visible only then, by the time Oedipa drifted through San Francisco the city was already threatening to spread its "infection"—to put it another way, its peculiar psychogeography—beyond the Bay Area.

In what sense, then, is *The Crying of Lot 49* different from Kerouac's San Francisco texts as far as the exploitation of the city's urban space is concerned? An essential feature of Kerouac's underworld is that, in line with the Beat movement, it remains relatively ignored by society. As we have already seen, Kerouac's literary *alter egos* choose to drop out from mainstream society in an individual way by immersing themselves in the marginal scene of the city. Unlike the movement that exploded in 1960s San Francisco, Kerouac's literary withdrawal is devoid of public display. Even though an unofficial section of American society had surfaced systematically in the Beat texts, their low social profile allowed the official United States to remain relatively unmolested until the Sixties. The muted nature of Pynchon's post horn points at this low profile, since the cultural conflict in the late Fifties, according to him, actually had

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[60] This conversion is called by Debord the *spectacle*, a development of the Marxist notions of fetishism of commodities and alienation. A comprehensive analysis of the *spectacle* can be found in Debord's magnum opus *Society of the Spectacle* (1967).

stayed "muted" as well.

In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon proposes a Debordian use of the San Francisco urban space in the form of a *dérive*. Oedipa reveals herself as a symbol of normative American society whose ideological foundations had remained imperturbable until then. However, when she faces a delirious—yet subconsciously desired—*dérive* through the San Francisco night, the psychogeographical effects of the city turn into an epiphany for her. "This is America, you live in it, you let it happen. Let it unfurl" (*Crying* 103), Oedipa tells herself at one point. San Francisco deploys before her a reality she had ignored for too long: there is much more to the United States than its official American Way of Life. With this allegory, in the transition from the Fifties to the Sixties, Pynchon addresses the anxieties of a time where the counterculture had no definite direction. The San Francisco psychogeography explored by Oedipa sheds light on the "silent empire" of the Trystero, hinting at a new generation that was getting ready to openly challenge the foundations of the political, social, and family values of the United States.

2.3. JOHN WIENERS AND QUEER

SPATIALIZATION IN POST-BEAT SAN FRANCISCO

John Wieners's contribution to the San Francisco literary scene represents a particular case. After associating closely with Charles Olson and Robert Duncan at Black Mountain College, his actual eruption as a writer took place during his fleeting yet prolific stay in the city in the very late 1950s—just as the strong influence of the San Francisco Beat movement was approaching its twilight. Even though his texts from this time owe much to the Beat literature produced until then, Wieners's genuineness makes him hard to label in this temporal context. Asked if he considers himself within the Beat sphere, Wieners answers, "Yes, I do. . . . Well, the movement got some publicity, and I didn't" (qtd. in Petro, "The Hipster of Joy Street"). Others, like fellow poet Robert Creeley, see Wieners in a class of his very own:

> If "Beat" is to cover poets at the time who had, as John, put themselves entirely in the line . . . then he was certainly one. But I think better to see him as *The New American Poetry* locates him, singular and primary—not simply as a "Beat" poet, nor defined only by drug use, nor a regional poet, nor one of a "school." Because that begs all the particulars of John's writing, his immense articulation of the situation and feelings in a relationship with another. (qtd. in Petro, "The Hipster of Joy Street")

Wieners's writing resists labeling and, furthermore, is somewhat distanced from that of the San Francisco Beats. His style, closer to confessional poetry than that of most of his peers, has been referred to as "melancholy lyricism" (Ward 76). Pamela Petro points out that, while the Beats ended up assimilated by mainstream culture, Wieners's

"lifestyle was always in service to his poetry, so he simply went on living to write, often in poverty, sometimes in mental institutions, always in obscurity. He quietly became, in effect, Rimbaud's *voyant*" ("The Hipster of Joy Street"). Petro draws a pertinent parallelism between Wieners and French poet Arthur Rimbaud, who expresses his take on the role of the poet in a letter sent to Paul Demeny in 1871:

> The Poet makes himself a *seer* by a long, gigantic and rational *derangement* of *all the senses*. All forms of love, suffering, and madness. He searches himself. He exhausts all poisons in himself and keeps only their quintessences. Unspeakable torture where he needs all his faith, all his superhuman strength, where he becomes among all men the great patient, the great criminal, the one accursed—and the supreme Scholar! (373)

Wieners certainly echoes Rimbaud's description, for his writing capitalizes largely on his struggle with drug abuse, mental instability, and social exclusion. In Wieners, the frontier between the man and the poetic voice becomes blurrier than ever in our study of the poets of the San Francisco counterculture. As Allen Ginsberg describes, "John Wieners's glory is solitary, as pure poet—a man reduced to loneness in poetry, without worldly distractions—and a man become one with his poetry" (qtd. in "The Hipster of Joy Street"). His case can be seen as the realization of Kerouac's attempt to appropriate the voice and life style of the social outcasts, as we have previously seen. Unlike Kerouac, whose literature moves back and forth from Catholic to Buddhist spirituality and from marginal life to the safety net represented by his mother,[61] there is no

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[61] For further reading on Kerouac's internal struggle between his Catholic upbringing and his interest in Buddhism, see Matt Theado's *Understanding Jack Kerouac* (University of South Carolina Press, 2000) and Sarah Haynes's article "An Exploration of Jack Kerouac's Buddhism: Text and Life" (*Contemporary Buddhism*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2005, pp. 153-71), and Richard S. Sorrell's "The Catholicism of Jack Kerouac" (*Studies in Religion/Sciences Religeuses*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1982, pp. 189-200). An illustrative study of Kerouac's familial relationships can be found in Sorrell's article "La Famille of Jack Kerouac: Ethnicity and the Franco-American Family" (*Journal of Psychoanalytic Anthropology*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1981, pp. 199-222).

ambivalence in Wieners, who consistently devotes himself to a life on the margins where everything revolves around poetry. "A poet only writes poems. That is all he should have to do" (*Scott Street* 48), affirms Wieners cogently in his journal *The Journal of John Wieners Is to Be Called 707 Scott Street for Billie Holiday, 1959* (1996). To him, in a very similar vein to Rimbaud's *voyant*, pain is inseparable from poetry (*Scott Street* 51).

Two main elements combine to make Wieners the quintessential social outsider during his time in San Francisco: his mental issues—stemming primarily from his self-destructive drug habit—and his homosexuality. From the spatial perspective of our research, the use Wieners makes of homosexuality in his San Francisco texts is particularly appealing. His stay in the city, where he lived from 1958 to 1960, coincided with the progressive loss of momentum of the San Francisco Beat scene. Beatdom, in a way, had become institutionalized, which would make room for an intriguing transition from the countercultural Fifties to the countercultural Sixties. It is our contention that, in this context, Wieners's poetry makes a pivotal contribution to the shaping of a lasting queer space in San Francisco.[62]

It is not that homosexuality had been alien to the Beat community before Wieners. Several San Francisco Beats, along with some other authors involved in the San Francisco Renaissance, were openly homosexual or bisexual and so expressed it in their writings—Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky, Jack Spicer, or Robert Duncan, to name a few. Even in other authors' works, such as Jack Kerouac's, homosociality and homoeroticism are recurrent. The city's countercultural scene was therefore particularly

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[62] Even though queer theory is not at the center of our critical approach, this chapter will be using some terms and concepts pertaining to this field. A very brief list of bibliographical suggestions for the reader interested in queer theory includes Nikki Sullivan's *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York UP, 2003), Annamarie Jagose's *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York UP, 1996), and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1990).

challenging to the heteronormativity of society at large. The publication of Ginsberg's poem "Howl"—an explicit paean to, among other subjects, sexual diversity—in 1956 was crucial for the opening of a male homosexual space in 1950s San Francisco. The outcome of the 1957 obscenity trial prompted by the poem only underpinned this newly created space.

The city's queer space, however, failed to reach a character of its own during the Fifties. The different subcultures—hipster, queer, black—that coexisted in the Beat community would blend together under the generic Beat umbrella. John D'Emilio, in his discussion of Paul Goodman's book *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized Society* (1960)—"one of the few serious critical treatments of the beats," according to D'Emilio,— draws attention to the many structural characteristics shared by the Beat and queer communities: "outcastness; facing prejudice; protective exclusiveness; in-group loyalty; fear of the cops; exotic, or at least not-standard-American, art and folkways" (93). In addition, the geography of both tendencies in San Francisco, as D'Emilio highlights, "overlapped considerably, with the beats centered in North Beach, and many of the city's gay male and lesbian bars stretching from North Beach over to the Tenderloin and to the Polk Street area" (93).

It is in this queer westward expansion toward Polk Gulch where Wieners's San Francisco poetry displays its spatial appeal. The author's stay in the city is divided mainly into the period when he lived at 707 Scott Street—in the then-seedy Alamo Square section of the Western Addition—and the period of time that he spent in the Wentley, a low-rent boardinghouse in Polk Gulch. The latter remained San Francisco's premiere gay neighborhood until the 1970s,[63] when many gays began to move to the

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[63] Polk Gulch housed, as Manuel Castells notes, "for the first time, an independent gay residential area developed around the meeting places opened on Polk Street" (155).

Castro. In Wieners's years, the neighborhood was largely on the fringes of society. As Geoff Ward puts it, "it served . . . as a place to pick up rent boys; not so much a dangerous as an unhappy area" (74-75). Polk Gulch would be the scenario of the coalescence of what Castells deems "the twin evils in the eyes of puritan morality": homosexuality and prostitution (141). In the heart of this area, at the intersection of Polk and Sutter streets, stood Wieners's hotel, which gives name to his most recognized poetry collection, *The Hotel Wentley Poems* (1958). As a queer *voyant*, the sort of locale he chooses as retreat after a breakup is not incidental. In Ward's description,

> High on the Polk Street side of the three-storey building a sign announces Rooms for Rent and gives a telephone number, though there is . . . no obvious means by which accommodation could be reached from the street. The outlet used to be a Foster's Cafeteria . . . . Open all night, it would have served reheated pasta and dishwater coffee to a clientele of the old, the poor, the addicted and the just-passing-through. Above . . . the rest room – in this case a haunt of furtive commerce – ran the dark halls of the rooming house. (73)

At a time when the gay rights struggle was still far away and queer reality remained invisible to the larger society, Wieners plays with the notions of gay and decadent when it comes to opening a post-Beat space for homosexuality in San Francisco. In this sense, Lawrence Knopp underscores the traditional portrayal that heteronormative society makes of "gay entertainment areas . . . as dangerous sadomasochistic underworlds, of red-light districts as threatening to 'family values', of 'non-white' neighbourhoods as centers of rape," whereas suburbia is seen as a place "of blissful monogamous (and patriarchal) heterosexuality" (136). To heterosexist American society, then, Wieners's queer space is threatening. Yet for that very reason, it also remains unspeakably magnetic due to its dangerous yet potentially liberatory traits, which confer a heavy—

and prohibited—erotic burden to it in the eyes of the dominant order (Knopp 139).

Faced with the incomprehension—not to say the disapproval and hostility—of the larger heteronormative society, the gay space shaped by Wieners functions as an "imagined community"—that is, people having nothing in common with each other in their everyday lives but who share the image of communion in their minds (B. Anderson 6).[64] However imagined, this sense of community is what turns Wieners's space into a place, for its members find themselves bonded by what Lucy Lippard calls the pull of place: the "geographical component of the psychological need to belong somewhere, one antidote to a prevailing alienation" (7). The community, as Wieners celebrates in "A Poem of Cocksuckers" (1958), cannot help but coming together and strengthening its unity against the common threat:

> Well we can go
> in the queers bars
> . . . .
>   On our right the fairies
> giggle in their lacquered
> voices & blow
> smoke in your eyes let them
> it's a nigger's world
> and we retain strength.
> . . . .
>   It is all here between
> the powdered legs &
> painted eyes of the fairy
> friends who do not fail us

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[64] Especially in the late 1950s, Polk Gulch began to welcome a large number of gays coming from other areas of the United States enticed by the sense of community irradiated by San Francisco's queer haven. The level of gay visibility at that time, although still reduced, would be greater in San Francisco than elsewhere in the country, which, combined with what David Bell and Gill Valentine describe as "the opportunities offered by city life—anonymity and heterogeneity as well as sheer population size" (7), would be essential to the growth of Polk Gulch.

in our hour of

    despair. (*Hotel Wentley* 36)

The author draws a powerful parallelism between his queer urban space and "a nigger's world," thus referencing Norman Mailer's essay "The White Negro" (1958). Like the hipsters Mailer writes about, Wieners denounces that the San Francisco gay community is forced to remain underground, ever-alert, and use a shared linguistic code full of ambiguity that helps them stay safe from hostile outsiders. In another layer of meaning, the author brings the focus on the active harassment conducted by the police for decades on behalf of the heteronormative American society—which translated social bitterness into legal difficulties for the San Francisco gay community. Despite the city's apparent level of tolerance towards homosexuality in the late 1950s and early 1960s, local authorities had generally taken care of keeping the publicity of its ever-growing gay population under control since the 1920s (Castells 140-41).[65] In Wiener's temporal context, the City intensified the repression against any recognizable gay leisure "institution"—that is, those spaces of the city that had become markedly *queerized*: gay male cruising areas, theaters screening homosexual pornography, or, especially, queer bars (D'Emilio 86). Gay bars were massively targeted for they always held a strong symbolism in the queer community. As Barbara Weightman claims, they "incorporate and reflect certain characteristics of the gay community: secrecy and stigmatisation. They do not accommodate the eyes of outsiders, they have low imageability, and they can be truly known only from within" (9). Gay bars became the ultimate gay space, intangible for heteronormative society. Therefore, it became a common police practice

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[65] For concise yet explanatory historical overviews of the tension between the San Francisco gay community and the local authorities prior to the gay rights movement era, see Chapter 14 of *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (1983), by Manuel Castells, and John D'Emilio's 1981 essay "Gay Politics, Gay Community: San Francisco's Experience."

to infiltrate them with undercover vice officers (Brady 24).

Wieners bemoans the extreme policing of his queer space in his journal:

> The city is a fabled labyrinth, and sustenance there is subterranean. Life on the surface regiment, ordered mechanized the people move as robots, displaying neither love nor fear: Sophistication and of course the infinite variety of individual acts made to break the stereotype. . . . At night when there is only one eye and the police prowl as roaches thru every layer. Searching like poets every face, gait, manner of dress. (*Scott Street* 53-54)

The author implies that homosexuality in San Francisco necessarily remains "subterranean," for the police put great effort into keeping gay visibility to a minimum. He also takes the opportunity to deride heteronormativity, which he calls the "surface regiment." To Wieners, a society that represses sexual diversity becomes disturbingly standardized, or, to use his own vocabulary, "robotic." This criminalization of the gay community also has an impact on "A Poem for Vipers":

> I sit in Lees. At 11:40 PM with
> Jimmy the pusher. He teaches me
> Ju Ju. Hot on the table before us
> shrimp foo young, rice and mushroom
> chow yuke. Up the street under the wheels
> of a strange car is his stash — The ritual.
> We make it. And have made it.
> For months now together after midnight.
> Soon I know the fuzz will
> interrupt, will arrest Jimmy and
> I shall be placed on probation. The poem
> does not lie to us. We lie under
> its law, alive in the glamour of this hour

able to enter into the sacred places
of his dark people, who carry secrets
glassed in their eyes and hide words
under the coat of their tongue. (*Hotel Wentley* 28)

Although homosexuality apparently is not the main focus of the poem, Wieners, through ambiguity and wordplay, manages to slip it into the text with the same care the gay community protects itself from heterosexism and police harassment. In an accurate analysis of this poem, Geoff Ward points out that the word "it," simple and ambiguous as it is, "stretches promiscuously across sexual and criminal possibilities" (76). As though it were another loose reference to Mailer's "The White Negro," the poem plays with the linguistic ambiguity shared by those who feel at risk in a hostile milieu, and navigates the criminal underworld of the city between drug dealing and gay sex. In this sense, Ward adds, "'hide words / under the coats of their tongue' implies . . . the hipster's code of a secret society at odds with the straight world, the hiding of illegal bits-and-bobs in a long coat, and the coating of the tongue the morning after; to say the least" (76).

The poet tries to find an explanation to the criminalization of the gay community and the policing of the San Francisco queer space in the irrational fear of heteronormative society. In this sense, the author writes in his journal,

The 80 bus going the other way, to Market Street,
sounds its squashed beep, peculiar to San Francisco, where
they are afraid any loud noise would start another earth-
quake. And yet we all go around screaming. (*Scott Street* 14)

In an indirect way, Wieners claims that both the San Francisco authorities and its

heteronormative society are afraid of dealing with the spatial presence of a queer community (a "loud noise"). The poet implies that any sort of integration of homosexuality in the city life is disruptive for the interests of the dominant order in social terms (an "earthquake"). During Wieners's time in San Francisco, there took place, as D'Emilio puts it, "an *unprecedented* degree of public discussion of homosexuality" (87). Quoting an unnamed local reporter, D'Emilio explains that "San Francisco parents were uncomfortably alone among the fathers and mothers of America in having to field such questions from 11 and 12 year olds as 'Daddy, what is a homosexual?'" (87). The idea that there was much more to human sexuality than heteronormativity began to cross the threshold of the San Francisco households, gaining a visibility that made it problematic for normative society.

The sense of community in Wieners's queer space proves crucial for the self-assertion of its individuals and the creation of a stable common identity. As David Woodhead argues, "Community is a shelter, a site of shared injustice, a symbolic representation" (215). Such is the case in Wieners's gay space, where community boosts, on the one hand, dignity and self-pride—"and yet we all go around screaming," brags the poet in the excerpt above, in spite of a social context hostile to the city's queer reality—and, on the other hand, solidarity and caring for each other against oppression —the "fairy / friends who do not fail us / in our hour of / despair" that Wieners celebrates in "A Poem for Cocksuckers."

In this chapter, we have tried to isolate, among the virtues of John Wieners's poetic legacy, his most valuable contribution to the power of space in the mid-century San Francisco counterculture. We find that his success rests in pioneering an actual spatialization of homosexuality in the city. While it had gained its own space within the

Beat community in the Fifties, homosexuality had remained amalgamated with other socially and culturally alternative sensibilities under the Beat label. Wieners's poetry belongs to a temporal context where normative American society had buffered the impact of the Beat Generation. In the slow transition towards the Sixties, the author—a product rather than a member of the Beat experience—takes queer identity to a level of its own, creating an independent space—and a place—for it in the human geography of post-Beat San Francisco.

Wieners's efforts, moreover, help link in a way the Fifties to the liberating atmosphere of the Sixties. As Ward points up, the author "was not to know that a diluted version of the social attitudes implicit in [his poetry] would become hugely fashionable within ten years" (77). Ward refers to drug use, life under police pressure, and liberated sexuality. In actuality, though, the agendas of the San Francisco countercultural currents of the Sixties and the gay liberation movement would rarely get to run in parallel. The notion of *free love* advocated in the Sixties was heavily centered around straight males. Yet it fueled the energy of gay rights advocates, who, flying solo as an organized force since the mid-1960s, sought to the extend the liberation to the whole spectrum of human sexuality. It would not be exaggerated to conclude that Wieners's queer spatialization is seminal in the articulation of the local gay rights movement, which would explode in San Francisco only a few years later with the 1966 Compton's Cafeteria riots,[66] leading

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[66] The Compton's Cafeteria riots would take place in the Tenderloin district in August 1966 sparked by the police harassment endured by the San Francisco transgender community. (Cross-dressing was still illegal at that time.) Over several nights, pickets formed by transgender people, joined by other members of the local LGBTQ community, would confront the police in the cafeteria. A milestone in the gay rights struggle both in San Francisco and the United States, it contributed greatly to the recognition of transgender people. Furthermore, this event prepared the ground for the Stonewall riots of 1969, which are considered the symbolic turning point that led to a cohesive national LGBTQ rights movement. This time, a series of violent demonstrations by members of the New York gay community took place in reaction against the homophobic police raid of the Stonewall Inn, in the Greenwich Village. For further insight into the Compton's Cafeteria riots, see the documentary *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria*, directed by Victor Silverman and Susan Stryker (Frameline, 2005). For further reading on the Stonewall riots, see *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution*, by David Carter (St. Martin's Griffin, 2004).

through the years, among other achievements, to the historic election of Harvey Milk for city supervisor in 1977.

PART THREE: THE SIXTIES

3.1. DISSENT ON STAGE: RADICAL THEATER

AND THE RECLAMATION OF THE PUBLIC SPACE

The San Francisco Beats would probably have not imagined how influential their determination to take literature out of the academic sanctum would ever be. At the beginning of the Sixties, their views on the value of the social space remained as present as in the Fifties. The early 1960s, which did not yet have an idiosyncratic counterculture in the city like that of the Sixties, saw the flourishing of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, a radical theater company founded in 1959 with a heavy focus on outdoor performance and socio-political satire.[67] By no means was the Mime Troupe an isolated phenomenon in the country, though. In like manner, several other theatrical troupes with a strong political engagement proliferated nationwide by its warmth. In Mississippi, the Free Southern Theater was born in 1963, inspired by the Civil Rights Movement. This group would focus on a genuinely black theater dealing with the identity and problems of the African-American community.[68] Roughly in parallel, El Teatro Campesino was founded in Delano, California, as the cultural wing of the César Chávez-led United

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[67] The Mime Troupe would present its first performance, *Mime and Words*, on October 29, 1959. The core group of the company was formed initially by its founder R.G. Davis along with Dawn Grey, Susan Darby, and Robert Doyle. Other influential members of the Troupe, like Peter Berg, Peter Coyote, or Roberto La Morticella, would join in the following years. Even though the company remains active and successful today, its first ten years were certainly capital for the radical theater of the United States. For further reading on this period, see Davis's *The San Francisco Mime Troupe: The First Ten Years* (1975). For a panoramic view of the Troupe through the 1990s, with a compilation of the scripts of its most relevant plays, see Susan Vaneta Mason's *The San Francisco Mime Troupe Reader* (2005).

[68] Detailed discussions of the history of the Free Southern Theater can be found in Thomas C. Dent, Richard Schechner, and Gilbert Moses's *The Free Southern Theater by the Free Southern Theater: A Documentary of the South's Radical Black Theater with Journal, Letters, Poetry, and Essays, and a Play Written By Those Who Built It* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1969) and Annemarie Bean's article "The Free Southern Theater: Mythology and the Moving between Movements," included in *Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theaters and Their Legacies*, edited by James M. Harding and Cindy Rosenthal (U of Michigan P, 2006).

Farm Workers.[69] From early skits performed in the fields that addressed the lives of the Mexican and Chicano farm workers, El Teatro Campesino would subsequently evolve towards broader themes that related to the Chicano community beyond the fields such as the Vietnam War and racism.[70] Radical theater, therefore, found its way through the 1960s United States partially as a means to raise awareness of the violation of the civil rights of non-white communities from an artistic perspective. In San Francisco, conversely, radical theater would target not only civil rights issues but the core values of the American normative culture at the levels of society, economy, and family. Theatrical subversion would reach its climax in the city with the rise to prominence of the Diggers in 1966, whose life-acting approach to community action would replace the Mime Troupe at the vanguard of the city's radical theater scene through 1968.[71] But what is most remarkable about the San Francisco radical theater of the Sixties is its emphasis on the takeover of the city's public space as the central challenge to the dominant order. In this chapter, we will examine how these theatrical manifestations articulate their reclamation of the city and, concurrently, give shape to a politics of the public space that would influence decisively most of the countercultural currents of the Sixties.

Whenever we discuss controversy over the public space, we must turn

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[69] The United Farm Workers of America is a labor union resulting from the fusion of the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee and the National Farm Workers Association. Under the leadership of the Mexican-American activist César Chávez, the union attained great prominence thanks to a radical yet nonviolent stance that turned the farm workers' struggle into a moral cause with nationwide support. For further reading on the United Farm Workers of America and César Chávez's activism, see *The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement*, by Susan Ferriss, Ricardo Sandoval, and Diana Hembree (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1998).

[70] For critical overviews of El Teatro Campesino's historial evolution, see Jorge Huerta's "The Legacy of El Teatro Campesino," in the Harding and Rosenthal-edited *Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theaters and Their Legacies*, and Ingrid Mündel's "Performing (R)evolution: The Story of El Teatro Campesino" (*Postcolonial Text*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2007, n. pag.).

[71] Born in the fall of 1966, the Diggers were founded by former Mime Troupers—Peter Berg, Peter Coyote, Roberto La Morticella, Brooks Bucher—joined in their effort by key members Emmett Grogan and Billy Murcott. For a broad overview of the Diggers' history and archives, see their unofficial website *The Digger Archives* (www.diggers.org), which has maintained alive their legacy until our days.

necessarily to Henri Lefebvre. In his influential study *The Production of Space* (1974),

he states that space is socially *produced* (26, emphasis added). That is, from his Marxist

viewpoint, space is a social construct that actually reproduces social relations of

production:

> Space is not produced in the sense that a kilogram of sugar or a yard of cloth is
> produced. Nor is it an aggregate of the places or locations of such products as sugar,
> wheat or cloth. . . . [I]t is at once a precondition and a result of social superstructures.
> The state and each of its constituent institutions call for spaces—but spaces which they
> can then organize according to their specific requirements; so there is no sense in which
> space can be treated solely as an *a priori* condition of these institutions and the state
> which presides over them. Is space a social relationship? Certainly—but one which is
> inherent to property relationships (especially the ownership of the earth, of land) and
> also closely bound up with the forces of production (which impose a form on that earth
> or land). (*Production of Space* 85)

In a capitalist context, this production of space results in a dominant elite that, relying

on an unmatched financial power, and with the cooperation—or rather, submission—of

the state, rules over a dominated society. This elite, moreover, has a major say in the

configuration and evolution of the ensemble of values that set the social standard, for

these values, in most cases, meet the interests of this elite. As a consequence, the public

space, according to Lefebvre, becomes abstracted: "[Abstract space is] a space of

quantification and growing homogeneity, a merchandised space where all the elements

are exchangeable and thus interchangeable; a police space in which the state tolerates no

resistance and no obstacles. Economic space and political space thus converge towards

an elimination of all differences" ("Space" 192). The abstraction of the public space

thus involves, as Puneet Dhaliwal puts it, that "social life is subordinated to the logic of

capital as opposed to being directed towards fulfilling the diverse needs of human community. In Marxian terms, space is conceived so as to maximize its commercial *exchange value* rather than to enhance its *use value* for local communities" (257). The intention of the dominant elite, unsurprisingly, is to perpetuate the status quo through the abstract urban space. When it comes to preserving the profitability of the abstract space, Lefebvre argues that the hegemonic power develops simultaneous strategies

> to force worrisome groups, the workers among others, out towards the periphery; to make available spaces near the centres scarcer, so increasing their value; to organize the centre as locus of decision, wealth, power and information; to find allies for the hegemonic class within the middle strata and within the 'elite'; to plan production and flows from the spatial point of view; and so on. (*Production of Space* 375)

In a Lefebvrian interpretation, therefore, suburbia—the quintessential urban spatial phenomenon in the postwar United States—is to be read as a direct consequence of the survival of the abstract space. Traditionally vilified by the counterculture due to its alleged robotic uniformity and cultural numbness in contrast with the vibrant and diverse city, suburbia is actually a product of the politics of space imposed by the mid-century financial and political powers.[72] By forcing the middle and working classes out of and far from the urban downtown, the dominating elite makes sure that the core of the city—the true symbol of urban power—remains under its full control in its pursuance of the unmolested preservation of the status quo.

Considering this context, the San Francisco Mime Troupe, and especially its founder R.G. Davis, would prove very aware of how much was at stake in the company's daring intrusion into the city's public space. On the one hand, they proposed

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[72] For an authoritative study of suburbia as a unique American phenomenon, see Kenneth T. Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford UP, 1985).

a transposition of art and performance to open space—a space unconstrained by walls that would desacralize the artistic expression in an attempt to make it less solemn and more democratic. On the other hand, the conquest of the public space would bring about an actual challenge to the status quo, for it would make more easily available to the average American an awkwardly discordant perspective on society and culture. In short, the *education*—or rather, reeducation—of the everyday citizen and the democratization of art would meet in the Mime Troupe's politics of the public space.

By 1965, the Mime Troupe was already a chief spearhead of the city's counterculture. Created in 1959, the company's aesthetic and political engagement evolved during the first half of the 1960s encouraged by the ever-increasing social unrest against the government caused by, among others reasons, the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam war (Mason, "The 1960s" 14). Starting with performances given mainly in closed venues, they gradually turned to the public space as a stage.[73] Between 1962 and the summer of 1965, the Troupe gave over ten park performances thanks to a permit granted by the San Francisco Parks and Recreation Commission. This period would define what Susan Vaneta Mason calls the Mime Troupe's signature style: "Free performances in public parks employing music and a broad, improvisational, physical acting style, in anachronistic productions updated with topical references" ("Troupe Legacy" 198). Their orientation to the public space earned them great visibility, as they became more and more popular in the local media. Kenneth Rexroth, who had become an authoritative cultural commentator on the city's local affairs for the *San Francisco Examiner* by the early 1960s, writes,

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[73] The Mime Troupe's first performance ever, *Mime and Words*, took place at the San Francisco Art Institute. It would then be followed by other indoor performances at, for instance, Reed College in Portland, Oregon, or the Encore Theater in San Francisco in 1960 and 1961. In the summer of 1962, *Dowry* would get to be the Troupe's first summer production in the parks of San Francisco (Davis xlix, l).

Audiences in the parks in the Western Addition of the Mission turn out to be no different than those 300 years ago in Italy or 2,000 years ago in Greece or Alexandria. They loved it. Let's hope this is an entering wedge, and that eventually we will have all sorts of musical and dramatic activity in the parks. I can think of few better ways to rise the muscle of a flabby community. ("The Mime Troupe")

Such an intense contact of the Troupe's subversive political messages with mainstream society in the public space became bothersome for the San Francisco local authorities. Veritably, the company was breaking the artificial peacefulness of the city's abstract space. In Lefebvre's description, abstract space

implies a tacit agreement, a non-aggression pact, a contract, as it were, of non-violence. It imposes reciprocity and communality of use. In the street, each individual is supposed not to attack those he meets; anyone who transgresses this law is deemed guilty of a criminal act. A space of this kind presupposes the existence of a 'spatial economy' closely allied, though not identical, to a verbal economy. This economy valorizes certain relationships between people in particular places (shops, cafes, cinemas, etc.), and thus gives rise to connotative discourses concerning these places; these in turn generate 'consensuses' or conventions according to which, for example, such and such place is supposed to be trouble-free, a quiet area where people go peacefully to have a good time, and so forth. (*Production of Space* 56)

That is, Lefebvre suggests that the social pact of peaceful coexistence that regulates the use of space cynically conceals, at a higher level, the imposition of the political and financial establishment of using the abstract space only according to and in favor of their interests. Davis's Mime Troupe would not disrupt cohabitation in the streets, yet their radical political and social views were defiant to the dominant order. As the confrontation with the city's authorities escalated in the summer of 1965, the company consolidated its theatrical identity around the notion of guerrilla theater. As Michael

William Doyle puts it,

> Guerrilla theater grew directly out of Davis's rediscovery of commedia dell'arte . . . . Commedia performers customarily make sport of human foibles and universal complaints while burlesquing the most socially or politically prominent members of a given community. . . . It recuperated the carnivalesque . . . and transposed it to a modern setting. Furthermore, it furnished the Mime Troupe with an earthly, subversive art form that was tailored for itinerant players who found their audiences in the streets and marketplaces. Commedia troupes adapted their skits to local issues, supported themselves by passing the hat and therefore were not beholden by wealthy benefactors, and were able to quickly disperse and slip out of town when the magistrates took offense and came calling.[74] (72-73)

Davis's own essays on guerrilla theater exude an eclectic Marxism incompatible with the order established in the abstract space. He singles out private property as the root of the ills of the United States, for it puts at risk "the idea of community so necessary to a healthy individual" (v). In contrast to society's assumed self-centeredness, Davis advocates a "life-style that replaces most, if not all, middle-class capitalistic assumptions" (vi). At the core of Davis's project, therefore, there is the determination to overturn the social relations of production that, according to Lefebvre, have configured space the way we inhabit it—in its abstract form. Theater, from Davis's perspective, must aspire to teach, direct towards change, and be an example of that change (i). In this sense, he defends guerrilla theater as an essential social agent: "For those who like their

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[74] Davis elaborates on the inspiration drawn from commedia dell'arte in *The San Francisco Mime Troupe: The First Ten Years* (1975): "Why commedia? The intrinsic nature of commedia dell'arte is its working-class viewpoint. Its origins are the alleys and corners of the marketplace. The Italian street hustler in the 1500s with an instrument turned medicine man, added a singer, picked up a few *jongeleurs,* jumped onto a platform of barrels covered with boards in the piazza and commedia became a recognizable entity (and a way to make a living). It pleased its audience by farting and belching at the stuffier stuffed classes" (15). Davis finds in commedia dell'arte, therefore, an early expression of class consciousness and class struggle that matches his own Marxist views and can be easily adapted to his claim of the public space.

theatre pure of social issues, I must say—FUCK YOU! buddy, theatre IS a social entity. It can dull the minds of the citizens, it can wipe out guilt, it can teach all to accept the Great Society and the Amaaaaarican [*sic*] way of life . . . or it can look to changing that society... and that's political" (i). Again, as we have mentioned earlier in this chapter, the point is: taking over the public space with a combination of art both as education and as a democratic experience is the way to reach the consciousness of a numbed society. According to Davis, society as a whole, deadened by a favorable self-image and the delusional short-term virtues of capitalism, is a passive accomplice of the dominant political and financial elite. Davis presents the American involvement in the Vietnam war as an example of how society fails, on a daily basis, to prevent the Establishment from fulfilling its interests as it pleases:

> The Vietnam war has exposed the exploitation and the concomitant irresponsibility. The Little Man and his son or the lower classes and their children, have been told to serve; the professors paid to produce weapons; the military trained to kill and 'win'; the politicians given a mandate to expand influence and profit; although the longshoremen object, they load the ships; although some senators criticize the war, they vote for military budgets; although students talk of revolution, they cannot keep any organization alive more than six months.[75] (x)

In order to put into practice his radical theory, Davis proposes to turn the public space into an irregular battlefield where to implement nonviolent guerrilla warfare-inspired

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[75] Davis's active use of the public space and his explicit opposition to the Vietnam war are links that he shared with the recurrent student protests that would take place concurrently in Berkeley at that time. While this climate of unrest began with the Free Speech Movement's struggle for free on-campus political activism at University of California, Berkeley in 1964, the focus of the protests would evolve into repeated demonstrations against the American involvement in the Vietnam war. The spatial emphasis of these protests, besides numerous sit-ins, would materialize in such events as the occupation of the university's Sproul Hall on December 2, 1964; the multitudinous Vietnam Day march on May 22, 1965; or the march down Telegraph Avenue on October 15, 1965. The climax of the reliance on the subversive power of the public space within and around the Berkeley campus was the occupation of People's Park in the spring of 1969, which led to a violent repression by the police on May15 of that year.

strategies. In fact, we can find exhortations from Davis—very familiar himself with revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara's writings and, principally, his concept of *hit-and-run*—to radical theater performers to "become equipped to pack up and move quickly where you're outnumbered. Never engage the enemy head on. Choose your fighting ground; don't be forced into battle over the wrong issues" (ii). Davis's words undeniably reverberate Guevara's praise of the elusiveness of the guerrilla fighter, who

> uses secretiveness, treachery and surprise . . . . But since the guerrilla band is a division unto itself, and since there are larger zones of territory not controlled by the enemy, it is always possible to carry out guerrilla attacks in such a way as to assure surprise; and it is the duty of the guerrilla fighter to do so. "Hit and run," some call this scornfully, and this is accurate. Hit and run, wait, lie in ambush, again hit and run, and thus repeatedly, without giving any rest to the enemy. (Guevara 54)

Similarly, Davis is aware that the abstract space is guarded by the repressive forces of the dominant elite. Hence his call for the treacherousness and evasiveness of the guerrilla troupe.

Thus did the Mime Troupe become armed from a theoretical point of view for the new situation that followed the revocation of the city permit in the summer of 1965 on obscenity grounds. The Troupe's nonviolent satires, deemed indecorous by the San Francisco political and financial power, were actually acts of *violence* exerted against the abstract space. Lefebvre puts it clearly:

> The fact remains . . . that communal or shared spaces, the possession or consumption of which cannot be entirely privatized, continue to exist [within abstract space]. Cafés, squares and monuments are cases in point. The spatial consensus [the above-mentioned non-aggression pact] . . . constitutes part of civilization as much as do prohibitions against acts considered vulgar or offensive to children, women, old people or the public

in general. Naturally enough, its response to class struggle, as to other forms of *violence*, amounts to a formal and categorical rejection. (*Production of Space* 57, emphasis added)

Lefebvre deplores that it is strictly up to the dominant elite—or its delegates—to determine what is and what is not proper in the public space. Any action within the abstract space that violates the interests of the elite is consequently subject to retaliation. Davis interprets the revocation of the permit precisely in this very sense:

The vice president of the [Parks and Recreation] commission said, "This group has a monumental reputation for ridiculing the police, our city, our government, religion and this commission and staff." And the commission were corporate executives, real estate guys and fundraisers for the mayor who regarded the parks as their private property. (qtd. in Kamiya, "A Mime Troupe Arrest")

The San Francisco Recreation and Parks Commission, controlled by the city's financial elite, had reserved the right to prohibit the public performance of the Mime Troupe's adaptation of Giordano Bruno's play *Candelaio*. The choice of the play was not incidental. Bruno is an emblem of opposition to authoritarian power, for he died executed in 1600 for not retracting his Copernican views (Davis 35). The Mime Troupe's adaptation, as Gary Kamiya describes, "bawdily mocked sexual conventions, and in the commedia dell'arte tradition, it featured liberal use of a candle as a symbolic phallus" ("A Mime Troupe Arrest"). Satirizing the local hegemonic power in a sexually suggestive fashion—although Davis contends it would never be strict obscenity (Davis 36; Kamiya, "A Mime Troupe Arrest)—would certainly be too much of a defiance. Still, despite the prohibition, Davis would go ahead with the performance scheduled for August 7, 1965 in Lafayette Park, which ultimately resulted in the arrest of the Troupe.

Considering the company's signature irreverence, it is safe to say that what was staged that day was an act of provocation to the authority—and a successful one. In fact, actor Peter Coyote, a prominent member of the Mime Troupe those days, recounts that "one day during rehearsal, Ronnie [Davis] confessed that they were probably *not* going to perform the play but intended to get arrested for attempting to perform it without a park permit" (*Sleeping* 32-33). Obviating the guerrilla policy of *hit-and-run*, the company engaged in a passive real-life confrontation with the police that day over the right to use the city's space. As Manzanas and Benito put it, "Standing one's premises is just a way to assert the right to space in a public place" (1). By making the arrest happen in the public space, in front of an audience, the Troupe sought to further ridicule the police. The officers dispatched to the park were inadvertently forced into the role of the antagonist in the one performance that *actually* went on. And last but not least, the Troupe managed to expose the oppressive nature of the police as the task force of the dominant elite.

The following fall, several Mime Troupers left the company to found the Haight-based anarchist collective called the Diggers.[76] They borrowed from the Troupe, as Doyle points out, "the ensemble form, as well as the aggressive improvisational style, the itinerant outlaw posture, and the satirical social critique mode of commedia dell'arte" (80). They were, in addition, equally aware of the value of urban space, as they lay it bare in a language full of spatial imagery:

> *Theater is territory*. A space for existing outside padded walls. . . . *Guerrilla theater*

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[76] Even though the appearance of the Diggers, with their thriving style and audacity, marked a new chapter in the San Francisco guerrilla theater scene, it did not lead to the disbandment of the Mime Troupe. Still, stricken by its diverse legal difficulties, the Troupe would lose the radical spotlight to the Diggers during the latter's period of activity between late 1966 and 1968—the most critical years in the San Francisco Sixties when, unlike the Mime Troupe, the Diggers became active part of the Haight-Ashbury hippie community.

intends to bring audiences to liberated territory to create life-actors . . . . This is theater of an underground that wants out. Its aim is to liberate ground held by consumer wardens and establish territory without walls. Its plays are glass cutters for empire windows. ("Trip Without a Ticket")

The Diggers' interpretation of radical theater, by contrast, went far beyond Davis's, for they advocated the life-acting technique, a new approach oriented to remove the boundaries between art and life and between performer and spectator (Doyle 80). Life-acting would incorporate performance to everyday life—a real-life full-time performance that was no longer so much avant-garde theater with an educational purpose as flat-out social activism of the street. The Diggers' challenge to the dominant order, then, was not limited to a show with a beginning and an end; instead, a Digger's dailiness had to be devoted to tearing down the existing capitalistic assumptions. Their revolution was eminently micropolitical rather than macropolitical, for it targeted the actual everyday social relations and practices instead of the power of the state. Or, in other words, the Diggers' social transformation was expected to start with thinking and behaving as if one were part of an *already transformed* society (Díez 237).

In order to make the individual truly free, the Digger philosophy contended that it was necessary to change one's own consciousness before changing the world. This notion of *free* would become the central motive of the Diggers' project. *Free* was used to refer both to freedom from the American prevailing ideology and free-of-charge services and goods. As Doyle notes,

The project of "Free" all started in early October 1966 with free food dished out in Golden Gate Park every day at 4 P.M. Next it was manifested in the free store . . . . The free store's first name was the Free Frame of Reference, which derived from the tall yellow picture frame that the Diggers would have people step through before being

served their daily stew and bread. The frame represented what was possible when people changed their conceptual paradigm for apprehending reality. . . . Added to these various free services were others that gradually took shape between 1966 and 1968: free housing in communal crash pads and outlying farms, free legal services, and a free medical clinic. For entertainment there were occasional free film screenings and of course free dance concerts. (80-81)

These services were grouped under the Digger-supervised Free City network. This program would succeed in engaging, among others, physicians, lawyers, local artists, and members of the clergy that contributed to defy the capitalistic soul of the United States by providing free services throughout San Francisco (Doyle 81). While the Mime Troupe had disputed the city's abstract space with a takeover of its public areas, the launch of the Free City network suggests that the Troupe was never as close as the Diggers to the articulation of what Lefebvre calls differential space. According to Lefebvre,

> Despite – or rather because of – its negativity, abstract space carries within itself the seeds of a new kind of space. I shall call that new space 'differential space', because, inasmuch as abstract space tends towards homogeneity, towards the elimination of existing differences or peculiarities, a new space cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences. It will also restore unity to what abstract space breaks up – to the functions, elements and moments of social practice. It will put an end to those localizations which shatter the integrity of the individual body, the social body, the corpus of human needs, and the corpus of knowledge. (*Production of Space* 52)

Differential space constitutes a counter-space where the contradictions of abstract space become exposed. It calls for new spatial practices intended to overthrow the tyranny of capital and the state over the way in which space is conceived and used. This counter-space, therefore, emerges where there is a rupture in the existing system of production

and value. The Diggers were, to a certain extent, successful in contesting the system with their Free City program. Their proposal entailed the articulation of a differential space where the logic of capitalism was defied by creating food distribution centers and providing, among others, medical and legal assistance all for free. The Diggers' use of the public space was overtly differential in that they managed to create—beginning in the already vibrant Haight district, and, then, spreading across other areas of San Francisco—a network of public services operated outside the orthodox channels of capitalism. These services provided for free were real, tangible versions of their counterparts in the abstract space. Yet other spatial practices, such as the crossing of the Free Frame of Reference to enter the Diggers' free store, were rather more conceptual. In Ashbolt's interpretation, the Frame "reflected, in part, the Diggers' desire to confront spatial forms of social relationships and to alter perceptions about going from one side to the other, passing through, moving beyond. But this particular ritual produced space stripped of politics, play-acting devoid of aesthetic radicalism" (*Radical Sixties* 110). Regardless of the real or conceptual nature of their spatial practices, the Diggers would certainly prove more masterful with the diverse expressions of the countercultural politics of space than the regular hippie or, even, the Mime Troupe. The radicalism underlying their life-acting technique proved the most determined in the Sixties to translate effectively a revolutionary social theory into the practice of everyday life.

Our analysis of the San Francisco radical theater scene concludes that, with the advent of the Sixties, the indoor space was felt to be no longer the place where art could destabilize the system. The San Francisco Mime Troupe opened the door to the reclamation of the city's public space, turning it into the venue where to stage the defiance to the existing social relations. This use of the public space would represent,

concurrently, a challenge to the political and financial elite that dominates the submissive larger society and imposes the aforementioned social relations. The appearance of the Diggers would buttress the accomplishments of the Troupe, for they got to produce, especially in the Haight, a new space—a differential space based on new social relations that subverted those which capitalism relies on. The Diggers would advance one of Lefebvre's core ideas: "'Change life!' 'Change society!' These precepts mean nothing without the production of an appropriate space" (*Production of Space* 59). The appropriate—differential—space to change the system was produced by them in San Francisco. And the relevance of this space goes far beyond a simple revolutionary adventure, for it would set the tone of the spatial politics that predominated in the city's countercultural scene in the Sixties—be it in the form of gatherings, be-ins, happenings, multitudinous concerts, or the Summer of Love.

3.2. THE SIXTIES PUT INTO REAL-LIFE PRACTICE: THE HAIGHT-ASHBURY COMMUNITY

The turn from the Fifties to the Sixties, as we have seen in the previous chapter, changed the spatial focus of the counterculture from the indoor to the outdoor space. This would also involve a major shift from a mainly individual to a collective approach to the countercultural experience. The Beats, one decade earlier, had been mainly writers, turning literature into the backbone of their countercultural expression. There are arguably few activities more individualistic than writing. In most cases, following Bronwyn T. Williams and Amy A. Zenger, the literary authors' "writing, rather than connecting them to others, tends to set them apart. The act of writing, rather than a social act drawn from and driven by social contact, is instead an interior and unique activity, driven by an interior genius, in the tradition of Romantic individualism" (16). The social drives inherent to the human being, however, also took them to forge a community in North Beach, which, in turn, would prompt the appearance of the beatnik subculture. While the Beats, along with other figures of the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance, had popularized a somewhat communal approach to literature epitomized by frequent poetry readings, the social scene of this community was nonetheless mostly reserved and indoors-oriented. In fact, the Beat soul, as explained by Ray Carney, would remain heavily based on "individualism, loneliness, aimlessness and an idealistic quest for purpose" (qtd. in Lauerman, "The Broad Reach"). At the core of the Sixties counterculture in San Francisco, the hippie subculture, by contrast, would drink from the capital influence of guerrilla theater and its irreverent reclamation of the public space. In San Francisco's new countercultural locale, the Haight district, the hippie

scene would emerge thanks to a newfound feeling of community founded on the carnivalesque, public display, theater, rock dances, and "happenings" (Ashbolt, "Remembering" 42). The countercultural experience would become, then, overtly public and collective. The consequent attention garnered from society and the media was the hippies' channel to reach piercingly the conscience of normative society—an intention that had been largely absent from the Beat counterculture. Albeit desired, this overexposure, however, would prove to be a double-edged sword.

In the early 1960s, the North Beach real estate market was hit by steady price hikes, mostly due to the reputation acquired as the sanctuary of the West Coast Beats (Ashbolt, "Remembering" 36). The commodification of the neighborhood, in fact, had become rampant at that point. In this sense, Perry describes the early 1960s North Beach as "a tourist trap full of topless bars" (5). Facing this reality, Haight-Ashbury was the district chosen by the remains of the beatnik subculture for cheaper accommodation. Prior to the beatnik takeover, the Haight had remained primarily a middle-class neighborhood with ties to the labor movement. It had also seen the formation of the Haight-Ashbury Neighborhood Council, a neighborhood organization that successfully opposed in the 1950s the creation of a freeway that would have run through the district (Rodriguez 40). Charles Perry points out that there existed "even a small-town sense of community among the pre-hippie residents" (72). In addition to this background of dissent and community action, Anthony Ashbolt highlights the Haight's "superb location in the heights of San Francisco, its many attractive Victorian houses, its closeness to both Golden Gate Park and San Francisco State College [and] its declining status as a middle class district" ("Remembering" 36). All of these factors would converge in the mid-1960s to make the Haight-Ashbury a favorable breeding ground for

the blossoming of a bohemian community.

It is safe to argue that a hippie scene was already underway in the city by the time the Haight-Ashbury countercultural community emerged. One hint of it was the series of rock dances organized by a group of hip entrepreneurs, the Free Dog Collective, that began in October 1965. The first one would be held at the Longshoremen's Hall in Fisherman's Wharf, implicitly putting the thriving hippie scene in symbolic connection with the historic Bay Area longshoremen's struggle of the 1930s (Ashbolt, *Radical Sixties* 88).[77] This first dance would be instrumental to the promotion of iconic local rock bands such as Jefferson Airplane and the Great Society. Additionally, it sparked the organization of two more dances, named Appeal I and Appeal II, intended to fund the San Francisco Mime Troupe's legal battle for its right to perform in the parks of San Francisco. The Appeals would be a great success, especially in that they got to bring the city's countercultural spectrum of the Sixties together for the first time. Another hint of the advent of the San Francisco hippie scene was Ken Kesey's Trips Festival, held over three days in January 1966 also at the Longshoremen's Hall, a then-innovative multi-media party centered exclusively around the experimentation with LSD. The Trips Festival, inspired by Kesey's ongoing Acid Tests, was another success that triggered a sense of community among the counterculture in the form of a happening (Ashbolt, "Remembering" 39). These events are considered crucial catalysts of the San Francisco hippie movement that had been gestating during the first half of the 1960s. San Francisco's new countercutural scene was, as Perry defines it, the result of the coalescence of

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[77] The 1934 San Francisco General Strike was framed precisely within the six-month West Coast Waterfront Strike, led by longshoremen and sailors, which attained a great impact in San Francisco—then the major port on the West Coast.

a new generation of bohemian-minded kids who were very interested in . . . mind drugs. They were also interested in such traditional bohemian subjects as art, psychology, pacifism, exotic religions and anything else that stretched the limits of understanding. They had no name for themselves comparable to the Beat Generation, though the Beats derisively called some of them hippies (junior grade hipsters), and by default that group started using the name itself. (5)

Conversely, others, like San Francisco Mime Trouper-turned-Digger Peter Berg, may object to the vision of the hippie subculture as an exclusively youth-led experience. Berg traces the origins of the movement back to Fifties, as he recalls, "When I read *Howl*, I knew I didn't have anything to lose. That's what did it. That's what sent people out in search of experience" (qtd. in Wolf 250). Indeed, it is a fact that many of the leading figures of the Sixties in San Francisco were older people who had associated, in varying degrees, with the 1950s counterculture. When it comes to dating accurately the beginning of the Haight community, however, Timothy Miller considers that "it would be hard to see [the hippies] as coalescing into anything that amounted to a distinct social movement before about 1966" ("Communal Revival" 74). Ashbolt also dates it around the beginning of 1966 ("Remembering" 37). But what exactly got to bring all this boiling energy together? What was the instrumental factor around which the Haight-Ashbury countercultural community took shape?

As Tom Wolfe puts it in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968), "The Acid Tests were one of those outrages, one of those *scandals*, that create a new style or a new world view. . . . It all came straight out of the Acid Tests in a direct line leading to the Trips Festival of January, 1966. That brought the whole thing full out in the open" (222-23). Held by Kesey primarily in San Francisco, the Acid Tests, just like the Trips Festival, gravitated around one totem: LSD. The consumption of this hallucinogenic

drug in the Sixties was intended to prompt a *trip*. In countercultural terms, the closeness

of LSD and travel, according to Arun Saldanha, can be explained insofar as "a *trip*

consists in reinventing oneself through the sensual encounters with beyonds which

could be geographical, cultural or psychological" ("The LSD-Event"). Michael

McClure, one of the few Beats that remained somehow connected to the Sixties

counterculture, further elaborates on the challenge that the psychedelic trip represents to

the ordinary perception of space and time: "We would find ourselves in control of time

and space. It was very Faustian. Along with the greatest alchemical aspirations would

go the Faustian desire to . . . crash through time and space" (qtd. in Perry 166). The link

with space in the Sixties therefore would not be confined to its physical representation

in the Haight. By overturning the notion of space, the psychedelic counterculture sought

to create new psychological spaces and, all at once, a new place of the mind—

understanding the sense of place, as per what we have seen in chapter 1.3, as the

personal attachment to a given space (Creswell 7). Contradicting Tim Cresswell's

contention that mobility and traveling hinder severely the formation of any sense of

place (44-45), however, the psychological *trip* associated to the LSD experience was

intended to stimulate precisely new places for the contrarian minds of the Sixties. The

concomitant stretching of the limits of understanding thus became the main instrument

for a disenchanted generation to transgress the boundaries of normative American

society. We must not overlook, additionally, that the countercultural use of LSD not only

targeted the collective but also the individual. Psychedelic guru Timothy Leary

describes his famous call to drop out[78] as "an active, selective, graceful process of

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[78] One of the most recognizable slogans of the Sixties is Leary's "Turn on, tune in, drop out." Leary
himself explains its intended message: "'Turn on' meant go within to activate your neural and genetic
equipment. Become sensitive to the many and various levels of consciousness and the specific triggers
that engage them. Drugs were one way to accomplish this end. 'Tune in' meant interact harmoniously
with the world around you – externalize, materialize, express your new internal perspectives. 'Drop out'
suggested an active, selective, graceful process of detachment from involuntary or unconscious

detachment from involuntary or unconscious commitments. 'Drop Out' meant self-reliance, a discovery of one's singularity, a commitment to mobility, choice, and change" (253). The collective and individual dimensions of LSD consumption thus established the frame of reference of the San Francisco hippie community from its very inception.

The unifying power of LSD in the Haight community was unequivocal. Prominent Haight-Ashbury hippie Ron Thelin refers to Kesey's LSD-centered gatherings as "the first thing that got the larger kind of whole community thing happening – everybody turning on together" (228). Tom Wolfe corroborates Thelin's view: "The Trips Festival . . . was what kicked the whole thing off. . . . And all of a sudden it was like the Acid Tests had taken root and sprung up into people living the Tests like a whole life style" (313). Every Haight institution stemming from this psychedelic mania would be another step towards the consolidation of the San Francisco countercultural community of the Sixties. The opening of the Psychedelic Shop in January 1966 represented a major landmark for the Haight in that it instantly became the emblem of its psychedelic ethos. Peter Coyote describes the Psychedelic Shop as an establishment "founded to disseminate information on the growing interest in psychedelic drugs and expanded consciousness" ("Ron Thelin"). As Thelin, co-founder of the store, puts it, "Suddenly there was a common fact that everyone could identify with. It was right in the middle of town, and it was called the Psychedelic Shop . . . . And then more people started coming in and then pretty soon it was like the whole Haight-Ashbury was the community" (225). Gradually thereafter, the hippie Haight would develop its own internal institutions. In Coyote's words,

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commitments" (*Flashbacks* 253).

The Haight Independent Proprietors appeared at conferences with city officials discussing the "problems" of the community. People making money off the scene—the rock bands, merchants, and dope dealers—felt that publicity about the Haight would "change people's heads" and automatically generate changes in economic relationships and political structures . . . . The Haight had its own newspaper, the *San Francisco Oracle* . . . . The *Oracle* was colorful, full of treatises and manifestos, and about equal to any other paper in disguising opinion as fact. . . . The [Diggers'] free food services had been assumed by a local church; Dr. David Smith had established the Haight-Ashbury Free Medical Clinic; The Trip Without a Ticket [the name of the Diggers' free store] was serving scores of customers and many local stores had instituted "free" boxes of cast-offs or couldn't-sells free for the taking. (*Sleeping* 76, 93)

With such internal network of institutions, the San Francisco countercultural scene would not only become a cohesive community but also sought to represent a sort of liberated zone unto itself—that is, in Lefebvrian terms, a differential space that challenges the domination of the local political and financial elite over the city's space.

While psychedelic drugs—together with music—were the central token that kept the Haight unified, the San Francisco hippie scene would achieve community through a collectivist use of space. Saldanha finds in Kesey's Acid Tests a seminal contribution to this spatial standpoint:

The Acid Tests are rightfully legendary in the American twentieth century for having turned on people without discrimination wherever they took place. . . . The egalitarian truth of the Acid Tests was embodied, pure and simple, in the fun. . . . The Merry Pranksters perfected the art of collective psychedelic living. They not only remained faithful to the naughty creativities of LSD, but seduced anyone they thought needed to partake in its power. . . . The question was not what to be against or for, but CAN *YOU* PASS THE ACID TEST? The intensity of the "contact high" was not subjective, it was collective, divisive, political. ("The LSD-Event")

The nexus between space and the collective buttressed by Kesey lays the foundation of the hippies' "play[ing] around with the politics of space through communal living arrangements and the use of streets and parks as public forums" (Ashbolt, "Remembering" 41). In particular, street life, whether it be in Golden Gate Park, Buena Vista Park, or Haight Street, was central (Ashbolt, "Remembering" 41). The philosophy of the streets in the Sixties, as hippie Richard Honigman suggests, lies in the fact that

> The street can be a classroom, a zoo, a stage, an asphalt padded cell, a whorehouse, a folksong, or the traverse of Scorpio. . . . The street is there and some must run its course, called doing their thing, going through changes. Others less mangled are able to deculturalize or find themselves easier, but the educational conformist pressures stack higher against them. It can be done anywhere, but our society tends to produce exaggerations of itself and only extremity seems to break through its accompanying neurosis. Thus the phenomenon of street life, a clearing house spontaneously formed to break the conditioning of the perpetual motion machine. (188)

Life in the outdoor space was therefore a mechanism by which, finding an own life style and mingling with other like-minded individuals, the hippie sought to abandon the life path defined by normative society. Among the most representative examples of the use of the Haight's outdoor space as a public forum we can name the First Human Be-In, held in Golden Gate Park in January 1967,[79] and the Diggers' free food program.[80] The politics of space of the San Francisco hippie community was decidedly oriented towards the collective. By expanding towards the outdoor space of the Haight and taking

[79] For specific further reading on the First Human Be-In, see Helen Swick Perry's *The Human Be-In* (Basic, 1970) and Peter Hartlaub and Sam Whiting's article for the *San Francisco Chronicle* "Reliving the Human Be-In 50 Years Later" (13 Jan. 2017, www.sfchronicle.com/music/article/Reliving-the-Human-Be-In-50-years-later-10854785.php. Accessed 28 Jan. 2017).

[80] The Diggers' free food program would gather groups of fifty to roughly four hundred people in Golden Gate Park on a daily basis for several months. This initiative gave away food for members of the Haight-Ashbury hippie community in an effort to offer basic services to this community outside the capitalist model. For further reading on the free food program, see chapter 3 of *The Theater Is in the Street: Politics and Performance in Sixties America*, by Bradford D. Martin (U of Massachusetts P, 2004).

advantage of the possibilities that the neighborhood offered, the hippie community arguably echoed the quasi-religious concept of expanded consciousness that psychedelia promoted. At the same time, the politics of collective-based public living can be read as an opposition to what the counterculture saw as the numbing and mostly domestic life style of middle-class suburbia—what Michel de Certeau would call an "unpracticed space" (xxi, 117) where the multiple vectors and energies of the everyday lives of its inhabitants remain constrained into the private realm.

The importance of the Haight-Ashbury countercultural community resides in the fact that, through its heavy use of the public space, it represented an actual implementation of the counterculture at a real-life scale. The reservedness of the Beats' literary forms in the Fifties was replaced by the raucous visuality and reliance on mass culture of the Sixties. The Haight captured the national imagination and broke into the American households, evincing an insurmountable generational gap that, in many cases, would result in the phenomenon of the runaway minors who left their homes in search for the hippie experience.[81] The Haight community, however, could not endure the alienating influence of mass market and crime, which would eventually take over the district.[82] The collapse arguably materialized after the 1967 Summer of Love. In Ashbolt's words,

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[81] For further reading on the runaways of the Sixties, a phenomenon intimately linked to the counterculture of that decade, see *Runaways: How the Sixties Counterculture Shaped Today's Practices and Policies*, by Karen M. Staller (Columbia UP, 2006).

[82] The end of the Sixties in the Haight-Ashbury would involve a massive exodus of most of the local hippie scene between the fall of 1967 and the first half of 1968 that left the district to deal with the consequences of the excesses of the counterculture—namely drug addiction, homelessness, panhandling, or crime—for many years. Further reading on the pronounced decline of the Haight over the decades that followed the Summer of Love can be found in Robert Lindsey's article for *The New York Times* "20 Years after a 'Summer of Love,' Haight-Ashbury Looks Back" (2 Jul. 1987, www.nytimes.com/1987/07/02/us/20-years-after-a-summer-of-love-haight-ashbury-looks-back.html. Accessed 30 Dec. 2016) and Joel Selvin's article for *SFGate* "Summer of Love: 40 Years Later / 1967: The Stuff that Myths Are Made of" (20 May 2007, www.sfgate.com/news/article/Summer-of-Love-40-Years-Later-1967-The-stuff-2593252.php. Accessed 30 Dec. 2016).

'The Death of the Hippie' parade on October, 6, 1967, during which the Psychedelic Shop's sign was buried, functioned as the Haight's 'goodbye to all that'. This parade was really a protest resulting from the feeling that hippies were no longer 'doing their own thing' but rather responding to a media image. The Haight was not completely dead as a hippie venue. Signs of community, however, were withering quickly. ("Remembering" 43)

The Haight languished rapidly as a countercultural community because of its own initial virtues. Its distinguishing spatial politics, based upon an the takeover of the city's public space—be it in the form of gatherings, dances, street life, or life-acting—could be considered an asset at one point. However, powerful as the penetration into the consciousness of mainstream society could be, this spatial politics would overexpose the Haight community to the overwhelming power of media. As a result, space, initially a valuable ally for the San Francisco counterculture of the Sixties to project its message of radical change to the rest of the country, would eventually turn against it and favor its assimilation into mainstream culture.

3.3. THE KESEY-LEARY DICHOTOMY:

TOWARDS A DISTINCTIVE WEST COAST PSYCHEDELIC

COUNTERCULTURE

Discussing the use of psychoactive drugs in the Bay Area in the Sixties inevitably leads us to the local lysergic guru: Ken Kesey. After graduating from University of Oregon in 1957, Kesey's move to the Bay Area to continue his graduate education at Stanford University brought him dramatically closer to the San Francisco Beat scene. Yet he would never get to become part of that scene in actuality. Being a newcomer in his early twenties at a moment—the late 1950s and early 1960s—when the Beat movement, already consolidated around its main figures, had lost a significant part of its freshness certainly did not help his integration. However, fate had something else in store for him. While at Stanford, Kesey served as a night aide at Menlo Park Veterans Hospital. This job would get him in touch with mental illness, and also with the infamous Project MK-Ultra. This CIA-run study, officially sanctioned in 1953, was designed to explore mind and behavior control in human beings through the administration of psychoactive drugs, hypnosis, and psychological torture. Kesey signed up to volunteer for the program at the same hospital, which made him familiar with powerful hallucinogens, especially LSD.[83] This first contact with LSD was a turning point in Kesey's life. Of his first experience with acid for MK-Ultra he recalls,

It was groovy. We suddenly realized that there's a lot more to this world than we

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[83] Further first-hand accounts of Kesey's experimentation with psychedelic drugs can be found in *Conversations with Ken Kesey* (2014), edited by Scott F. Parker.

previously thought. . . . the one of the things that I think came out it is this, that there's room. We don't all have to be the same. We don't have to have Baptists, coast to coast. We can throw in some Buddhists and some Christians and people who are just thinking these strange thoughts about the Irish leprechauns, that there is room, spiritually, for everybody in this universe. (qtd. in Gross 112)

This expansion of understanding is seen by Kesey as the opening of a new dimension of the mind. It is also the questioning of standard rational procedures and, ultimately, of the boundaries between sanity and madness. The time he spent working among the mentally ill patients of the VA hospital was a pivotal complement to his LSD-fueled epiphany:

> After I had gone through these drug experiments and was in this little room in the hospital, looking out through the little window at the people out there who were the regular nuts. They weren't students going to experiments. I'm looking at them through my crazed eyes, I saw these people have something going and there's a truth to it that people are missing. . . . These people had had serious problems. I mean I saw people hallucinating and people in bad shape. . . . And being crazy is hell—whether you get it from taking a drug or whether it happens because you're just trying to lead the American way of life and it keeps kicking your legs out from under you. One way or another, it's hell on you. . . . It is a lens through which I did stuff, but it's hard on the eyes. But I think I had a very valid viewpoint and much closer than a lot of the doctors were having. (qtd. in Gross 112-13)

Menlo Park Veterans Hospital, therefore, would be crucial for Kesey, for it presented him with a different take on two subjects that normative society strived to conceal: psychedelic drugs and mental illness. In Kesey's experience, both of them unveil different layers of perception other than the commonly accepted, thus transgressing the acceptable social standards. What society deems unacceptable—or even abject—and

sweeps to the margins, according to Kesey, is actually what it most fears.

Kesey's job at the hospital would prompt his writing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, published in 1962. The novel proved groundbreaking as it challenges the sick nature of the mentally ill and confronts normative society with an inconvenient reality. The money earned with the book helped Kesey purchase an estate in La Honda, California, fifty miles south of San Francisco. The La Honda house would become thereafter Kesey's headquarters and an emblem for the Bay Area psychedelic movement.

When his presence in New York was required as part of the promotion of his second novel, *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1964), Kesey took the opportunity to plan a coast-to-coast road trip along with his circle of friends and associates. The group, self-baptized as the Merry Pranksters, led a communal life style in the La Honda house and was mainly focused in the promotion and enjoyment of psychedelic drugs. The chosen vehicle was a retired International Harvester school bus customized in day-glo colors and nicknamed "Furthur" [*sic*], a playful term evocative of the Pranksters' search for expanded levels of consciousness through drugs. (The provocative misspelling would soon be corrected, thus becoming "Further.") The trip, despite its social impact at that time, was yet to achieve a legendary status when Tom Wolfe documented it in *The Electric Kool Aid Acid Test* (1968). Yet most importantly for our study, the Merry Pranksters' trip would lead to the encounter of Kesey's group with the other great psychedelic guru of the Sixties, Timothy Leary.

Leary's approach to psychedelic drugs, conversely, was more academy-oriented. A rising star in the psychology field and a Harvard professor himself, Leary came across psilocybin while vacationing in Mexico in 1960. His first psychedelic experience was,

as in Kesey's case, a watershed in his life: "It was above all and without question the deepest religious experience of my life . . . . I discovered that beauty, revelation, sensuality, the cellular history of the past, God, the Devil—all lie inside my body, outside my mind" (qtd. in Lee and Shlain 65). After his discovery of psilocybin, Leary would reconsider his goals as a researcher on psychology, focusing on the exploration of the effects of psychoactive drugs on the human mind. He conducted several research projects that combined psychotherapy with psychedelic substances under the premise that proper doses of the latter could affect human behavior in beneficial ways that regular therapy could not. During that time, he would put the focus on the treatment of alcoholism and the rehabilitation of criminals. The controversy surrounding his use of psilocybin and LSD would ultimately cost him his job at Harvard in 1963. After being fired, Leary settled down in Mexico along with his collaborator Richard Alpert, where they ran a training center for the use of psychedelics under the umbrella of their recently founded International Federation for Internal Freedom (IFIF). Their legal issues with the Mexican authorities ultimately would cause their moving to an estate in Millbrook, New York, under a new brand, the Castalia Foundation.[84]

By the summer of 1964, Leary was already a major player in the psychedelic subculture. It is no wonder that Kesey and the Merry Pranksters took the opportunity of their visit to New York to make a pilgrimage to the Millbrook mansion to meet Leary. The encounter with Leary's group resulted in something different from the psychedelic party the Pranksters expected, though. The visit, like the rest of the trip, is chronicled by Tom Wolfe in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. Since Wolfe devotes just a short chapter to it, this encounter may not appear to be quite relevant. Those few pages, however,

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[84] For a detailed history of Leary's discovery of psychedelics and subsequent LSD-proselitizing projects, see Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain's *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD. The CIA, the Sixties, and Beyond* (1985) and Jay Stevens's *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (1987).

expose the polarization between the two most prominent currents in the psychedelic movement in the early Sixties.

In Wolfe's words, the Pranksters brimmed over with excitement ahead of their visit:

> They headed off expecting the most glorious reception ever. It is probably hard at this late date to understand how glorious they thought it was going to be. The Pranksters thought of themselves and Leary's group as two extraordinary arcane societies, and the only ones in the world, engaged in the most fantastic experiment in human consciousness ever devised. The thing was totally new. And now the two secret societies bearing this new-world energy surge were going to meet. (97)

In 1964, LSD was still legal in the United States.[85] Both Kesey's and Leary's respective crews were arguably the two major *organized*—albeit not in the most literal sense of the word—contingents at the vanguard of the psychedelic subculture in national terms. The Pranksters' shortsightedness and childish enthusiasm made them see Leary's people as siblings to make common cause with. "The Pranksters expected the Learyites to come rolling out of the house like survivors of the siege of Khartoum," narrates Wolfe (97).[86] The reception, conversely, was cold. Nobody at Millbrook expected them. The arrival of the bus, with the Pranksters throwing green smoke bombs, waving flags, and playing loud rock 'n roll music, was not compatible with the intellectualism and the meditative mood of the Castalians. Kesey's crew would quickly become aware of what was going on, as Wolfe recalls: "The others. . .there is a general. . .vibration. . .of: We have

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[85] LSD would become illegal in California on October 6, 1966. Prohibition in other U.S. states would follow until the definitive federal ban passed on October 24, 1968.

[86] The Siege of Khartoum (1884-1885) was the battle that led to the conquest of Khartoum, then under Egyptian authority, by the forces of Mahdist Sudan. After the fall of the city, a great number of the defending Egyptian and British troops, along with a large portion of Sudanese civilians, were massacred. Wolfe references the survivors of the battle to draw a joking parallelism with the Pranksters' idealization of Leary's group as the heroic few at the vanguard of the psychedelic brotherhood.

something rather deep and a meditative going on here, and you California crazies are a sour note" (98). The Pranksters felt even more unwelcome as, according to Wolfe's account, they would not even get to meet Timothy Leary. Allegedly, he had embarked in a very important three-day psychedelic trip upstairs in the mansion and was not supposed to be disturbed.

Wolfe's account of the episode remains one of the most reputed narrations of the Pranksters' stop at Millbrook. The subjective remarks he adds to his description of the setting and the people at Leary's mansion emphasize the great distance between the Castalians and the Pranksters. The most important of these remarks is the depiction of the house as a sinister Gothic mansion that plays with the collective imagination to convey the reader to such archetypal fictional Gothic settings as those of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) or Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898):

> The Pranksters entered the twisty deep green Gothic grounds of Millbrook with flags flying. American flags all over the bus, and the speakers blaring rock 'n' roll, on in over the twisty dirt road, through the tangled greeny thickets, past the ponds and glades; like a rolling yahooing circus. When they got in sight of the great gingerbread mansion itself, all towers and turrets and jigsaw shingles, Sandy Lehmann-Haupt started throwing green smoke bombs off the top of the bus . . . . The Pranksters stop in front and there is just the big house sitting there sepulchral and Gothic. (97-98)

The contrast between the gloomy solemnity of the estate and the playful and freewheeling attitude of the Pranksters is evident. Wolfe does not miss the opportunity to further the Gothic feeling by highlighting the twisty and long path that leads from the entrance of the state to the mansion. He even uses the term "big house," which evokes its colloquial meaning of jail, a place where seriousness and lack of liberty prevail. Still, he cannot resist to add a sarcastic—and dismissive—note by referring to the house as

"the great gingerbread mansion." Wolfe's description, in short, points to a space that Certeau would deem "unpracticed," that is, lacking the vectors of vitality by which a lively social and cultural activity turn a space into a place (xxi, 117). The Millbrook mansion also seems to represent a handicap unto itself for the Castalians' countercultural experiment. As Lefebvre notes,

> Innumerable groups, some ephemeral, some more durable, have sought to invent a 'new life' – usually a communal one. . . . Among the obstacles that they have run into and the reasons for their failure when it occurs must certainly be numbered the absence of an appropriated space, the inability to invent new forms. . . . Most if not all modern experiments in communal living have diverted an existing space to their own purposes and so lost their impetus on account of an inappropriate spatial morphology: bourgeois mansions, half-ruined castles, villages abandoned by the peasantry, suburban villas, and so forth. (379-80)

The mansion can thus be interpreted as a misguided spatial choice. Leary and his group remained faithful to a traditional spatial morphology where to develop their psychedelic project. Following Lefebvre's theory, this is a symbolic obstacle that exposes Leary's failure to subvert the notion of space, which may translate into a shortcoming in his countercultural legitimacy. As the Pranksters saw it, consequently, the spatial traditionalism of Millbrook was just another representation of Leary's elitism.

The quietude and solemnity of Millbrook emphasized by Wolfe is endorsed by other sources, such as critic Jay Stevens:

> In some accounts Millbrook resembles an ashram or monastery, a refuge for seekers on the higher paths of consciousness; in others it emerges as a unique research institute, a place where psychologists frustrated with the accepted models of mind could pursue their research in peace. Both descriptions are correct, as far as they go. . . . At the center

of all these memoirs is the astonishing Victorian labyrinth that was Alte Haus, the Big House, dark and mysterious, the halls carpeted with a frayed red fabric, the walls covered with psychedelic frescoes. . . . Millbrook was a "strange mutation of Thoreau's Walden and a Tantric Buddhist temple," wrote an anonymous reporter for *Time*. (167)

However, for the insider core community, the perception was different. Stevens concedes that Millbrook got to be "a house party of unparalleled dimensions" (167). The weekend parties at the mansion would achieve legendary status. A more academic or transcendental interpretation of psychedelics did not preclude amusement fueled by large amounts of hashish, DMT, psilocybin, LSD, mescaline, peyote, mushrooms, marijuana, and alcohol (Stevens 170-71). Whereas Leary's core group of stalwarts at Millbrook was made of roughly 30 people, most of which were his collaborators and acid veterans from the early days at Harvard (Lee and Shlain 82), the spectrum of party guests was wider, as Leary's longtime associate Ralph Metzner remembers: "Jazz musicians, avant-garde painters, underground filmmakers, high level procurers, mysterious Orientals, night creatures with huge eyes and chromatic chiffon dresses floated softly through the house" (qtd. in Stevens 171).

Despite all the fun, which few of the people related to the psychedelic movement in the Sixties were willing to relinquish, the architecture of their mansion and the purpose itself of their communal project were tightly related. The Castalians had a more serious approach to the psychedelic experience than the Pranksters. Leary and his people were not just playing or pranking. As Lee and Shlain put it, "Leary and his associates were still basically psychologists who felt compelled to figure it all out" (89). Kesey's house in La Honda, as Stevens describes, sported a different architectural style and surroundings:

> Kesey found what he was looking for in La Honda . . . . It was a modern log cabin, six large rooms, paneled, with a massive fireplace and a pair of elegant French doors that opened onto six acres of redwood forest. To reach the house you had to cross a wooden bridge spanning a little stream. The nearest neighbor was a mile away, the nearest outpost of civilization a few miles beyond that, at Baw's General Store. (183)

Kesey's estate was far from the Gothic appearance of Millbrook. It is usually represented as a peaceful and rustic log house in the middle of a typical California redwood forest—that is, surrounded by largely unaltered wilderness. The scene is completed by the little stream that passed by the house, adding a bucolic feeling Millbrook lacked. Most importantly yet, the La Honda estate oozed an archetypal Western character. Wolfe depicts the house in this very sense:

> A very Christmas card,
>> Kesey's new place near La Honda.
>> A log house, a mountain creek, a little wooden bridge
>> Fifteen miles from Palo Alto beyond
>> Cahill Ridge where Route 84
>> Cuts through a redwood forest gorge -
> A redwood forest for a yard!
> A very Christmas card.
>
> And -
> Strategic privacy.
>> Not a neighbor for a mile.
>> La Honda lived it Western style. (54)

The author stresses the isolation of the property in the middle of an area of low population density as a distinctively Western trait. Plus, the location is particularly Western in that the West and Northwest are typically the locales of mighty physical

forces such as gigantic trees, extensive greenery, and rivers (Carnes 23). We can thus read Kesey's domain in terms of the stereotypical features usually associated to the Westerner in the American imagination: solitary, tough, independent, individualistic, unbowed. Despite the idyllic tone of Wolfe's description, the design, location, and surroundings of Kesey's Bay Area headquarters differ from those of Leary's insofar the former suggests the Western character Kesey himself, an adopted Oregonian, represented. Leary, on the contrary, was an East Coast man, and his Millbrook mansion, presented as heir of the European Gothic tradition, can be read as the embodiment of his Eastern essence.

Not only is the traditional East-West dichotomy of the United States present in the physical appearance of the Pranksters' and the Castalians' respective operation centers. It is noteworthy that, whereas Leary surrounds himself with fellow scientists from his years at Harvard—the epitome of the East Coast elitist academia,— the core of Kesey's group consisted of his old comrades coming mostly from the liberal arts field at Stanford. In fact, their relationship had begun while living in the alternative Perry Lane community.[87] Perry Lane, as Wolfe calls it, "was Stanford's bohemian quarter. As bohemias go, Perry Lane was Arcadia, Arcadia just off the Stanford golf course. . . . [I]t had true cultural cachet. . . . [T]here was always something of an atmosphere of communal living. Nobody's door was ever shut on Perry Lane, except when they were pissed off" (35). Perry Lane therefore was the transposition of San Francisco's bohemian North Beach into Stanford's academic milieu. San Francisco, only a few miles to the north, was throwing shock waves around the Bay Area that were informing

[87] Perry Lane was a small community in Menlo Park, California, known for being Stanford's bohemian section between the 1950s and the early 1960s. Street interaction between its residents and regulars was the keynote. Besides Kesey, other haunters of the Perry Lane scene during those years would be Larry McMurtry, Robert Stone, Ken Babbs, or Vic Lovell. Bohemian Perry Lane finally came to an end in 1963, when the neighborhood would undergo redevelopment into a more upscale residential area. For further reading, see chapter 2 of Timothy Miller's *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (1999).

a heterogeneous yet distinctive West Coast counterculture. The spirit of Perry Lane is precisely what Kesey sought to transplant into La Honda, turning the latter into a reference communal experiment for the West Coast counterculture. What is more, this spirit would foster a sense of place that, in Wolfe's narration, defines La Honda by opposition to the allegedly unpracticed space of Millbrook. In Certeau's words, a place "is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts" (117). Thus did the Pranksters see La Honda: a communal experience where space was subject to the unplanned variations of a relaxed and playful approach to the use of psychedelics.

Among the numerous additions to the original Perry Laners, the Pranksters saw the arrival of Neal Cassady. He would be one of the few Beat icons to become part of the Prankster entourage in one moment or another.[88] Yet his presence was central in the first coast-to-coast trip the group took aboard Furthur. His background as a Beat hero, immortalized by Jack Kerouac in *On the Road* a few years before, was just indisputable. Cassady had attained a larger-than-life reputation in the countercultural imagination mainly due to the image of him projected by Kerouac in the novel. An incarnation of the American Westerner, Kerouac associates Cassady with that specific stereotype: "My first impression of Dean [real-life Neal Cassady] was of a young Gene Autry – trim, thin-hipped, blue-eyed, with a real Oklahoma accent – a sideburned hero of the snowy West" (*On the Road* 8). In other words, Cassady comes to be a contemporary version of

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[88] When the Pranksters became major players in the San Francisco counterculture in the Sixties, few Beat figures would show them visible support. Neal Cassady was the one who got most heavily involved with Kesey's group. Allen Ginsberg and, to a lesser extent, Michael McClure also were also close to Kesey. The lack of interest of the rest of the Beats in the Pranksters would point out that generational gap between both countercultural currents was insurmountable.

the cowboy: an independent man, without constrictions of any kind, who lives on the fringes of the normative and whose *raison d'être* is his nomadic spirit of restless movement. This spirit is closely linked to the restlessness inherent to the American ethos since the very foundation of the country, as Frederick Jackson Turner puts it: "Movement has been its dominant fact, and . . . the American energy will continually demand a wider field for its exercise" (227).

The man that joined the Merry Pranksters around 1964, shortly after serving two years in San Quentin for marijuana possession, however, somehow differed from the countercultural legend. As Lee and Shlain affirm, "Though the years in prison did not actually wither his joyful manner, the experience hardened him. The essence of Cassady's style remained the mad exultation in the moment, but his identification with sheer speed was even more compulsive; he ate amphetamines compulsively" (101). He was seen by Kesey's acolytes as a museum piece (Stevens 184), so he did not get to overshadow Kesey. Still, he would become the main driver of the bus. This added a dramatic symbolism to the Pranksters' trip: Neal Cassady, the unbowed embodiment of the Western man, behind the wheel again in what can be read as the retracing of his and Kerouac's seminal road trips to the West and back. This time, however, history was to be rewritten in the opposite direction—only to find out, in the frustrated climax at Millbrook, that the Eastern and more academic character of the Castalians also determined the approach to the psychedelic experience of Leary's group. A conclusion we can draw from this first trip is that the Bay Area Pranksters were already at the very last frontier; there was nothing left to be found by going east—not even in psychedelic terms. The new boundary, instead, was a new level of consciousness that exists in a different dimension (Carnes 38). As crucial as movement may have been for them, the

ultimate frontier was not a matter of traveling in geographical space but through the unexplored areas of the mind. Furthur would only be the metaphor of acid—a symbol that enabled the movement that necessarily connects the physical world with the uncharted spaces of human consciousness.

Cassady's distinguishing thirst for motion reached its apogee at one point of the trip on the way to New York. As Wolfe recalls,

> Coming up over the Blue Ridge Mountains everybody was stoned on acid, Cassady included, and it was at that moment that he decided to make it all the way down the steepest, awfulest windingest mountain highway in the history of the world without using the brakes. The lurid bus started barreling down the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. Kesey was up on top of the bus to take it all in. He was up there and he could feel the motion of the thing careening around the curves and the road rippling and writhing out in front of him like someone rippling a bullwhip. He felt totally synched with Cassady, however. It was as if, if he were panicked, Cassady would be panicked, panic would rush through the bus like an energy. And yet he never felt panic. It was an abstract thought. He had total faith in Cassady, but it was more than faith. It was as if Cassady, at the wheel, was in a state of satori, as totally into this very moment, Now, as a being can get, and for that moment they all shared it. (93)

A mixture of reckless insanity and uber-authentic moment-seizing, situations like this fascinated Kesey as he saw in Cassady's extravagant Western character an archetype of what the post-psychedelic man should be like (Stevens 184). In Lee and Shlain's words,

> Through such gratuitous acts Cassady became a kind of teacher for the group. He was the Zen lunatic whose gestures embodied the bohemian commitment to spontaneity and authenticity. Kesey described Cassady's spiritual path as "the yoga of a man driven to the cliff edge by the grassfire of an entire nation's burning material madness. Rather than be consumed by this he jumped, choosing to sort things out in the fast-flying but smogfree moments of a life with no retreat." (101)

Psychedelic Cassady's indomitability makes him a revised version of the marijuana-smoking Dean Moriarty we had seen in *On the Road*. From the Prankster point of view, in fact, this was a perfected version, for he conveyed his appealing transgressive traits and voracious appetite for movement to the psychedelic experience. He also contributed the "Zen lunatic" halo ascribed to him because of his earlier association with the Buddhist-leaning Beats, which the Pranksters would certainly idealize in their analogous spiritual quest. Above all, in the eyes of the Pranksters, Cassady's combination of spontaneity and lack of control was what gave them an edge over Leary's scientific and ordered views on psychedelics.

Of course, the formal differences between Kesey and Leary point to a deeper divergence that has to do with their outlooks on psychedelic drugs. As we have hinted earlier in this chapter, the enormous distance between them stemmed primarily from the seriousness of their respective approaches to psychedelics. In Timothy Miller's view,

> Seriousness of purpose guided Millbrook through the bulk of its existence. Unlike the Merry Pranksters, who took lots of LSD casually and had roaring parties, the Castalians took their psychedelics under controlled, even somber conditions, with guides and carefully controlled physical environments. . . . They also had a clear sense of group endeavor, undertaking study projects . . . and coming together for group LSD sessions. (*60s Communes* 28)

Leary believed in "set and setting," that is, the control of the psychedelic trip (*Psychedelic Experience* 103). To him, a proper guidance by an expert in psychoactive drugs, combined with the control of the surrounding environment, was required to secure the success of the psychedelic experience and avoid bad trips. Taking LSD was not just a personal action intended to unlock unexplored levels of the psyche. It became

a scholarly project that deserved traditional research methods: taking notes, analyzing the process from an external and emotionally detached position, coming to specific conclusions, and publishing a research journal between 1963 and 1971 called *The Psychedelic Review*. Leary, along with Richard Alpert and Ralph Metzner, would even go one step further and author *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1964), a book meant to be a guide on the use of psychedelics and the management of the various phases of ego death that these drugs ignite. As this book suggests, in the Sixties, Eastern spirituality would become something more abstract and distant from its literal study and practice, which had previously been favored by some of the Beats.

Where the Learyites saw guidance and control as positive, the Pranksters saw a cold, cerebral, and elitist approach to psychedelics. Lee and Shlain explain it:

> Kesey was not at all interested in structuring the set and setting of a LSD trip so that a spiritual experience would result. Why did acid require picturesque countryside or a fancy apartment with objets d'art to groove on and Bach's Suite in B Minor playing on the stereo? A psychedelic adventure on the bus needed no preconceived spiritual overtones; it could be experienced in the context of a family scene, a musical jam, or a plain old party. The Pranksters thought it was fine just going with the flow, taking acid in the midst of whatever was happening, no matter how disorienting or unusual the situation. (102)

Spontaneity and authenticity, once again, were crucial. The lysergic trip had to be free of scholarly and scientific constraints. Having been introduced to psychedelics by government-run drug testing programs, Kesey proposed to keep LSD away from the laboratory and the research realm in any of its forms (Lee and Shlain 102). This is read by critic Richard J. Miller as the seed of the democratization of the use of LSD (68). By

attempting to transpose the psychedelic experience to the masses—mainly in the form of the Acid Tests he organized throughout the Bay Area—and putting the accent on spontaneity and even hedonism, Kesey, in a quasi-apostolic lysergic mission, appealed to the democratic values of the American psyche, thus seeking the identification of the LSD trip with a truly American experience (Carnes 37, Lee and Shlain 100).

Leary's East Coast elitism was countered through the evocation of democracy, but also through a carnivalesque and playful style. The Pranksters' stylistic provocation, as Kim Hewitt points out, consisted of "wearing outrageous clothing, blasting loud music, attracting media attention, breaking as many social norms as possible, and committing as many pranks as possible" (579). The seriousness of purpose and the spirituality of Leary's circle found in Kesey, in Erik Davis's view, an antagonist, as "the 'spirituality' of the Pranksters can be seen as an anarchic, demotic, and sometimes goofy suspension of the difference between sacred and profane—more of a dodge of conventional rationality than a disciplined transcendence" (639). The Pranksters' use of playfulness and ambiguity was their way to subvert normative social standards and, this way, challenge the Establishment. According to Lee and Shlain, "they were into 'tootling the multitudes,' doing whatever was necessary to blow minds and keep folks off balance. 'The purpose of psychedelics,' said Kesey, 'is to learn the conditioned responses of people and then to prank them. That's the only way to get people to ask questions, and until they ask questions, they are going to remain conditioned robots'" (100).

Whether Leary actually got to receive Kesey at Millbrook is not entirely clear. Yet it is not that relevant either. The encounter of their respective groups at that early point in the Sixties counterculture—it was still 1964—already exposed the cultural

clash between the two main branches of the incipient drug counterculture. It was, in short, the traditional and recurrent East Coast versus West Coast confrontation, for the birthplace of each branch had ostensibly marked their respective approaches to the use of psychedelics. East versus West, in this particular case, meant intellect versus body, mysticism versus hedonism, illumination versus vital expansion (Racionero Ragué, "Ken Kesey y Timothy Leary"). Or, to put it Richard J. Miller's way, it meant "upper class versus working class, exclusivity versus egalitarianism" (68). As we have seen, the democratization of the psychedelic experience was at stake. The Bay Area Pranksters, following values coherent with their Western character, were instrumental in bringing acid closer to the masses. This democratization, consequently, in contrast with Leary's elitism, proved decisive in the configuration of the Sixties counterculture the way it unfolded in the following years. Therefore, we contend that, without Kesey, the San Francisco Sixties might have never been the way we know them. The Haight-Ashbury hippie community owed its aesthetics and approach to psychedelics, to a great extent, to Kesey's Pranksters. Their visual and raucous style would set the tone for the countercultural takeover of the public urban space in the Sixties. Concurrently, their playful use of drugs, promoted by successive Acid Tests organized throughout the Bay Area, put the psychedelic experience within everybody's reach, conquering, additionally, new mental spaces. The exploration of this mental spatiality unlocked by drugs exceeds the scope of this dissertation by far, but definitely opens the door for worthy follow-up research on the rich relationship between counterculture and space.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this dissertation we have strived to delineate an intimate relation of the counterculture of the 1950s and 1960s with the urban space of San Francisco. If there is one thing that stands out in our analysis, it is a parallelism between the evolution of the counterculture from the Fifties to the Sixties and its respective approach to the city's space in each period. The Fifties were the heyday of the Beat Generation in San Francisco. The Beats, arguably more intellectual than their heirs of the Sixties, usually put little interest in leaving a mark that transcended deep into society. Their condition of counterculture lied in an individual quest for purpose and a voluntary disengagement from the codes and anxieties of their contemporary society. Consequently, as Todd Gitlin notes, "most of the beats were inconspicuous; indeed, that was part of the point of being beat, whether that meant self-consciously beaten or beatified" (50). In *Minor Characters*, Joyce Johnson defines the Beat essence as the choice "to be lonely within a camaraderie of loneliness" (27). Unlike most of the hippies of the Sixties, the Beats were predominantly writers, and were characterized by traits inherent to writing—individualism, loneliness. The internal and personal process of writing would inform the countercultural identity of the Beat Generation. This bluntly individualistic bent is noticeable all over Beat literature, but we have seen that it is particularly pronounced in Jack Kerouac.

Among the San Francisco Beats, Kerouac is arguably the author who identifies himself the most with the marginal and the disenfranchised of American society. We observe in his texts a fixation for San Francisco's South of Market district, the city's skid row until the 1970s. There he can explore the meaning of placelessness through an

array of social characters buried by mainstream society in its periphery, represented by this neighborhood. Kerouac turns South of Market into a decrepit space that is not a place for anyone. The image is exceptionally powerful, for he uses San Francisco—the emblematic end of the North American subcontinent in the American vision of westward expansion—to draw a space that, in social terms, symbolizes what has been abandoned at the other side of the American Frontier. The characters confined to this peripheral area of society represent what Kerouac, and the Beats in general, see as the liberation from the constraints of the dominant culture, which generates in him a desire for what he perceives as the purest individuality. Among these characters, the hobo captivates Kerouac's imagination as an idiosyncratically Western American figure. A transient worker in constant movement, the hobo is considered by the author the quintessential mirror for the disenchanted mid-century Americans. Kerouac's romantic perception of the hobo places the latter in an "idealistic lope to freedom and the hills of holy silence and holy privacy" (*Lonesome Traveler* 172-73). The intrinsic individualism and lack of place of South of Market's numerous hobos is reflective of Kerouac's own psychological placelessness in American society.

The frankly individualistic leanings of the San Francisco Beats, however, would not be detrimental to the articulation of a countercultural community in the city's North Beach neighborhood. Albeit always based on the value of the individual, this community would rely on a "camaraderie of loneliness"—as mentioned by Johnson above—to shape a sound attachment to the North Beach space. We find in Lawrence Ferlinghetti's poetry that this results in a sense of resistance as a community. Ferlinghetti's texts transmit a vision of North Beach as a countercultural enclave within San Francisco that is fully aware of the aggressive practices of the city's and the

country's dominant elite that threaten the community by means of attacking its space. As a consequence of this awareness, Ferlinghetti portrays North Beach as an Edenic community distant from the excesses of capitalism and the intolerance of normative society and close to a purer vision of the original United States influenced by the Whitmanian tradition of poetic celebration and definition of the American democracy.

In contrast to the counterculture of the Sixties, the social scene of Beat North Beach would be largely restricted to the indoor space. The bars, coffeehouses, and restaurants of the neighborhood became the public meeting places of the Beat authors and the beatnik subculture that emerged around them and their writings. Although technically public, these spaces, always enclosed within four walls, would serve as *dens* where the San Francisco counterculture could shelter from any interference from the larger society. The San Francisco Beats, even in the social sphere, would resist the spotlight of the public scene and favor a sense of privacy and social loneliness. The countercultural politics of space, nevertheless, would change significantly as the Sixties approached. We have seen in chapter 2.2 the value of Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* as an allegorical chronicle of the transition from the Fifties to the Sixties in San Francisco. Published just in 1966, Pynchon's novella already provides a comprehensive insight into the early 1960s and how the counterculture would evolve in its use of the city's space. The protagonist of the story, Oedipa Maas, an emblem of the normative and self-complacent American society of the mid-20th century, spends a hallucinatory night adrift in San Francisco that reproduces the Debordian concept of the *dérive*. Pynchon's nod to the situationists' psychogeographical perspective on the urban space results in a metaphor of the United States becoming aware of the alternate social realities that the nation had been sweeping under the rug until then—just in the same way as American

society would run across the overwhelming energy of the Sixties counterculture in the second half of that decade, once it was already a fact. Similarly, the San Francisco counterculture—or rather, the remnants of the Fifties counterculture, represented by John Wieners—would also disclose the reality that sexual diversity was. While not strictly central to the agenda of the San Francisco counterculture, homosexuality was widely present in the Beat community and the beatnik subculture in the Fifties. It would never be an actual concern of the city's rebels of the Sixties either, but we find it noteworthy that Wieners's post-Beat work relates so closely to the incipient gay rights movement that was finding its place in the city's landscape of the early 1960s in the form of a gay neighborhood. This physical space for homosexuality, impulsed by the Beats' liberal politics of sex, received a major contribution from Wieners's poetry, which would help underpin it from the cultural—or rather, countercultural—sphere. Wieners's contribution, however irrelevant it would be to the new countercultural generation, can be seen as central to the gay rights movement that would unfold later that decade and would attain great strength in San Francisco well into the 1970s.

The Sixties, as *The Crying of Lot 49* hints at, represented a spatial revolution in the San Francisco counterculture. R.G. Davis's San Francisco Mime Troupe would be a pioneer in realizing the power of an active use of the public space as a weapon to change society. The Mime Troupe was fully aware that the dominant political and financial elite had appropriated the public space and controlled who and how can access it in any truly transcendental way. Advancing Henri Lefebvre's theory that a differential space—or counter space—can be opened up in order to challenge the domination of the hegemonic class, the Troupe would embark in an aggressive reclamation of San Francisco's public space. Against the interests of the local authorities, the city's parks

and streets became the space of the Sixties counterculture. The outdoor space, ultimately, would prevail over the indoor space. The Troupe's politics of space was furthered in the heyday of the Sixties by the Diggers, who would become a central element of the hippie community that emerged in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district. The Haight, the beating heart of the Sixties in the city, popularized the heterogeneous hippie stereotype. The hippies took over the streets and parks of the Haight as a loosely cohesive community, relying on a visual, carnivalesque, and scandalous style that would materialize into "happenings" such as gatherings and rock dances. The hippie invasion of the city's public space would be just another representation of that thumping style. In contrast with the intimate nature of the Beats' literary countercultural proposal—intimate both for them as writers and the reader as target,— the hippie style would seek to be as invasive for the public space as for the human senses—an ultimate expression of which was their heavy use of psychedelic drugs—and, at a broader scale, for the conscience of normative society.

It has been our intention to explore the fact that the dialogue of the San Francisco counterculture with space, however, was not free of problems. We contend that one of the greatest faux pas of the Beat counterculture was to introduce the figure of the African-American in such a forced way. The Beat movement was so extremely male and white-centered that we can count Bob Kaufman as the only relevant black literary authority in its West Coast scene. With the purpose of strengthening their rebellious identity, the Beats and their beatnik social base would embark in a symbolic yet misguided effort to racialize their social space—composed essentially of the North Beach gathering spots mentioned above. Kaufman's poetry shows us that the intended blackening of the Beat social space resulted in an appropriation of the African-American

identity. This race-based politics of space, far from working in favor of the counterculture, would only unleash its dormant racist instincts—thus only weakening the Beat message of racial integration. In the Sixties, on another note, the main problem of the San Francisco counterculture would lie in what should have been one of its strong points on paper—the over-exploitation of the public space. The hippies of the Haight put so much emphasis on the creation of a differential space that the exposure they thought would help them change society turned into their worst enemy in actuality. The irresistible power of mass media, which targeted the unrestrained hippies, would assimilate them as a caricature into popular culture very quickly, leaving the Haight community largely dismantled soon after the iconic Summer of Love of 1967.

We have not wanted to miss the opportunity to tackle in this dissertation the expansive outreach of San Francisco as countercultural space beyond the strictly local sphere. We have done it from two different angles. First, we have examined the orientalist leanings of the San Francisco Beat scene from the seminal role of Kenneth Rexroth to the poetry of Gary Snyder and Philip Whalen. By putting in connection the anarchistic roots of the San Francisco Beats and their attraction for Eastern religion and philosophy, we contend that they sketch a heterotopian vision of the city as a cultural—and, concurrently, countercultural—capital that expands spatially through the Bay Area and the American Northwest all the way to Eastern Asia—thus setting itself apart as the United States' primary contact zone with Asia-Pacific. Another interpretation of San Francisco as a wide-ranging countercultural space has been our comparison of Ken Kesey's and Timothy Leary's respective perspectives on the use of psychedelic drugs. Rather than acknowledging a uniform psychedelic culture across the American counterculture, we have analyzed the psychedelic politics of both of them from a

geographical viewpoint. We have found deep differences between both that can be transposed, in geographical terms, into a representation of the East-West dialectics that is indivisible part of the American imaginary. In our view, the distinctive Western traits of Kesey and his group of associates, consequently, informed an idiosyncratic democratizing West Coast psychedelic culture. Gravitating geographically around San Francisco, this lysergic philosophy would put the city in the Sixties in a leading position at the forefront of the American counterculture.

The inevitable focus limitations required by a study like this unfortunately leave little room if any for related research lines that may complement and enrich it. Still, the triangle composed by space, San Francisco, and the counterculture—the basic framework of this dissertation—offers several possibilities to follow up with further research from each of its three angles. One of these possibilities is the expansion of the spatial scope of analysis. This study focuses mostly on the physical space of San Francisco rather than on imagined or figurative spaces. When it comes to inquiring into the counterculture, shifting into a wider notion of space would open up a vast field related to the mind. The consistent experimentation with drugs across the different stages of the San Francisco counterculture, aimed at unlocking unexplored layers of human consciousness that favor a deeper self-knowledge and new forms of artistic creation, turns the mind into an extremely interesting space—and a potential place— from which pursue a broader understanding of the mid-century American counterculture. This foray into the mind, moreover, can represent an opportunity to incorporate to the analysis of the counterculture different levels of the human condition of critical interest—most prominently, gender dialectics, which has a minimal impact on the physical urban space from our approach, and a wider consideration of race relations

within the counterculture.

Another research line that might as well build upon this dissertation is the broadening of the geographical purview of study. The vision of San Francisco as an imperial city-state that reigns over a region of influence or *contado*, developed by Gray Brechin and Rob Wilson and mentioned in chapter 1.4 of our study, certainly opens the door to analyzing the counterculture as a fully regional phenomenon that interacts with the space of the whole Bay Area and beyond—for the mid-century counterculture in the Bay Area had ramifications that exceeded the limits of the city of San Francisco. This would call for the incorporation of the iconic space of the commune—largely absent from our study due to its little relevance in the city's urban space—as a notion of analysis and for the inclusion of authors like Richard Brautigan, whose ties to the San Francisco region are tighter than to the city itself.

Last, the historical point where this dissertation concludes is an invitation to delve further into the spatiality of dissent in San Francisco beyond the mid-century counterculture. As we have mentioned in the introduction section, the city has favored the emergence of a wide number of dissident movements over the years that range from the gay liberation movement to tenant power initiatives to the Occupy movement. The twilight of the Sixties in San Francisco certainly yields to a large amount of study material to explore the inseparable connection of this city as space with the defiance to the social, cultural, political, and financial status quo of the United States.

Studying San Francisco as a pivotal space for dissent—as we hope this dissertation has achieved—remains a very relevant enterprise for the critical mind, for the city has been, is, and probably will be an essential hotbed of progressive and liberal ideas. It is even more so today, when the election of Donald Trump as President of the

United States has led to political and social turmoil without parallel in recent years. San Francisco has a central role amid this atmosphere, for it symbolizes quite the opposite of what President Trump seems to represent. This diametrical opposition would become even more obvious on 2016 Election Day, when over ten times as many San Francisco voters supported Trump's Democratic rival Hillary Clinton ("California Results"). The antagonism led columnist Willie Brown of the *San Francisco Chronicle* to suggest that the city might be "at the top of Trump's enemies list" ("SF Could Be"). In fact, city politics in San Francisco has evolved relatively in parallel with the local trademark culture of dissent in the last decades. This materializes at present in two defining traits of the city that contradict President Trump's political views as they have been implemented thus far. One is San Francisco's condition as a leading sanctuary city among those in the United States that do not persecute actively illegal immigration—a condition the city has vowed to proudly retain in defiance to Trump's Executive Order 13767 (titled "Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements), which seeks full cooperation of local, county, and state authorities with federal immigration enforcement officials (Green and Fagan, "SF Mayor Lee"). The other is the city's elevated amount of public spending, part of which is set aside for, among a number of social initiatives, the city-run Healthy San Francisco program. A subsidized medical care program for the city's uninsured residents, Healthy San Francisco is fundamentally similar to President Barack Obama's 2010 Affordable Care Act, which the Trump administration heartily opposes.

Space proves to be a vital dimension for the efforts of cultural and social movements to oppose the normative order. Instrumental as it was to the impact of the mid-20th century American counterculture, San Francisco's relevance is thus today

greater than ever.

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