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GRADUATE COLLEGE

DISSENT: DETROIT AND THE UNDERGROUND PRESS, 1965-69

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

MATTHEW T. PIFER

Norman, Oklahoma

2001

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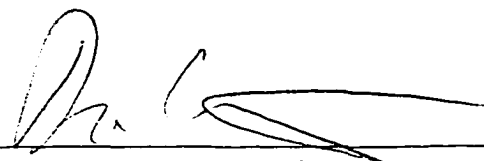
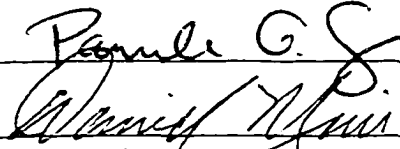
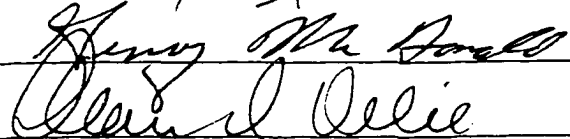
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DISSENT: DETROIT AND THE UNDERGROUND PRESS, 1965-69

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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Abstract

Dissent: Detroit and the Underground Press, 1965-69

The relationship between Detroit's underground presses—which included *The Fifth Estate*, *Creem*, *Sun*, the *Artists' Workshop Press*, the *Inner City Voice*, the *South End Press*, *The Broadside Press*, and *Guerrilla*—and the cultural realities of late 1960s Detroit is revealed in these presses' editorial policies and artistic content. A critical understanding of this relationship is framed by Henri Levebre's and Raymond Williams notions of place as a social and cultural construct. Their social theories inform an understanding of how social space and cultural texts interact to shape the political realities of a specific time and place, composing, as Williams describes, a "sociology of culture." From this conceptual foundation, it is possible to view the underground presses' artistic discourses, such as journalism, poetry, fiction, and visual art, as politically motivated modes of social and cultural critique, which were central to the kinds of dissent emerging in Detroit and elsewhere at the time. These discourses, often presented as means to a new consciousness, were used to interrogate and potentially to alter Detroit's urban consciousness and, therefore, its social possibilities. How, it is asked, did the underground presses function, as John Sinclair wondered, to "do something about Detroit?" The answer to this question uncovers the art, music, and philosophies—the enduring cultural artifacts—of Detroit's urban radicals and counter-culturalists. However, the answer also reveals the limits of 1960s' radicalism, counter-culturalism, and the significance of the political and cultural contributions of these occasionally misguided, criminal, and anti-intellectual editors, poets, musicians, and journalists. Yet the impression that lingers after an analysis of these presses is the desire, perhaps the audacity, to say something different in the face of enormous political and economic pressures to conform to the status quo. Even though these presses had their shortcomings, they still provided a counter-representation to the straight media's "humiliation" of history, as Jerry Herron states, and provided important insights into the every day possibilities of journalism, poetry, fiction, and visual art in the re-imagining of Detroit's social and cultural futures.

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Preface: Coming Home

My investigation of the 1960s began in ignorance. Growing up in a small town in northern Michigan, I had never known any political activists. Political activism amounted to letters written to the editor of the *Clare County Cleaver*. I read them as one reads tabloids: enamored with the spectacle, the morsel of gossip, the sense of my town as a contentious space: who had the power, who wanted it, who might lose it. I read about those upset about the city's remodeling of the little league field or the expansion of the Clare County jail's parking lot. Meanwhile, my sense of global politics reached me through the television—the nightly news and *60 Minutes*. I remember the Middle Eastern conflicts, the assassination of Anwar al-Sadat, the bombing of the military compound in Beirut, Lebanon. Politics seemed merely practice in foreign policy and had little to do with my home, family, or friends.¹

To some this pastoral detachment (the separation between country and city) was a benefit of my rural upbringing: through a social isolation, I was able to approach my future with little fear except for those vague bogeymen of nuclear annihilation and AIDS. The need to be political, essentially from birth, and to fight the government for my basic rights was not part of my experience. Radicalism was sinful, disrespectful (which to my family was a sin worse than other kinds of sin), and unproductive (a sin against the

¹In “Notes Towards Historiographies of Rhetorics; or the Rhetorics of the Histories of Rhetorics: Traditional, Revisionary, and Sub/Versive, Victor J. Vitanza argues that the act of writing history is “always already” ideological and that we cannot escape or see our history from outside this ideology. To address this predicament it is, therefore, necessary—“if we are ever to escape the exclusivity of a common sense rhetoric or ideology and to establish what I have been referring to as a competing ‘counter’-ideology and then (yes) ‘counter-counter’ ideologies”—to acknowledge that “there can be (this time) no final day of rest, no final point of stasis” (12). In this dissertation, I attempt to uncover those ideologies that speak in opposition to perceived instances of the “dominant” ideology.

German work ethic, which was the creed that shaped the history of my community). Like many of my town-folk and school peers, I had been taught that the radicalism of the 1960s had been misguided. As Patrick Brantlinger discusses in *Crusoe's Footprints*, I had been introduced to the belief that "the current moribund state of the humanities and more generally of education" could be traced to the "radical tendencies of the 1960s" (3). Still, I encountered histories that suggested something deeper might be meant by the pejorative use of the phrase "the 1960s."

Most of these stories emerged in 1985 (I was eleven in 1982 when the Vietnam Memorial was dedicated and only remember some controversy over the designer's ethnicity) with the flood of Vietnam retrospectives produced to commemorate the ten-year anniversary of our evacuation from Saigon. Around this time, movies, such as *Apocalypse Now* (in commemorative airings), *The Fourth of July*, *Platoon*, and *Full Metal Jacket*, introduced me to the Vietnam conflict.² These movies, in conjunction with the elevation of the Vietnam Veteran in popular culture, portrayed the 1960s as an evil time of rampant exploitation, in which innocent children (noticeably like myself) had been sent to fight or die in an unjust war. The focus of these films, of course, was on the kid tortured by images of death and hatred and the sense that nothing made sense. The "existentialism" of these films, in which nothing had meaning and sense was conveyed through the collision of shattered psychologies, was reportedly a product of '60s' drug

²These movies, especially *Apocalypse Now*, portrayed some of the most terrifying images I had known. This terror was furthered when a teacher, who grew up during the Vietnam War, told my English class that most of the soldiers who went to Vietnam were about my age, 18. On this point also recall Paul Hardcastle's song "19" from *A Time to Remember 1985*, which claims that the "average combat soldier in Vietnam was nineteen." In World War II, the average age was twenty-six.

culture, its sexual permissiveness, and its disrespect of American traditions (what Sacvan Bercovitch might refer to as the inability or unwillingness of those in the 1960s to agree upon a cultural consensus).³ Many of the filmmakers consulted Michael Herr—a war correspondent, author of *Dispatches*, coauthor of the screenplays for *Full Metal Jacket* and *Apocalypse Now*—in making their films. In *Dispatches*, after his return from Vietnam, Herr provides a compelling description of the 1960s:

Out on the street I couldn't tell the Vietnam veterans from the rock and roll veterans. The Sixties had made so many casualties, its war and its music had run power off the same circuit for so long they didn't even have to fuse. The war primed you for lame years while rock and roll turned more lurid and dangerous than bullfighting, rock stars started falling like second lieutenants: ecstasy and death and (of course) life, but it didn't seem so then. What I'd thought of as two obsessions were really only one, I don't know how to tell you how complicated that made my life. Freezing and burning and going down again into the sucking mud of the culture, hold on tight and move real slow. (258)

I began to see the 1960s as a complex interaction of confusion, utopia, idiocy, and hope, following, for example, the title of Todd Gitlin's book about the 1960s: *The Sixties*:

³Bercovitch makes the following connection between the 1960s and the American "ritual of consensus" in *The Rites of Assent: Transformations in the Symbolic Construction of America*:
When I first encountered the ritual of American consensus, in the mid-1960s, it took the form of protest and despair: the Jewish anarchist Paul Goodman berating the country for abandoning its promise; the descendant of American slaves, Martin Luther King, Jr., denouncing injustice as a violation of the American Way; an interminable debate about national destiny, full of rage and faith, conservatives scavenging for un-Americans, New Left historians recalling the country to its sacred mission. The complaints on all sides amounted to an old refrain adapted to a New World prophecy: "When is our errand to be fulfilled? How long, O Lord, how long?" And on all sides the solutions joined celebration and lament in reaffirming the American dream. (29)

Years of Hope, Days of Rage. In Herr's description is the sense that everyone is dying, that the culture of death was more than radical rhetoric, but was a physical reality. It was Dantesque, in the sense that all was being drawn into the depths of hell, each level a progression in sin. Post-traumatic stress syndrome (recognized in 1979), the psyche-wrenching dreams of those who could not forget the horrors they had committed and seen, became a condition of postmodern America. The psyche stressed to its limits became a pop-cultural archetype: John Rambo, Colonel Walter E. Kurtz, and Sergeant Barnes.⁴ The My Lai massacre seemed its symbol: evil existed in the government and the actions of high-placed American officials.⁵ Herr describes 1969 as exhibiting this sense of the social mind becoming unhinged, flailing for some set of common values that might heal the nation, or at least keep it together: "The year had been so hot that I think it shorted out the whole decade, what followed was mutation, some kind of awful 1969-X" (259). In these accounts, histories, and personal narratives, it seemed that everyone was trying to get to something like Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, that beatific utopia, that sense of love and individual freedom, but kept finding himself in some industrial malaise complete with a bunch of jerky Hals replacing people at their jobs and, as in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, going insane.

That's how the 1960s appeared to me in the 1980s: it seemed the beginning of some odyssey that manifested itself in the anti-intellectual, postmodern, confused present I was living. Sixties radicals seemed akin to Jason and the Argonauts trying to find their

⁴These characters are from *First Blood*, *Apocalypse Now*, and *Platoon*, respectively.

⁵Lt. William Calley was convicted of war crimes for ordering his men to kill the My Lai civilians.

way home after war. The perils were everywhere and strange, cyclops with pens, skeletons with business plans, krakens on the cover of *Time Magazine*, Medusa staring back from the pages of *Life*. Crazy, postmodern fragmentation faced those coming out of the nostalgia of the 1950s, in which everything was presented as uniform, clean, and progressive. New machines meant less work, suburbs and freeways meant quiet isolation and the freedom of individual movement, new industries meant more jobs, new technologies promised an easier future (but ease at what cost?). Yet what was made of the inequalities inside this periphery of conformity? What was made of the inner cities that were becoming the forgotten frontiers of American social policy, as industries and capital moved away from the contentiousness of the civil rights movement, black nationalism, and the tensions among unions, corporate executives, and anti-unions? During the civil rights movement emerged the ideals of Martin Luther King and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). At the same time, Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam called for violent resistance to white oppression. Dissent from the apparent conformity of the 1950s became necessary to achieve full citizenship under the constitution (a need that threw America into an identity crisis).

Still, such dissent was divided into several factions among several different groups, which led me to see the decade as being defined by paradox and contradiction. These antagonistic appearances became one way to describe America's future: "we must destroy it to save it." And for me that did seem to be what happened in the 1960s. The war, the riots, and civil unrest in the nation helped explain why my parents, grandparents, and teachers referred to this time with such trepidation. But the complexities made a

point, even though there was certainly no *one* point to be taken from the 1960s. That point was that ideas matter, or as Richard Neuhaus states, paraphrasing Richard Weaver, “ideas have consequences” (9). Ideas have the power to change perception, to alter the nation’s consciousness, to tell the stories and share the experiences of those that had gone unheard and unheeded. It was a search of such ideas that I wished to conduct in my research into the 1960s; I wished to recover, in some way, from history what had been discarded.

The unrest of the 1960s has been well documented by those who experienced the decade, such as Todd Gitlin, Abe Peck, James Miller, and Maurice Isserman, but the submerged voices, such as those published in the underground presses, have often gone unconsidered, or only considered in terms of the role they played in some larger political organization. Although such considerations are important, it is also important to examine the literature of these writers who were trying, in their way, to say and do something about the problems in their own time. This desire informs my investigation of Detroit and the poetry of the city’s underground presses in the late 1960s.

My aim in this work is similar to the literary history Cary Nelson conducts in *Repression and Recovery*. In discussing the method he used to analyze the poetry of the left between 1910 and 1945, Nelson states, “I want to resist the tendency toward decisive canonical judgements because my aims are different: to suggest the range of voices, styles, and discourses at work in the period, to point toward rather than wholly represent their writing practices, to provide possible entrances into their work, to raise interest in rather than settle the status of these poets, to identify poetry that may be able again to do

useful cultural work in our own time. And finally to propose a general reconsideration of the relations between poetry and the rest of social life” (19). The poetry of the underground press in late ‘60s Detroit has a relationship that is analogous, generally speaking, to that phenomenon which Nelson describes. My efforts, then, are also analogous. As with his interest in early leftist poetry, I have found the poetry, and the more general cultural poetics, of the ‘60s irresistible, agreeing with his statement that “we should always read what people assure us is no good. . . . We need to rediscover poets whose work is no longer even mentioned in most literary histories” (51). The question of course is “why?” Nelson argues that his investigation, for instance, is essential for a more complete understanding of modern poetry, and that it, more generally, critiques the institutional “hierarchical ranking of poets” that leads to the loss of important segments of our literary heritage (51-2). Similarly, looking at the forgotten poets of the ‘60s and their equally important publishing media adds to the story of postmodernism and to the aesthetics that characterize this era’s modes of dissent. I consider the nature of the relationship between art and culture and how that relationship can be identified and explained. In this work, I attempt to uncover some of the complex interactions of this relationship, pushing more toward an articulation of a poetics than a mere interpretation of forgotten texts. I have found that the underground presses not only published new poetry, but argued for a new sense of sight, a new way of perceiving one’s relation to the city, community, and artistry in general. This new sense of sight I perceive as a Detroit poetics, which begins for me as Nelson’s book did for him: “Indeed, this book is partly a record of the way my own reflections about the issue of historical interest have changed

my taste in poetry” (41). For me, this project also grew out of my own interactions with the city of Detroit and its literature, and out of a desire to understand one in relation to the other.

My experiences working in Detroit, reading Philip Levine, traveling to the city, eating in the restaurants in Trappers Alley and Greek Town, suggested something different about what I had been taught about the 1960s. The burned-out, boarded-up shops and homes seemed to be witnesses to a past no one seemed to discuss. The Detroit riot of 1967, which produced much of this landscape, did not get revisited very often, but seemed inscribed on Detroit’s urban landscape. In the early 1990s, the past violence of the riots seemed a footnote to the economic difficulties the city was experiencing.

As I began to look closer at the 1960s through Levine’s poetry and additional reading of hard-to-find books, I discovered some of the submerged voices that were trying to tell the complex story of Detroit—the story that lies beneath the city’s ruins and extant social tensions. Poets such as b.p. flanagan, Dudley Randall, and John Sinclair began to suggest that something had been lost in the 1960s. Some vital energy that sought sincerely to change society for the better had been squandered, and hope had been replaced with cynicism. But rather than examining, in Levine’s words, “what had come off,” commentators had displaced the 1960s from their historical context. It was not useful, or productive, to examine the literature of this era at any length unless it coincided with feminism and the civil rights movement.

Why have so many of the poets of Detroit and the 1960s disappeared? One reason is certainly because poetry itself has declined in importance. Since the 1960s, its

audience has shrunk primarily to include academic specialists. Also, the poetry of protest, or poetry devoted to the events of its time, is often discarded along with the history to which it was directly responding. Such poetry, often referred to as didactic or sentimental, lacks the necessary “transcendence” to remain vital throughout the ages. Therefore, it does not find a place in the canon and in university literature courses, which are the only places in which many people will ever read poetry.⁶ In addition, much of the poetry of the 1960s was published in relatively rare newspapers and magazines or not at all, existing only in transcripts of oral readings or as part of some activist lore. However, simply because a work is not printed in a conventional medium and discreetly shelved in a library should not exclude it from critical consideration, as Nelson points out in his critique of the modern poetic canon (41-51).

As I continued to study Detroit’s marginal voices, I was moved by the depths of their insights, even when they were gratuitously off-color or grotesque. The poets Philip Levine, Jim Daniels, Joyce Carol Oates, and Dudley Randall seemed on to something, conscious of some sense of humanity that I wished I had been taught. This impression was in part due, I am sure, to my desire to think differently than those I worked with at the National Bank of Detroit. I wondered what had become of the 1960s activist mentality, or the desire to re-imagine society. Some would say it turned into feminism, environmentalism, pluralism; others that it had sold out to Madison Avenue and was transforming the world into a vat of hyper-consumption; others still that it had been

⁶What is curious about this is that everybody I know outside of academia writes poetry, but no one I know in that realm ever seems to read it.

consumed by drugs, sex, and other kinds of irrational excess. Some would argue that the writers of the 1960s were doomed by their influences, pointing to the various characters in Tom Wolfe's *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, or William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*. They argued that within those pages, those representations, were the remains of a lost generation, solipsistic teenagers tripping along highways, swilling their way on to nowhere. But through these stories I was reminded of other artistic movements that seemed to have a kinship with the 1960s, with the voices that had been discarded for more academically privileged literature. Dadaism and Surrealism provided me with a way to begin understanding the oppositional drive of the activists in Detroit. These movements put culture itself on trial. So I took a closer look.

Tying these artistic movements to the evolving history of the twentieth century, Robert Short describes the role Dadaism and Surrealism played in establishing an alternative aesthetic. "Dadaists and Surrealists," Short states, "claimed that there was no longer any point in writing about experience: the act of the poet or artist should be to put his whole sensitivity in direct contact with the universe in a stance of cosmic passivity. In place of the maker of forms, Surrealism posited a new image of the artist as someone who was characterized by his availability to chance, to the promptings of the unconscious and internal impulses, who welcomed everything that occurred spontaneously" (292). In this aesthetic, artists accepted sloppy artifacts: items that were generated out of half-thought, half-recognized impressions, which were considered more honest to the degree to which they diverged from a central plan or artistic form. They allowed the artist to work outside of institutionalized reason, searching for a more truly human means of expression. Freed

in this way, the artist could critique bourgeois culture. This freedom led to a new romanticism in which a search for a fundamental truth was conducted in the acceptance of the accidental, the natural, the autochthonous voice that seemed to spring from the very soil underfoot or to form the very soil that had become the asphalt of the city's streets. Spontaneity and simultaneity became important concepts. No longer was the linear experience the only way to imagine the world. Much was happening at once, and the Dadaists and Surrealists attempted, as artists in the 1960s did, to embrace this sense of an engaged and unpredictable life.

Motivated by these Dadaist and Surrealist ideas, I continued my investigation of the 1960s with an unrefined reading of various poets and careful attention to the lectures of my instructors. I was looking and listening intently, almost obsessively, for the accident, that tangential grouping of facts or impressions, that would open up a world of meaning for me and, thereby, help me understand what had been lost in the 1960s. I admit that my interest at first was naive, intense, and under-theorized, rising primarily out of my confusion with Detroit, my corporate life as a technical writer, and a timely introduction to the poetry of Philip Levine. I also spent time listening, for the first time, to Bob Dylan, the Fugs, the Velvet Underground, the MC5, and Grand Funk Railroad. It seemed as if an important period in American literature and culture had been denied me. Blame it on a gap in literary scholarship that lingers about fifty years behind current trends (it takes fifty years, as Harold Bloom might argue, for the timeless art to rise above the fluff). Blame it on the force of the canon and the academy's devotion to "cultural literacy." Blame it on our tendency to define "art" or "literature" as that which is

supposed to illuminate the fundamental nature of the human condition by transcending its immediate context. As Nelson states, this view of the canon is political: “The canon as it now exists serves as much to prevent (or at least to discourage) us from reading certain kinds of texts—particularly texts marked as disruptively political—as to ensure that what we have judged to be the best literature will continue to be read. It maintains a limited and apolitical notion of poetry in part by decreasing the chance that people will read poems that provide counter-examples” (37). I do not mean to suggest here that the canon, as it “now exists,” is part of some ivory-tower conspiracy. It exists and evolves as it can to include those works that provide insight into “good literature.” The fact that deciding what is “good literature” is controversial should not cause too much concern because it is a necessary part of academic exchange and growth. It must remain so if the field is to adapt to ever-changing social and cultural contexts. Re-evaluations of the canon, or occasional divergences from it, should be encouraged and not simply ignored. The canon is best, I think, when thought of as an ongoing dialogue between tradition, convention, and innovation. Such a dialogue allows the multi-voiced, multi-imagined works to emerge in tension with one another, thereby providing new and potentially helpful perspectives for (re)interpreting our individual and communal experiences. In any event, I felt I needed to understand this period. It held more power for me than most literature I had encountered as an undergraduate, and I wished to discover why that might be the case.

At some point (probably while I was trying to avoid writing that next mortgage

manual), I encountered Levine's "Coming Home: 1968," included below.⁷ It articulated the mystery that captivated me and remains central to my understanding of Detroit and of the fragmented and changeable character of Michigan.⁸ Around this one text revolved all the tensions that defined the Detroit I had begun to love and hate. The fear, the racism, the work, the pain, and the loss were all there. In each line is an image that forces a pause, a meter pounded out with experience rather than familiar tropes: "One brown child," "a shower of human breath," "The charred faces":

Near the freeway
you stop and wonder what came off,
recall the snowstorm where you lost it all,
the wolverine, the northern bear, the wolf
caught out, ice and steel raining
from the foundries in a shower
of human breath. On sleds in the false sun

⁷To see an example of how technical writers evade their jobs, read John Ashbery's "The Instruction Manual." It expresses almost exactly what I felt every day as a member of NBD Mortgage's branch support department:

As I sit looking out of the building
I wish I did not have to write the instruction manual on
the uses of a new metal.
I look down into the street and see people, each walking
with an inner peace,
And envy them—they are so far away from me! (13)

Sitting on the fifth floor of the NBD Mortgage Company, with my cubicle strategically turned away from the large windows, I would watch a scene similar to that viewed by Ashbery's narrator: I'd get a cup of bitter coffee in the morning, walk to the windows, and watch the people wandering along Tower Drive. Unlike this narrator, however, I never imagined that the people I saw were any more at "peace" than I was. As I was, they also appeared to be part of the same hyper-driven, ambition-laden world. Yet they did seem more free.

⁸For a single-volume history of Michigan see Willis F. Dunbar's *The Wolverine State: A History of the Wolverine State*.

the new material rests. One brown child
stares and stares into your frozen eyes
until the lights change and you go
forward to work. The charred faces, the eyes
boarded up, the rubble of innards, the cry
of wet smoke hanging in your throat,
the twisted river stopped at the color of iron.
We burn this city every day. (75)

Michigan's history and its personality, like those of many states, revolve around its major cities. Through history Detroit has become home to diverse fragments of the past and doles them out in ravished bits over the rest of the sparsely populated northern landscape. The northern town where I grew up, for instance, seemed to collect these bits of Detroit—its bondooed automobiles (which still seem to me a specific type of rural body), together with the effects of its unemployment, depression, and pollution. The city, I have come to realize, is the great modernist text, with its people moving among high rises, guided by them along various streets, down clean alleys, past cars stopping now and then among the statues and fountains, the parks and man-made streams, reading endless advertisements rotating on mechanized billboards while they eat their lunch before going back to their factory jobs. The American city is a drama that ties the history of America to the present efforts of the most silent, marginalized citizens. And like any story, it needs to be told, retold, and studied, for it has a great deal to tell us about how our past has affected and will continue to affect our present.

In the 1970s Detroit seemed little more than a dot on my palm when I was holding my hand to serve as a map of Michigan, or part of my dad's stories about his youth (Hudson's department store, the Fox Theater, Dearborn when it was still a rural neighborhood . . .). Later in life, while I was working in and around Detroit, the mystery of its spaces, the vagueness of its interiors, grew more profound. Driving down Gratiot Avenue and over to Belle Isle to wash boats at the Detroit Yacht Club, I always felt as though I had crossed some invisible barrier. Certainly there was poverty and some of the neighborhoods I passed through were dilapidated, but there was also something less tangible in moving through these areas. It was a feeling, a kind of psychic breeze that kicked up the dust of desperation and whistled through the vacant lots and gutted buildings. The city felt vacant, in a sense forgotten, somehow outside of history, and it was like the setting of some post-apocalyptic fairy tale, as in *Robocop* or *Blade Runner*.

One evening, after having spent about ten hours washing boats at the yacht club, I passed a laundry shop just off of Gratiot Avenue. A large loading door was opened, and I saw rows of washing and wringing machines arranged in straight, I assumed efficient, rows. Outside a group of black men were buying sandwiches from a vendor who was set up in the back end of a pickup. As I passed, stopping at the corner, I watched other men folding large white sheets and white towels, probably to be shipped to the area's hotels. The contrasts struck me, not just the different colors, white on black, but what that contrast suggested about inner-city Detroit and the outlying suburbs, the poor neighborhoods and the hyper-rich yacht clubs they bordered, and the people who worked in the factories and the disappearance of history, or what Jerry Herron in *Afterculture*

refers to as its “humiliation” (62). At the end of the summer, I quit my job and returned to graduate school, but Detroit never quite resolved itself in my imagination.

I still desired to understand this city; therefore, I began to look beyond the common interpretations of it in literature, looking to the texts that lay beneath the more conventional stories presented in Levine’s work. This search led me to the product of Detroit’s underground presses, which are hard to find and once discovered are like words and insights from an entirely different world. I wanted to understand that uncanny feeling that seemed to define the city, that sublime experience I had had in walking the streets, eating in historic restaurants, and watching the homeless sell coupons on the corners of Michigan and Fort Avenues. In this way, I stumbled upon the significance of the 1960s while following the trajectory of my literary studies, ending up in the summer of 2000 at the National Poetry Foundation’s conference at the University of Maine.

Through my attendance at the conference, I began to think that any project dealing with the 1960s would have to consider the interrelation of artistic forms: how forms converge to create a cultural poetics in which different cultural artifacts modify and inform one another. This poetics functions to open a field of experience that otherwise would remain closed or disfigured by institutional specializations. This conception of poetics informs my present project, which looks at the underground presses’ reaction to the dominant social order of Detroit during the late 1960s. One incident I experienced during this conference revealed just how complex the investigation of such a poetics might become.

The conference’s title, “The Opening of the Field: A Conference on North

American Poetry in the 1960s,” and the program cover design (originally created by Robert Duncan’s partner Jess) were taken from Robert Duncan’s book of poetry titled *The Opening of the Field*. The relationship between Duncan and Jess illustrates the collaboration often associated with the art of the 1960s, which remains an unrealized ideal for many contemporary humanities scholars.⁹ This collaboration, unlike the often sterile collaboration of contemporary corporations, was sexually charged: i.e. John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s protest from their bed, John Sinclair’s collaboration with his partner Magdalena Arndt, and Charles Olson’s collaboration with his own body. Leafing through the program illustrates the centrality of sexualized methodologies. In the first plenary session, for example, Michael Davidson’s “Missing Larry” discussed embodied poetics, pointing out the relationship between poetic form, the body, and rhetorical intent. In Davidson’s presentation, the course for the conference was set. The collaboration between poetry and visual art, between poet and poet, between contributor and editor, between form and content, between the margin and the center, was sexualized, a matter of anxious reproduction, dirty jokes, and men in love with boys. Yet in listening to this paper and those to follow, there was a sense that much of it was ludicrous—a feeling Amiri Baraka would voice in an angry outburst during Barrett Watten’s “The Turn to

⁹Most collaborative research in English Departments is pursued by the distinctly multi-disciplinary efforts of rhetoric, composition, and literacy scholars. Such research is also conducted, but to a lesser degree, by cultural studies scholars. One reason for the lack of collaboration, which is considered central to the efforts of those working outside the university, is the pursuit of tenure, which generally rewards only individual achievement. Some tenure reviews have gone as far as to require individuals to indicate the percentage of work they have put into a collaborative project. One professor stated that she put one hundred percent effort into such a project, which her reviewers found less than convincing. For more information about this situation refer to Lisa Ede’s and Andrea A. Lundsford’s article “Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship” in the March 2001 issue of *PMLA* pages 354-369.

Language after the 1960s.”

Amiri Baraka gave voice to one of the tensions present at the conference: the feeling that the presentations were not approaching the period and its literature appropriately. Baraka yelled from the back of the auditorium, “You, and by you I mean ‘you all,’ are pimping off real struggle, the struggle of real people, to get a better job. . . . This hyper-rationality and abstraction” means nothing, Baraka argued. Watten had been interpreting the failure of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement through a close analysis of its linguistic practices, using the theory of Donald G. McCloud to unravel the movement’s radical identity, which he claimed ultimately remained outside the discourse of power. Incensed, Baraka again yelled, “Inside or outside what? If we [by “we” he was referring, I assumed, to African Americans and specifically those who were part of the Black Panther Party, which Watten had just criticized] were outside it we wouldn’t have struggled to change it.” I felt that Baraka in his anger raised two compelling points: first, there was the notion that the conference presenters were “pimping off” the struggles of the 1960s to promote their own careers, which suggests that the events of the 1960s and the works produced during that time were being reified or fetishized into a consumable product by academics. During the conference there existed the perverse sense that sincere human struggles were being unconsciously, or ignorantly, reduced to support for abstract theories about the metaphysics, often, of failure. At times, it felt as if the dead were being misrepresented or worse. Second, there was Baraka’s disgust with the “hyper-rationality and abstraction” that defined the interpretive methods of the majority of the presentations. Such abstractions seemed to dilute the struggle embedded in the art of the 1960s, turning

it into little more than a curious commodity. Academic interpretations of the 1960s often seem to suck the vital force from the period's art by removing it from its context, divesting it of its raw, often sloppy edge and the sense of the uncanny that originally provoked confusion, anger, and, most importantly, thought. Baraka's objections, if they did nothing else, reminded me to tread carefully and understand that these works and this time were not only about socio-political theory but also about real efforts to live, if not better, then differently, with a real interest in a more egalitarian and free future (for better or worse).

But the 1960s was also a time, a force, to be opposed, as The Second Thoughts Conference illustrates. In 1987 several influential activists from the 1960s met to discuss how they had changed since their activist/revolutionary days. Peter Collier describes the oppositional stance that defined the conference:

The participants at the Second Thoughts Conference gave testimony that serves as an antidote to any simplistic, monochromatic view of the 'lessons' of the '60s. Others might try to manipulate the truth of the era into an exhilarating lesson for a new generation of activists, but those who came to Washington to tell about their second thoughts had a different curriculum in mind. For them the history of the Movement was a cautionary tale that should not inspire but rather give pause to the huddled millenarians awaiting the advent of the Next Left. For participants at this Conference, the leftism in which they had once believed was an infantile disorder. They felt that it was time to grow up and understand the past rather than condemn another generation to repeat it. (xi-ii)

Collectively these testimonies represent the nature of hindsight, perhaps the true nature of political history and cultural memory. Many of the papers follow a similar framework, beginning with the identification of what was right about the 1960s and then qualifying these experiences with descriptions of how the ideal went awry.¹⁰

One aspect of what was right about the activism of the 1960s appears to have revolved around a sense of community, of the unifying mission to “cleanse” America of its ills. Many of these activists were members of The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) or The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). As such, they felt linked by a common set of grievances (rather than hatreds in this case), which most notably included a commitment to civil rights and to ending the war in Vietnam. Jeffery Herf, a member of the SDS, provides a typical description of the intellectual community many of the New Left activists shared: “There was a great deal I relished about the New Left years: community, intellectual stimulation, friendship. . . . I still am proud of our efforts on behalf of civil rights, and recall the pain but also excitement of the early years of the women’s movement” (41). Rev. Richard Neuhaus articulates another version of this community, often referred to as the “Movement.” In his version, he points out that at least early on the members of the movement thought of themselves as a new moral force, a power for reason and moderation: “The stirring sense of a shared moral purpose that was once evoked for a brief time by the term ‘the Movement’ must be understood. It was

¹⁰Indeed many of the presentations published in the book *Second Thoughts: Former Radicals Look Back at the Sixties* do read like trial statements, as if the presenters had become the state’s witnesses. Many of the accounts seem to indict others, or seem to be attempts at uncovering the cause of the contributors’ own mistakes.

to be a band of happy warriors, to believe that somehow your contribution to fulfilling the American experiment—and it was to fulfill the American experiment and not to undo it or to oppose it—to believe that your contribution was to go up against what were then viewed as the secure and smug establishment” (8). Of course this happy band of warriors became more prominent in their role *as* warriors, such as the Black Panthers, Black Nationalists, or Weathermen. These were groups straying further and further from non-violence and toward armed confrontation with the military-industrial complex (the vaguely perceived establishment) and the police, whom many saw as the strong-arm of this modern urban alliance. In Marxist terms, the complex owned the means of production and was thereby able to oppress the working class. Morality, in this case, belonged to the proletariat: those struggling to control their own destiny but being eternally thwarted by the capitalist forces.

However, many found this aspect of the movement disturbing if not absolutely disastrous. A significant part of this concern stemmed from the criminal behavior many New Left groups covered up or accepted as part of revolutionary process—a process that increasingly articulated a palpable hatred of America itself, which many activists found disconcerting. David Horowitz, for instance, makes his disenchantment with the evolving Left clear in “Why I am No Longer a Leftist.” He describes the incident that led to his own second thoughts about the political activities of the late 1960s. While he was working with the Black Panthers, Horowitz hired a female bookkeeper who was later “kidnapped, sexually tormented and then brutally murdered by [his] Black Panther comrades” (54). Horowitz describes his disillusionment with those on the Left who

ignored such horrible crimes and protected the criminals from justice. He then concludes his presentation with the following critique of the Left—a critique that reveals one of the major failings that an anti-social, political platform inevitably causes:

By crowning the criminals with the halo of humanity's hope, the Left shields them from judgment for criminal deeds. Thus in the name of revolutionary justice, the Left defends revolutionary injustice; in the name of human liberation, the Left creates a new world of oppression.

The lesson I had learned for my pain turned out to be modest and simple: the best intentions can lead to the worst ends. I had believed in the Left because of the good it had promised. I had learned to judge it by the evil it had done. (57)

The tendency toward totalitarianism was one of the major drawbacks of the New Left's political ideology. In "Learning from Experience," Barry Rubin, once a member of the SDS and an editor of the Guardian newspaper, states, "Perhaps the most vicious component of the Left was its hysterical denunciations and slanders against anyone who disagreed with it. People also turned hatred on themselves, believing—as is common in many cults—that their doubts or deviations were only signs of individual weaknesses" (50). The New Left, like many political parties, refused to budge from the Marxist ideals it had accepted, treating this ideology like a religion, as Gitlin points out. Out of this rigidity grew the rhetoric of us-versus-them, those binaries which reduced the real social, economic, and political complexities of America to false choices between the apparently moral Left and fascist military-industrialists. Julius Lester provides a more nuanced description of this sense of us-versus-them in "Beyond Ideology": "There is a Them, but

it is not out there. Them is always and eternally Me. To the extent that I take responsibility for the Them that is Me, to that extent do I free others to be persons in all their crystalline fragility. That is the vision with which The Movement began, and it is a vision many of us are still trying to live” (224). The kind of empathy Lester describes is central to the poetics of the 1960s and may be, as Lester suggests, its most significant legacy.

The lessons of these second thoughts illustrate the ways in which the New Left strayed from the kind of community it had forged during the composition of the Port Huron Statement in 1962. This community, as Neuhaus argues, was idealistic about changing society for the better, believing that the policies of the Old Left needed to be revised. The energy of this revision fed the New Left’s sense of community, driving its early activities. However, the means of achieving this change never seemed well articulated: no economic, political, social, and cultural programs were systematically developed and lobbied into existence as (say) the different elements of the New Deal were. For instance, the “anti-anti-communist” stance that the New Left took against the League for Industrial Democracy (LID) was the kind of vague political thinking that riddled the New Left’s approach to social liberation. Joshua Muravchik, a member of the Young People’s Socialist League, reevaluates the New Left’s ideological foundation in “A Curse Worse than the Cure.” He notes the confusing complexity of the New Left’s evolving social theories: “while the New Left ranged from pro-communist to anti-anti-communist, [the members of the YPSL] were adamantly anti-Communist, regarding Communism as the great betrayal of the socialist ideal. While the New Left preached

‘participatory democracy,’ we were skeptical, wondering if their real aim wasn’t to vitiate representative democracy” (161). His group was not Leninist or Stalinist, he states, but Marxist. However, Muravchik points out that Marxist, but not Communist, socialism “presents itself as the remedy to [unequal distribution of wealth], but at best it does not work” (162). It does not work because it devalues the individual’s moral worth, the individual’s sense of self. As many of the conference presenters argued, this debasing of the individual in the name of some collective leads to totalitarianism, to the repression of personal freedoms that allow a nation to adapt to a changing global environment. These doubts lead Muravchik to the patriotic conclusion that “America is arguably the freest country on earth, the most socially egalitarian, and the most generous and peaceful great power in history” (165). Can we forgive him if he overstates his case? Conservative P.J. O’Rourke resorts to a similar patriotic sloganism, stating that America is “already . . . a highly idealistic, totally revolutionary society” and “that our revolution is based on reality, not bullshit” (209).

These second thoughts are based on the realization that Marxist or revolutionary idealism is just that and cannot be easily transformed into a practical political program. In the May 25, 2001 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Alan Wolfe critiques these second thoughts in “The Calling of the Public Intellectual”:

Reading these born-again conservatives, I feel as if I am reading ideology, stretched this way or that to fit whatever topic is under discussion. Their efforts, today, to prove how good things are under American capitalism strike me as remarkably similar to their efforts, yesterday, to emphasize how bad they were. I

get the feeling that pleasing a movement (or a financial sponsor) explains much of what they write. (B20)

Central to the discontent of the activists Wolfe is critiquing, such as David Horowitz, is a division between theory and practice. Many trusted their theories, their manipulations of Marx and Lenin, to lead to a better society, but, as Todd Gitlin says about the New Deal liberals, they failed because they were partially successful. The civil rights, feminist, and Vietnam War movements owe many of their successes to the efforts of SNCC, the SDS, LID, and others. It seems that these second thoughts are based not on a desire to undermine the achievements of the 1960s but rather to distance them from the decade's excesses and atrocities. My experience suggests that the ideologies of the New Left have idled into a poetics: what to me seems a vague liberal feeling that remains a subtext to America's social identity, emerging occasionally to color popular discourse or social policy debates. None of these second thoughters wants to be associated with those who caused America's moral decline; none of them wants to be linked to the murders that took place in Cambodia, China, or Russia; none of them wants to be thought of as an academic or corporate sell-out; none of them wants to align himself or herself with the Communists, those losers of history. However, it is important that I remain critical of these kinds of political retractions and ideological side-steppings. Such energetic retreats suggest that the 1960s mattered, that the decade did indeed impact America's sense of itself in ways that should be further analyzed. I wish to mine this context in order to produce a literary history; however, as Nelson points out, this effort is fraught with complexities. No story is conclusive, no recovery of the literary past is also a direct

recovery of past experience (22). It is with this warning ringing in my ears, and with these half-formed visions of what Detroit and the underground presses were during the late 1960s, that I proceed.

Introduction: Toward a Historical Poetics

The underground papers published in Detroit during the late 1960s have often been discussed in terms of their relation to national protest movements, if they have been discussed at all.¹¹ They have been viewed primarily as the official voices of the groups devoted to these struggles, such as the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers, Black Panthers, and the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW). Little attention has been given to their uses beyond this larger context. What is lacking in this picture is a consideration of the more localized manifestations of the underground press movement, and the role they played in the formation of a counter-culture.

In my analysis, the idea of place is necessarily central, as are the artistic forms that emerge in relation to its social practices. In "Literature as Equipment for Living," Kenneth Burke refers to this type of study as a "sociological criticism," which he defines as a seeking "to codify the various strategies which artists have developed with relation to the naming of situations" (301). Place is not just a physical location, but is, as Henri Lefebvre states, also a "(social) space" which in turn is a "(social) product" (*Production* 26). In other words, a location is defined by the interaction between social space, which is lived space, and the means by which we live within that space, producing its social product—those experiences that end up coded in stories, paintings, and songs. These cultural products form the basis of my the literary history I am exploring and the

¹¹In *Dancing in the Streets: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit*, Suzanne Smith gives a brief discussion of the Michigan Chronicle and the Inner City Voice during her analysis of Motown's relationship to the cultural politics of Detroit.

cultural poetics central to it. Conflating these two perspectives, this study might be accurately referred to as a historical poetics.

With Henri Lefebvre and Michel De Certeau, I argue in this poetics that the activity of living within a place is determined by the dialectical negotiation of cultural forms. Raymond Williams further illustrates this point when he argues that we “cannot understand an intellectual or artistic project without also understanding its formation.” How we translate our life into art depends upon the conditions of its production. That seems clear enough, but the production of art proceeds in a simultaneous relationship with history. Therefore, many artistic productions are in themselves reproductions of previous cultural artifacts, which, more abstractly, are themselves reproductions of other cultural values, memories, and desires. The appreciation of any art, thus constructed, is dependent upon intertextual and historical references that can be drawn out *ad infinitum*. The point here, however, as Williams states, is that cultural formations are “simultaneously artistic forms and social locations” (9). Accordingly, my analysis of Detroit’s underground press is illuminated by dialectical interactions in which history, social practice, and artistic expression converge to define the content of these presses. As cultural formations, these presses reveal how different groups, all considering themselves somehow disenfranchised, struggled to gain agency within Detroit.

Concentrating on the idea of Detroit as simultaneously a social space and social product will help bring the city into clearer focus. Consider that urban space is mostly empty. Remove the social practices from a place, and even though it is inhabited it will be shot through with silences and a lack of significance. To a stranger walking through

the inner blocks of industrial cities like Detroit, Cleveland, Gary, or Pittsburgh, these silences may create an eerie aura, as if the history of people has slipped away and been replaced by the tyranny of emptiness. One arrives at what Christophe Den Tandt describes as the “urban sublime,” in which fear caused by spatial dislocation becomes the inarticulate awe of urban possibilities, both bad and good (*Urban*). In this environment people seem out of place, mere decorations moving among the overwhelming expanses of brick, concrete, and glass. Art emerges to embed the stories of these people into the social and political history of the city. We see this, for instance, in William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Note, for example, the voice of the child chimney sweeper:

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry ‘Weep! weep! weep! weep!’
So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep. (2)

However, a concern about perspective arises since much urban literature is written by those far removed from the economic and class conditions they describe. In *Working Classics*, Peter Oresick and Nicholas Coles call the reader’s attention to this while introducing their collection of poetry: “Most of the poets represented here are professional writers, each with a distinguished record of publication. While they are mostly from working-class backgrounds, and while most have done the kinds of work they write about, the majority now work primarily at writing and, in many cases, at teaching that craft to others” (xxiv). Was Blake ever a chimney sweeper? No, and does it

matter? He certainly knew many chimney sweepers, saw them on his walks around the city, perhaps heard their stories. The ability to closely observe one's environment is displayed in the works of Blake, Charles Dickens, Rebecca Harding Davis, and Don Delillo (to name a few), who provide profound insights through their aesthetic recreations of these conditions.

As Burke points out, art codifies the "particulars" of everyday life, those events directly experienced by the artist, and suggests "strategies [or attitudes] for dealing with" them (296-7). Nelson argues that such particulars and the social context in which they are codified can lead to interesting additions to the canon and, more importantly, to the understanding of literature. He makes the strong point that "we would be better served [. . .] if literary history and canon formation were openly hostile to one another, or at least if they were competitive discursive traditions engaged in a dialectical relation of conscious critique, instead of being the interlocking, mutually supportive structures of the discipline" (53-4). Such a dialectic creates the dissonance out in which meaning can be discerned, differences can be drawn, and the "active nature" of categories can be observed and discussed (Burke 296). Competing discourses provide a deeper representation of the social and cultural complexities out of which literature is created and about which it comments.

Spend some time in front of paintings of industrial cities and their factories, the streets, and the dankness that seems to displace humanity. The city, in such cases, is a character central to the narrative of modernity. T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Carl Sandburg's "Chicago," William Carlos Williams's "Patterson," and

Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" all depend on the distancing of readers from the daily lives of urban residents; they all depend on the objectification of city dwellers. The looming architecture of contemporary cities, caught in the blank gaze of postindustrialism, mocks those passing amongst its facades, its interiors, its planned neo-nostalgias. Reading De Certeau's or Lefebvre's urban theories create a similar feeling, has a similarly befuddling affect. The dialectic between theories explaining the city and the experience of living within it creates a curious discursive space that artist, journalists, and activists occupy today, just as they did in the 1960s. Discourses cover the city, map it, disrupt its motion, manipulate its inhabitants, argue for change, and counter such arguments with justifications for maintaining the status quo. The structuring of these discourses can be explained by a historical poetics that describes cultural products in relation to social locations and in terms of a history and politics of local cultures.

In studying Detroit, like anyone studying an urban environment, I needed a method for describing simultaneity, a way to unlock relationships that are not linear, that fail to progress as might a conventional narrative. In addition to Cary Nelson's ideas about writing a literary history, I also needed a means of analyzing the material realities of a culture, which requires looking at cultural products and how they are conditioned by the social practices of the city. This goal is at the heart of Lefebvre's, Williams's, and Fredric Jameson's work. Rather than looking at the city as does Lewis Mumford, for instance, they attempt to give credence to diffuse relationships, interactions that are

essentially everywhere at once.¹² In my study of Detroit, I began to re-imagine the Detroit I had known, making sense of its streets, parks, buildings, history, and people. To do so, I found, was to define the cultural materialism that explains the city's urban realities, its social practices, or what Lefebvre might refer to as its "everyday life." This sense of materialism, as Williams discusses it, is part of a "sociology of culture," which is a study of culture as "defined by a convergence of interests" (12-3). This definition suggests that "cultural production" and "cultural practice" intersect within a specific place and time and that the nature of this intersection matters in understanding that place and time. In my analysis, this intersection is represented by the underground presses published in Detroit during the late 1960s. These presses suggest that cultural practice and cultural productions are "not simply derived from an otherwise constituted social order but are themselves major elements in its constitution." A "cultural materialism," or more broadly a "sociology of culture," views "culture as the signifying system through which necessarily (though among other means) a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored" (12-3). Detroit's underground presses were attempting to develop an alternative view of culture that would ultimately change the prevailing social order. It was this order and the city's inhabitants' dissatisfaction with it that led to the civil unrest that erupted into the summer riot of 1967.

¹²Refer to Mumford's *The City in History* for an example of a more linear interpretation of the urban environment through the analysis of architectural manipulations of urban spaces. He is still a central figure in the architectural curriculum.

The Present Work

In the analysis that follows, I look at three specific cultural formations that shape the activities of Detroit's underground presses. These formations are journalism, poetry, and work. Each of these formations is associated with specific cultural productions that characterize the political agency and social significance of the underground presses. In this analysis I make a few assumptions. First I have assumed that the 1960s happened. By "happened" I mean to suggest that the 1960s (primarily 1967-1969) was a significant moment in the development of Detroit's underground presses and the poetics that emerge from them. The context of this period was one characterized by tension and anxiety. The riots around the country in the late 1960s, for many, foreshadowed the coming proletarian revolution. In 1967, as the riot raged in Detroit, Todd Gitlin wrote a letter to Carol McEldowney in Cleveland that expressed the sense of panic, awe, and fear that typified this period:

All of us are on the brink of madness, and so much the worse that we are all marginal to what is going on. Andy [Kopkind] called last night, checking in, reporting that Washington was about to blow, the mood crackling up and down the length of 18th St., and we talked about the end of the movement as we've known it; so we live in the space between the end of the movement and the beginning of revolution. Of course ("of course") the insurrections are not revolution, but they sound like it and the fires burn close to revolution, as close as we have seen. "Oh Mama, can this really be the end? / To be stuck down here in Uptown while the blacks go wild again" (*Sixties* 244)

With the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968, the Black Panthers, the Weathermen, and the Nation of Islam and the violence they promoted began to gain more influence. As Gitlin states, “King’s influence had fallen off in the years leading up to his death. His moment had passed. [. . .] When he was murdered, it seemed that nonviolence went to the grave with him, and the movement was ‘free at last’ from restraint” (306). As Detroit recovered from the riot, the various underground presses attempted to gain support for their visions of a new Detroit. In this dissertation, I explore the ways in which these (re)visions functioned in a quickly changing and tense urban environment.

Chapter One explores the role of Detroit’s underground journalism in the act of dissent. I argue that Detroit’s underground presses sought to redefine journalism. They attempted to achieve these goals in two general ways. First, they attempted to create what the underground editors perceived as a morally responsible journalism that might uncover the repressive conditions that seemed to define late 1960s Detroit. The presses tended to approach this goal from a neo-Marxist perspective. The *Inner City Voice*, *Fifth Estate*, and *Guerrilla*, for instance, wove the philosophies of Mao and Lenin into their editorial policies, perceiving their railings against the ills of capitalism as largely educational. This Marxist foundation gave these papers a distinct voice or persona and shaped the content they published. The second goal was to change or “assault” culture and, thereby, create a more egalitarian society. As some critics have noted, such as those who attended the Second Thoughts Convention in 1985, these efforts were contradictory, leading, in many cases, to totalitarian practices, such as censorship, coercion, and violence. Overall, Detroit’s underground presses struggled to free themselves from strict journalistic codes

in order to re-imagine Detroit's urban space by providing a conduit for imaginative expression and dissent. They presented this discourse of dissent as a rite or ritual of "assent," as Sacvan Bercovitch discusses in *Rites of Assent*, and, in spite of their own failures, believed that art could change Detroit for the better.

Chapter Two delves more deeply into the nature of the poetry published in these underground presses, examining how verse functioned as a means of dissent. How might this poetry be characterized, I ask, and how did it function within the context of late-1960s Detroit? In this chapter, I argue that the poetry of dissent was a convergent verse, drawing on several cultural influences in its production. These influences included Charles Olson's idea of "projective verse," in which he sought to tie the form of a poem to its original oral aspects, therein creating an organic or kinetic verse. In Detroit and around the country, Olson's ideas and their extension (and sometimes translation) by other Black Mountain Poets, such as Robert Creeley and Denise Levertov, were popular. Many poets and artists used Olson's ideas of energy and its transfer through the composition and recitation of poetry to unify poetry with Detroit's other cultural productions, such as jazz, rhythm and blues, and rock music. The convergence of such cultural productions and perspectives characterizes much of the poetry in Detroit's underground presses, creating a convergent poetics.

Such transecting perspectives are revealed in the image of waiting, which Philip Levine uses in his definition of "what work is" in his poem of the same name. In chapter three, I explicate this poem and argue that the "waiting" so important to its narrative is a central component of factory work, leading to the separation of the mind (or intellect)

from the body. I equate the term “mind” with that of “intellect” because the term “mind” seems too general. It is commonly used to suggest a number of psychological faculties, such as the intellect, will, intelligence, and imagination. Of all these faculties, I find the intellect more descriptive, sufficiently specific to generate clear associations while remaining general enough to suggest the meanings of intelligence, knowledge, and imagination—as Raymond Williams suggests in his analysis of “intellectual” in *Keywords* (169-171). In Levine’s representation of industrial labor, and in David Harvey’s analysis of it in *The Postmodern Condition*, the mind is the human’s capacity for intelligence and imagination. And it is this capacity that industrial labor removes from the act of production. In modern instances of capitalism, we find few craftspeople that take a product from inception through creation to the final sale or trade. The division of tasks reduces the laborer, as Harvey argues, to a mere “‘appendage’ of the machine,” and “intelligence (knowledge, science, technique) is objectified in the machine, thus separating manual from mental labour and diminishing the application of intelligence on the part of the direct producers” (105). It is this condition of the worker that Detroit’s underground presses felt compelled to counter either through dropping out or revolution. Many of these presses were struggling to establish a new social order; however, few knew or cared what the implications of such a social order might be. Only a handful of these leaders, and most of these only in retrospect, thought critically about their identifications with dictators such as Mao Tse-Tung, who allowed, according to Jasper Becker in *Hungry Ghosts*, thirty million of his people to die from starvation during China’s Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution during the 1950s and 1960s.

Overall, this study of Detroit's underground presses seeks to understand literary history and the role of marginal texts in the act of dissent. During the late 1960s, Detroit reflected many of the difficult changes cities were experiencing around the country. The movements for civil rights and against the Vietnam War had become more violent. It was a time when literature, as revealed by Charles Olson and the Black Mountain Poets, became a less stable enterprise and its interpretation began to deconstruct itself. Culture, once a rather comfortable concept, denoting refined learning and intelligence, became a source of rabid and even violent conflict. Minorities demanded a place for their different cultural views and began, in earnest, to reclaim their heritage from the silences left gaping in school textbooks and American symbology in general. Women demanded the right to their bodies and a place in the country's economic and political development. It was a time of confusion that I have found difficult to understand. The perspectives are often opaque, but the very real concerns about what was happening, about what could happen, bridged the historical and cultural gaps I struggled to overcome. Gitlin sums up this sense of concern, stating that "nineteen sixty-eight was no year for a catching of the breath" (305). Ultimately, it was an inability to breathe, to relax, to reflect on the future, on the implications of their visions, dreams, and hopes that characterized Detroit's underground presses in the late 1960s. In these papers existed a will for change that, in the finally tally, was misguided. While I do not feel as intensely about this as K. L. Billingsley seems to in "A New Left Balance Sheet," I still feel his comments on the extremes of the New Left make an important point and provide a useful caution as one begins this dissertation:

Like the Old Left before them, New Left radicals have, in Frances FitzGerald's words, "performed a kind of surgery on their critical faculties." In most cases, such surgery appears to be irreversible: "As I am writing this, more than twenty years later," Arthur Koestler lamented in the 1950s, "the storm is still on. The well meaning 'progressives of the Left' persist in following their old, outworn concepts. As if under the spell of a destructive compulsion, they must repeat every single error of the past, draw the same faulty conclusions a second time, relive the same situations, perform the same suicidal gestures. One can only watch in horror and despair, for this time, there will be no pardon" (254)

Chapter 1

The Framework: Journalism of Dissent

The Riot

On July 23, 1967, the social and cultural tensions underlying Detroit's model image erupted in one of the most violent and costly riots in history.¹³ The underground presses and the literature they published were shaped by this event, developing a discourse of dissent to counter the mechanisms of discrimination the city had set up against minorities and the working class. The tensions caused by the city's systematic attempts to deny alternative and critical views about Detroit's present and future inspired these presses to re-imagine the city's landscape in their own terms. In *The Origin of the Urban Crisis*, Thomas Sugrue identifies the elements that led to Detroit's "urban crisis," arguing that it "is only through the complex and interwoven histories of race, residence, and work in the postwar era that the state of today's cities and their impoverished residents can be fully understood and confronted" (5). Sugrue describes the raid on the blind pig, an illegal after-hours drinking establishment, at Twelfth and Clairmount that precipitated the riot and details its material results:

¹³In *Violence in the Model City*, Sydney Fine contrasts the riot of 1967 with the belief held by city officials, such as Mayor Jerome Cavanagh, that Detroit was a model of race relations. On July 25, two days after the riot began, the *Detroit Free Press* said in a feature titled "As We See It" that "of all the major cities in the United States Detroit was the least likely to be struck by a race riot. Unlike Watts or Newark, Rochester or Cleveland, Detroit has worked longer and harder than any other city to see that it couldn't happen here. We are the only state with constitutionally established Civil Rights Commission. We have local and federal poverty programs so that no Negro is out of reach. The lines of communication between whites and Negroes are, and have been, the best. Nor are they superficial lines" (A4). Many of these programs that purportedly made Detroit a model city were poorly implemented or implemented at the cost of local black communities. Urban renewal, for instance, was commonly referred to as "Negro Removal" and not without reason, as Thomas Sugrue points out (50).

By four in the morning, an hour after the bust, nearly two hundred people, attracted by the commotion behind the blind pig, had gathered to watch the proceedings. As the arrestees shouted allegations of police brutality, tempers rose. The crowd began to jeer and to throw bottles, beer cans, and rocks at the police. William Scott II, a son of one of the bar's owners, threw a bottle at a police officer and shouted "Get your god damn sticks and bottles and start hurtin' baby." By 8:00 A.M., a crowd of over three thousand had gathered on Twelfth Street. The riot raged out of control until it was suppressed by a combined force of nearly seventeen thousand law enforcement officers, National Guardsmen, and federal troops. After five days of violence, forty-three people were dead, thirty of them killed by law enforcement personnel. Altogether 7,231 men and women were arrested on riot-related charges. The property damage, still visible in vacant lots and abandoned buildings in Detroit, was extensive. Rioters looted and burned 2,509 buildings. \$36 million in insured property was lost and undoubtedly millions more were lost by those without insurance, not to mention wages, income, and government costs. (259)

The racial, political, and economic aspects of these tensions are revealed in the contention over naming the unrest. Suzanne Smith describes the complexities inherent in this act in *Dancing in the Streets*:

The naming of the event was always highly contested. Many participants and members of the Black community referred to the week as the "Great Rebellion" or the "July Rebellion of 1967." Most press coverage and historical accounts used

the more common “Detroit Riot of 1967.” The distinction between “riot” and “rebellion” revolved around motive. Black community leaders preferred ‘rebellion’ since it implied that people were consciously reacting to economic oppression and racial inequality. The term “riot,” by contrast, evoked a sense of randomness and irrationality, which many critics of the term believed placed too much emphasis on the behavior of participants rather than the material conditions that generated the outrage. The government’s “civil disturbance” label had political and economic implications. Insurance companies determine coverage costs in relation to the definition of a catastrophic event. As Sidney Fine observed, “The insurance bureau was anxious that no responsible official in the state refer to the riot as an ‘insurrection’ since policies with extended coverage normally covered the ‘perils of riot and civil commotion’ but excluded losses resulting from insurrections” (195).

As seen in Smith’s analysis, identifying the nature of the unrest involved the implicit definition of “motivation” and, further, the consideration of the significance this idea had on the subsequent characterizations of Detroit during the late 1960s. Smith indicates that the social realities of Detroit were motivated most obviously by racial and economic tensions. The ghetto had become a space of real disenfranchisement as jobs, housing, and education failed to offer those living in the inner city an equal opportunity at social independence and economic security. Beyond these material conditions, the people in Detroit were motivated by cultural self-interest, by the desire to express their experience and communicate the validity of their cultural values. Motivation in this instance is as

much about *self*-definition and *self*-preservation as it is about a desire for material goods. The presence of this desire, more than the sociological models applied to such unrest, explains the persistent, even indomitable, nature of dissent. Dissent at its most necessary is about re-expressing the validity of one's vision of social possibilities in the face of disregard and/or repression. Therefore, motivation as a will to create, to express, to re-figure a set of cultural and social presuppositions is at the center of the publishing activities of Detroit's underground presses in the late 1960s.

Moving to answering the question, "What caused this riot?" reveals one of the major goals of the underground presses' mode of dissent, which was to uncover and critique the material conditions that led to this violence. For example, on July 25, two days after the riot began, the *Free Press* published an editorial with the headline "No Society Can Tolerate a Contempt for Its Laws." In this column, the editors state that Detroit was the least likely large city to experience a riot because it had "worked longer and harder than any other city to see that it couldn't happen here." The column goes on to define the riot, stating,

If it was a race riot, it was a new and frightening kind. It was an explosion against society generally, against its economics, its law and order. [. . .] In this sense it was as other Negroes described it, midsummer madness. [. . .] The areas burned were filled with good, big but overcrowded homes. Though the city was perhaps lax in cleaning the streets, they were not rat-infested ghettos like Newark's Central Ward or Los Angeles' Watts or Cleveland's Hough district. More likely, it was the way one Negro leader described it: "It appears to be almost exclusively

the hoodlum element that incites the looters and the bystanders to join in" (A4).

This report reveals that a critical inquiry into the real and perceived (which had real consequences) inequalities present in the city, as described, for example, by John Sugrue, Sidney Fine, or John Hersey, was not clearly conveyed in the city's more established presses. The underground presses, such as the *Inner City Voice (ICV)*, referred to this event as "the Great Rebellion of '67," suggesting that the event was the beginning of the long anticipated proletarian revolution (Georgakas and Surkin 155). The *Fifth Estate*, in addition, investigated the mysterious circumstances surrounding some of the deaths during the riot. In the September 1-15, 1967 issue, news editor Frank H. Joyce recounted in "New Evidence in Leroy Killing" the curious string of events that led to the death of John Leroy.¹⁴

As the riot continued the *Free Press* suggested that it might have been part of a Black Nationalist conspiracy. On July 30, for instance, the *Free Press* published the picture of an arm holding a rifle with "Join the Black Guards" written underneath. The caption stated that "signs like these began appearing on buildings in Detroit's Negro areas in May. Whether they were a warning of the riots to come hasn't been determined. But many Detroiters believe the outbreak was planned in advance" (A3). However, the headline for this story by George Walker was less certain than "many Detroiters" must have been: "Organized Riot Theory Lacks Evidence" (A3). About this coverage,

¹⁴In *Violence in the Motor City*, Sydney Fine describes John Leroy's killing: "John Leroy was a black passenger in a car that allegedly ran a road block. It is more likely that the car stopped on command, that an unknown person then fired, and that this led to aimless firing by Guardsmen that wounded the four passengers in the car, including Leroy, who died on July 28 following abdominal surgery" (201).

Suzanne Smith states that it “displaced broader analyses of the economic inequality and tense police-community relations that propelled the violence and looting” (195). The underground presses attempted to uncover these very tensions, often presenting them as endemic, a condition which accounted for the gaps in the established press’s coverage. It appears as if the goal of the *Free Press* was to pinpoint and clearly define a cause for the riot, and only tangentially to discuss Detroit’s other problems. The belief that Detroit was a “model city” of race relations seemed to be a way of countering the reality of the actual events. One mode of representing the riot was to suggest that it was more an expression in futility than of the political and social inequalities present, as John Hamilton’s story, “The Meaning of Detroit’s Riots,” illustrates: “We come back to the tears. At the 10th Precinct Station, wives, mothers and girl friends of some of the men brought into the station house in handcuffs stood by weeping. And one of the suspected looters wept, too” (A4). Overall, the way the riot was covered portrayed it as an irrational event, which was not a reaction to any “real” social problems. It was a “tragedy,” as Hamilton concludes, but not a political statement or the inevitable conclusion to years of systematic discrimination.

The possibility that the tensions and the riot may not have been inevitable needs to be considered. Perhaps the riot was a chance occurrence driven by criminals to achieve illicit ends. Have any riots occurred for this reason alone? Perhaps Detroit’s riot was correctly characterized in the *Free Press*’s article “No Society Can Tolerate a Contempt for Its Laws.” But the question arises of whose laws. Is *the law* always everyone’s law, is justice universal? These are some of the unanswered questions embedded in the

established presses' reports. In the above article the editors state that the riot illustrates not, as one Negro militant said, that "the facade has been torn off." No facade exists. For every rioter and looter there were thousands of Negroes who were horrified and frightened, sickened by what they saw.

What it does show is that the time has come in the civil rights movement to draw finer and clearer lines. More, much more, needs to be done to give the underprivileged a sense of belonging and of participation, a feeling that he has a stake in the community's welfare.

But the time has also come to separate these necessary functions, and the basically good people whom they affect, from the hoods and the punks.

Hoodlums, whatever their color, must be separated from society. (July 25 A4)

It is perhaps the "hoodlums" and "punks" that were most lacking in their sense of a community, in the sense that they had no stake in Detroit's future economic, social, and cultural growth. Perhaps the riot was an effort to destroy for the sake of watching one's neighborhood burn, as suggested in the *Free Press* story "Neighborhoods Burn As Residents Watch," and as seems the case every devil's night (July 24 A3).¹⁵ Is there any support for such a conclusion? Consider, for a moment, the Detroit poet Dominique Lowell's description of the motivations behind these yearly torchings in "Bike Messenger Leading the People: An Anarchy Poem. It's Devils Night in Detroit."

¹⁵In "Neighborhoods Burn As Residents Watch," the editors began with a quote from a policeman: "'They're burning themselves out.' The Policeman said it quietly and looked at the sky." The column continued, reporting on "adults—Negroes who shook their heads and said: 'Race has nothing to do with this'" (July 24 A3). The caption to the picture included in this column stated, in seeming contradiction to the report, that "angry teens fueled the disturbance along Twelfth" (A3). Why were they angry? The paper seemed to avoid the implications of its own observations.

I burn my own house down cause it ain't my house

it's your house

your shit your shit your shit

incitement to riot

burn it down burn it down burn it down burn it

down burn it down

there's so much paper

burn it down burn it down burn it down

.....

violence against buildings

violence against property

the ultimate act of rebellion

and I'm gonna build me a guillotine

at One Sansome

right by The Wall

right where it says "The Sharper Image"

grab these fuckers by the hair

drag em by their power nooses

and chop their lousy heads off

it's French Revolution time

burn it down

and there'll be a huge famous painting of me

bike messenger leading the people

yeah

.....

we are the refuse of a decaying system

we are products of decay

but oh! the fragrant twisted beauty of death

the rollicking waltz to be danced

come on come on come on

light the match (*Outlaw* 189-90)

As this poem suggests, burning the city to the ground is not always part of some political project; however, embedded in the act is an implicit spark of rebellion, violence against the images and symbols of capitalist insensitivity, such as one's labor being no more than an expendable extension of capital, part of the clankings of some machine. The support for the conclusion that the burning of the black neighborhoods was a form of self destruction is provided by traditional stereotypes heaped upon blacks as they migrated north. Those stereotypes represented black men as irrational savages, as ignorant pariahs, and are a set of unconscious conclusions that persist even today. Many of the difficulties faced by Detroit's liberal administration in the late 1960s revolved around these stereotypes and the facade of Detroit as a model of race relations, in that the administration failed to critically consider its social policies in relation to these misconceptions of race and human worth. Mayor Cavanagh's idea of urban renewal, like that of Mayor Cobo before him, reflects this uncritical approach to "improving"

conditions in Detroit as the new urban projects destroyed traditional black neighborhoods, severing the communal bonds that existed. By destroying the central space of the black residents' identity, Cavanagh's efforts created a tension—one that became indelibly etched onto the city itself.

The underground presses rose from the ruined city to support a movement for a different Detroit: a new social space that might be opened to different cultural visions. The riot seemed an appropriate time to attempt to publicize those visions, at the heart of which was the need to resist the repressive practices of the city's institutionalized beliefs about race, work, housing, and education. Responding as much to the abstract sense of discrimination as to material examples of it, the underground press adopted various modes of resistance as a means to dissent from the dominant order, the normalized power structures, while maintaining and promoting the cultural values under siege by that order.

In support of such resistance, papers, such as the *ICV*, *Guerrilla*, and the *South End*, provided information about the urban uprisings, strikes, and other social inequities in and around Detroit. They also published literature, set up lectures and creative readings, and supported the making of documentaries about Detroit's struggle for equal rights. At the same time, other papers, such as the *Artists' Worksheet*, *Broadside Press*, *Warren-Forest Sun* (which became the *Sun* in 1968), and *The Fifth Estate*, were publishing material aimed at undermining dominant cultural values, as part of what John Sinclair dubbed the "Total Assault on the Culture!" in an article published in the *Warren-Forest SUN* on March 1, 1968. Many of these presses were produced using mimeograph machines, a fact that has led some historians, such as D. R. Wagner, to refer to this period

as “The Mimeo Revolution” (*Outlaw* 389). Wagner states that “it was the mimeograph (mimeo) machine that formed the backbone of a significant literary movement that began in the 1960's and lasted until the middle of the 1970's. [. . .] The machines allowed an entire generation of poets and writers to communicate with one another and to an interested audience in a quick, efficient manner” (389-90). A precursor to the Internet, which has given an outlet to a variety of disparate voices, the mimeograph provided activist groups with an inexpensive means of publishing their ideas. These papers tended to have limited circulations. For example, the most popular underground paper in Detroit, *The Fifth Estate*, had a circulation of 17, 000, according to Robert J. Glessing in *The Underground Press in America* (124). It was distributed through the mail to subscribers, who paid \$2.50 for a year's subscription (26 issues) and \$5.00 for a two-year subscription (52 issues). The paper was also sold on the streets by anyone who wished to do so. These sales people earned a \$.05 commission on each paper they sold and for convincing area stores to carry the paper. However, these circulation figures need to be qualified, as Glessing does in his analysis: “Determining the total circulation of underground papers is a task replete with contradictions, snarls, and inaccuracies. By the time one underground paper has reached a circulation peak, another one starts in the same region to cut into the competitor's circulation or to displace the original publication altogether” (123). This kind of competition was certainly present in Detroit, in which each of the papers listed above competed for a finite number of sympathetic readers.

These readers are also of interest when one is trying to get a sense of the publication history of an underground paper. Glessing provides the following description

of the typical underground press reader, as described by the Boston *Avatar*: “‘The person next to you on the street car, as he proceeds to be where he wishes to be and do what he wishes to do,’ such are the potential underground press readers. Who reads the underground press? The Avatar concluded: ‘Think–look around–maybe/ in a mirror–maybe inside’” (125). These readers are the self-determined people of the city. They are those who might, simply by their own independence of thought and ample imaginations, change the nature of the city. These readers are the thoughtful, young men and women who will make up the proletarian party, or the equivalent of Lenin’s vanguard party, pushing equality and socialism through the resistance of capitalist consumption.

These papers, and by extension their audiences, were intended to be radical, to express some alternative or dissenting insight, opinions that might crack open the dominant order and dismantle the evils of capitalism. For this reason much of the distinctive rhetoric and most factual mistakes went unchallenged because accuracy was considered subjective, and, therefore, its systematic imposition might be construed as a form of repression. This loose sense of accuracy as much as anything else distinguished the underground press from its established counterpart, creating papers that could have only a limited circulation. As Glessing notes, competition was fierce and these presses often fractured along the lines of competing ideologies that mirrored the cultural and political differences among groups, such as that seen between the Black Panthers and SNCC, or more generally between Black Nationalists, counter-culturalists, liberals, and the Old and New Left. The differences of opinion were complex, characterized by shifting and often overlapping areas of concern. These complexities and fluid

interrelations were important to the formation of the city's underground presses and the ideological environment that existed in the late 1960s.

The nature of this ideological antagonism is illustrated in the confrontation, for example, between James A. Wechsler, a liberal activist, and Jack Kerouac, a beat writer, during a conference held at Hunter College in 1958, as described by Todd Gitlin in *Years of Hope and Days of Rage*. Gitlin felt that this meeting was a moment “when the zeitgeist struts on stage so theatrically it fairly screams”: “Wechsler,” Gitlin goes on to relate, “did not begin to comprehend [Kerouac’s drunken discussion of “beatitude”]. To him Kerouac’s performance was ‘a stream of semiconsciousness,’ ‘a union of madness and sadness.’ Kerouac sounded to him ‘like a jaded traveling salesman telling obscene bedtime stories to the young.’ Kerouac’s writings were ‘raucous hedonism,’ ‘vulgar ramblings on a latrine wall.’ ‘I was grappling with a man from outer space,’ Wechsler wrote, ‘and it was only for the briefest of intervals that we even seemed to occupy the same mat’” (56). This sense of a changing political dialect, in which old ideas are replaced by the rambling visions of the young, was carried into the 1960s and became a feature of competing underground presses in Detroit and elsewhere. The schisms (and the religious connotation of the term is appropriate in this case) that this new dialect, and dialectic, announced have been summed up in several ways, but one that synthesizes many of the stark binaries and finer nuances is Harvey Mansfield’s statement in his article “The Legacy of the Late Sixties”: “The fight is still on, and it is still both cultural and political, the site of battle being cultural, but the decision to be made political” (21). For Mansfield the difference between cultural activists and their politically oriented peers is

presented in the terms of an argument: the facts are cultural, the elements of contention are in the realm of culture and its products, its visions, its relation to people's lives, while the conclusions to be drawn from the cultural war are political, are to be coded into law and new or traditional social practices.

Growing out of this sense of change from an Old Left through beat apolitical "non-sense" to a New Left, the activists of the 1960s used the underground presses to develop and communicate their different ideologies, those competing, transacting, and diverging ways in which they planned to re-imagine the urban landscape. These ideologies were predominantly Marxist, but it was a modified Marxism, influenced by its Russian, Chinese, Cuban, and American variations.

Press Coverage

Detroit's underground presses were aligned against the morning *Detroit Free Press* and the evening *Detroit News*, which covered the city's events in a haze of objectivity, a kind of coverage Jerry Herron has described as "humiliating history," creating the emptiness and cultural silence of "afterculture" (62). Yet the underground's posture of opposition often seemed self-indulgent, tending more toward paranoid delusion than an appreciation of actual events. The underground press characterized the city's established presses in a variety of ways, but they were most commonly referred to as the "straight press," "the over-ground press," or the "dominant press." Regardless of the name, the general premise was the belief that these papers were the voice of capitalist repression, the mechanism behind the maintenance of the status quo. Such rhetoric, then,

was aimed at creating the tension between “us and them,” which was inherited from the activism of earlier decades, as Gitlin points out, while promoting the underground press’s point of view as the more moral and ethical option.¹⁶ The construction of such a binary situated both enemy and friend and so was a way of controlling the conflict by rallying the troops around a central cause and a clearly identified aggressor. Julius Lester, in a cautionary tale, poetically describes the danger behind this kind of control in “Beyond Ideology”:

The predominantly black Civil Rights Movement and the predominantly white anti-Vietnam War Movement became anti-American. Suddenly, America was the enemy. If ever there was a moment in history for second thoughts, that was one. Common sense should have told us that it is impossible to transform a nation if you hate it.

But that is one of the dangers of idealism. When it is let loose in the public arena, it is like an animal in heat and in desperate need of a sexual joining. All too quickly, unrequited idealism can become surly and aggressive. All too quickly, it becomes rage, bares the teeth that have been lurking behind the smile as pretty as a morning glory, and enraged, bites itself and never feels the pain, never knows that the blood staining its teeth is its own. (*Second* 216).

Finding no clear enemy, many presses turned upon each other and themselves, with one

¹⁶Gitlin states that “one of the Old Left’s major legacies was the sense of a world divided between us and them. We were different, special. We, however isolated in the United States, were part of ‘a worldwide community’—led, of course, by ‘the socialist countries,’ the Soviet Union usually ranked foremost (despite what were euphemistically called ‘mistakes’)” (73).

result being the dissolution of many underground presses once the Vietnam War ended. But in the late 1960s, with the Vietnam War and Civil Rights Movements at their peaks, such idealism became a means of defining and attacking the immediate present, suggesting that the evils of the city were also part of the global evils being perpetrated by the industrial-military complex (the *them* in opposition to the *us*, evil versus good).

However, in Detroit, the *Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News* were not in fact the conservative bogeymen they were often made out to be. The *Free Press*, for example, broke the story about the alleged police misconduct surrounding the three deaths at the Algiers Motel during the first few days of the 1967 riot. What appeared to be a more pressing concern for Detroit activists was that the established presses strongly limited access to the marketplace they dominated and, therefore, had a disproportionate control over the representation of Detroit. Their stringent, and often discriminatory, editorial and reporting policies denied the expression of the city's marginal voices. The presses, therefore, tended to suggest a false sense of conformity and unity, which seemed to be a discursive community built on the disregard of existing racial, economic, and political inequalities. For instance, during the riot, as Suzanne Smith points out, these presses often overlooked the material conditions that fueled black discontent, focusing instead on the riot's apparent irrationality (196). The *Free Press* published stories with headings such as "Riots Baffle Poverty War Administrators" or "Black Extremists Plan Their Next Battles." These stories were relevant and important, but they nonetheless remained uncritical of Detroit's social and cultural realities. To further distinguish the established press from the underground, Glessing, quoting Marty Glass, provides a lengthy example

of the underground press's idea of the news, which Glessing claims comes close to "clarifying many of the differences between over- and underground publications":

There's been a lot of murder and rape in the Bay Area during the past few weeks.

A pregnant woman was raped and stabbed in the throat with a butcher knife by two men in the Haight. Two San Jose girls, 14 & 15, were discovered with hundreds of stab wounds in their bodies. A 17 year old girl from Salinas found strangled with a red belt; police suspect this job was linked with the murder of eight girls in Ann Arbor, Michigan. A gang attack in the Hunter's Point section of San Francisco led to one man murdered, his girl raped, and his father slashed. And then there's the weird L.A. movie star murders of Sharon Tate, the pregnant wife of Roman Polanski, and three friends in their secluded Bel Air mansion.

There have been 96 murders so far this year in the Bay Area, just six less than the total for 1968.

The Bay Area newspapers blazed out the news in giant headlines. "Savage Slaying Mystery," "Shocking Murder," "A Story of Savagery," "Big Search for Knife Killer of Two San Jose Girls," "Big Hunt for Picnic Killer," and so on.

There's a big lie behind all this. The stories are more or less true; the accounts bear some police-filtered relation to the truth, but there's still a big lie behind the grisly intimate details of bloody mayhem and brutal sexual assault.

The lie is linked to the idea of 'news' in the daily papers. What does 'news' mean? 'News' is what stands out on the vast, flat and presumably irrelevant plain of mundane events, 'news' is what deviates from the ordinary and

the normal, 'news' is what someone else decides is important.

Supposedly, everything which isn't worth knowing about isn't of public concern. The daily papers convey a very strong and very indirect message; there's a normal, everyday life which is OK and unexceptional—not worth talking about. And then there's 'news': anything which stands out, anything that doesn't happen all the time and is, therefore, of interest.

Life is good. That's the realm where things are taken care of. 'News' is when something goes wrong.

This is pure bullshit. The real news isn't in distinct, bizarre events. The real news is what happens 24 hours a day all day long everywhere. This is the news we don't read about in the daily papers because the people who control those papers don't want us to know about it and do everything they can to distract our attention from it.

Fortunately, they can't succeed. We don't need their papers to tell us about the real news. All we have to do is open our eyes.

The real news is the expression on the faces of children sitting in tenement doorways with nothing to do. The real news is the tenement itself.

The real news is the despair and humiliation on the faces of people waiting for hours for a lousy check in the welfare or unemployment offices. And it's also on the emptied faces of people who have jobs they hate, jobs where their creative potential is stifled and crushed under the weight of meaningless labor performed to make enough money to survive.

The real news is jobs created solely to provide profits for those who don't work at all, or for a corporation which is nothing but a bankbook.

The precious unredeemable time of our lives is sacrificed for numbers in bankbooks.

The real news is elderly people rotting away in dilapidated Old Folks' Homes or in spare rooms in their childrens' [sic] houses, unwanted, resented, feeling they might as well be dead. The real news is in the millions of people who don't get enough to eat, who receive inadequate medical care, who suffer and die from diseases which could be cured and should never have been contracted in the first place.

The real [sic] news is when there's a giant traffic jam on the Bay Bridge because the market economy and capitalism require profit and there's no profit in safe, comfortable, efficient, rapid public transportation. The real news is that there are hardly enough parks and playgrounds for a fraction of our children, that schools are falling apart, overcrowded, repressive, irrelevant and hated by the children imprisoned there.

The real news is that guys are getting beaten by sadistic psychopaths in prisons and army stockades all over the country, kids watch hours of obscene commercials on TV, women are forced to waste their lives in shopping and cooking because private consumption is the syphilitic deity of our society.

The real news is that people who can't take it any more—and they're mostly black or poor whites—are called mentally ill and given shock treatment or mind-

killing drugs.

The real news is that ten thousand women die every year in the United States from slipshod expensive abortions, because this system doesn't permit half the population to decide what goes on in their own bodies, doesn't provide for any way outside of the decayed institution of marriage for children to be cared for.

The real news is that cops who murder black men are given medals and a guy found with two joints gets ten years [this is a reference to John Sinclair].

The real news is that guys are being forced to kill their brother in Vietnam.

The real news is that all the important decisions made in this country are made by maniac insects with dollar signs engraved on their beady inhuman plastic eyeballs. We see their pictures every day on the business pages in their newspapers.

The real news is that Huey Newton is in jail and Richard Nixon isn't. (qtd. in Glessing 108-10)

Glass's claims are somewhat disingenuous in that many city papers covered the difficulties of everyday life, the economic hardships of minorities or the elderly, and the physical degradation of inner-city neighborhoods. However, he does provide a compelling description of alternative views about cultural issues such as poverty, abortion, police brutality, economic inequalities, and the social marginalization of the old and minorities that many established presses avoided or discussed as if these problems had been dealt with. For example, during its reporting of the riot, the *Detroit Free Press* admitted that the conditions in Detroit were what led to the outburst of violence. John A.

Hamilton states in his July 24 article, "The Meaning of Detroit's Riot," that "whatever may have been its cause, what's absolutely clear is that it's a tragedy. It represents a massive failure which the whole community must bear. It represents, too, a personal tragedy for those whose property was destroyed and, more especially, for those who were injured and even for those who were somehow personally involved" (A4). Although sympathetic to the plight of those involved in or victims of the riot, however, such conclusions as Hamilton's represent what underground editors, such as Glass, found so frustrating. More than anything they wanted the press to draw Marxist conclusions about such events, placing the blame for the misery of "man" on capitalist repression, on greed, on police brutality, on political partisanship. Glass was apparently bothered, as were many editors of the time, by the lack of social critique in the papers: the inadequate consideration of everyday hardships. A similar interpretation inspired much of the urban analyses conducted by Michel De Certeau, Henri Lefebvre, and Fredric Jameson. Essentially, these theorists suggest models that might be used to analyze the complexities of everyday life, which can then lead to a more rigorous and useful understanding of urban experience and how to manage and improve it, creating (hopefully) a more egalitarian environment.

Ken Wachsberger also discusses these different philosophies of coverage, stating that "the generally accepted definition of 'objective journalism' involves the idea that an article should contain 'only the facts.' Writers for the underground papers, including *The Paper* [first published in East Lansing in 1965], attacked this notion as a myth by pointing out that even articles that purported to be objective contained opinions simply by

the terms the writers chose to use” (109-10). Adding to Wachsberger’s ideas, Chip Bartlet describes the mass media’s mode of coverage as “unconnected, ahistorical, anti-ideological . . . history and news covered as a sporting event. ‘Iranians bomb 3 ships but Navy sinks 2 gunboats . . . pix at eleven.’ There is never time to explain why. Everything is random events on the toteboard of history. We don’t get information, we get Box Scores. Why?” (95). The insistence on foregrounding the subjective nature of reporting, suggesting that it was more similar to telling a story than to gathering facts, illustrates the underground presses’ belief in the precepts of “new journalism,” which began to gain popularity in the 1960s with the publications of literary journalists such as Tom Wolfe and John Hersey. The characteristics of this new journalism, or what has been called by literary journalists, such as Mark Kramer, “extended digressive narrative nonfiction,” are often discussed in terms of narration and subjectivity: new journalists “immerse themselves in subjects’ worlds and in background research,” they “work out implicit covenants about accuracy and candor with readers and with sources,” they “write mostly about routine events,” they “write in an ‘intimate voice,’ informal, frank, human, and ironic,” they write in a style that is “plain and spare,” they “write from a disengaged and mobile stance, from which they tell stories and also turn and address readers directly,” they are concerned about structure and, therefore, mix “primary narrative with tales and digressions to amplify and reframe events,” they “develop meaning by building upon the readers’ sequential reactions” (21-33).

Even though these new journalist ethics sometimes caused the underground reporting to appear to be a collection of narcissistic opinions or childish polemics, it did

allow these presses to give voice to the dispossessed, to those whose ideas had been denied access to any social medium. Yet how to cover Detroit, how to represent it, was a hotly debated issue among Detroit's urban activists and underground editors. In Detroit (and elsewhere) this debate caused a subtle split between revolutionary and counter-cultural presses. The nature of the split, or schism, is described by Chip Bartlet, who states that "in 1967 the debate over political versus cultural coverage was already causing staff splits on U.S. underground newspapers" (87). Again, Mansfield's view is useful here: "The site of battle is cultural, but the decision to be made is political" (21). Another point this statement stresses is that culture and cultural products are inextricably linked to the political. In the underground presses there was faith that artistic expression (those visions produced as part of a culture's life) could change political practices and, thus, the social realities of a given place. The decision of how to cover Detroit determined which issues would be promoted in understanding and solving Detroit's urban crisis. At stake were not merely aesthetic values or journalistic codes but ultimately the material realities of Detroit's cultural space.

In pursuing their different ideas of coverage, the underground presses' overriding desire was to turn the unrest of the summer of 1967 into lasting social change and "do something about Detroit." For the *Inner City Voice* and many other papers, "the general strike of '67," or the "Great Rebellion," evoked a "liberating spirit" that they hoped might "prefigure and trigger a second American revolution" (Georgakas and Surkin 16-17). These presses struggled to develop a discourse of dissent that would facilitate opposition to the city's various discriminatory practices, if not inspire outright revolution. However,

such a discourse was more problematic than might have been expected. Investigating it in depth will help to precisely characterize how Detroit was being re-imagined in the late 1960s.

First we need to examine the Marxist ideology that served as a foundation and worked to unify the journalistic approaches of the underground presses. Through the application of Marxist ideas these papers attempted to organize their attacks against the dominant vision of the city, which was established, perhaps more than any other city in the country, on industrial capitalism—that mode of production made so effective by industrialists like Henry Ford and his assembly line.¹⁷

The Marxist Foundation

Marxism informed the underground presses' radical framework upon which they attached their own social and political ideas.¹⁸ In "A Cure Worse than the Disease," Joshua Muravchik, once a member of the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL), suggests some of the complexities of Marxist ideology as it emerged in the 1960s: "We were Marxists. Not Leninists, but Marxists. We believed in the economic interpretation

¹⁷Consider the contradictory ideas revealed between Andrew Carnegie's "Gospel of Wealth" and his capitalist practices. William Jewett Tucker, a contemporary of Carnegie's, provided a critique: "I can conceive of no greater mistake [. . .] than that of trying to make charity do the work of justice.[. . .] The ethical question of today centers, I am sure, in the distribution rather than in the redistribution of wealth" (qtd. in Wall 130). Tucker's critique holds as true for the 1960s and the naive ideas of urban renewal as it did for Carnegie and his belief in "the responsibilities of the wealthy to properly administer their wealth" (129).

¹⁸In this context, I am using Marxism to indicate the type of socialist ideology the underground presses used to define their understanding of reality, primarily the relationship of Detroit's working class to the city's material conditions.

of history, in particular that history was shaped by the struggle of classes and that political systems were best understood in terms of the classes whose rule they respectively expressed. Socialism would express the triumph of the industrial working class which was therefore the chief progressive force, the repository of our hopes, and of mankind's" (161-2). As a way of interpreting history as prefiguring their own struggle, Marxism was admired, but as a means to totalitarian excess it was held at arm's length: re-engineered back to some fetishistic essence to avoid its troubling implication in the creation of tyrants such as Stalin and Mao. Thus, it was deemed necessary but applied with some trepidation, which led to odd formulations, such as "anti-anti communism," a grand equivocation if ever there was one. Perhaps most important, Marxism identified the devil—capitalism—providing the underground with a clear enemy to defy and an ideology from which to dissent.

In order to unite the discontented and politically energize the masses, the underground attempted to problematize, or denormalize, the general impression people had of the city, arguing that urban space was not as uniform or as rational as contemporary media coverage suggested. In a sense, the aim of the underground presses was to say or enact the "something" that was being covered, lost, destroyed, hidden by these "official" representations. The dialectic between culture as viewed through capitalist production and culture as produced in the underground press might then create a compelling image on the face of the urban landscape.

Ideologically, many of these presses, and their socio-political aims, were developed in accordance with the ideas of Marx as articulated and practiced by V.I. Lenin

and Mao Zedong. Of primary importance here is the idea of “practice” as it relates to cultural production and political ideology. Marx proclaims socialism as the savior of modern “man,” who is stuck within the oppressive capitalist system, which Marx describes in the *Communist Manifesto* as follows: “In proportion as the bourgeoisie, i.e., capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class, developed—a class of laborers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labor increases capital. These laborers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market” (15). Marxist ideology empowered this class. Muravchik claims that socialism, the real Marxist doctrine, was motivated by a “yearning for justice,” for the more equal distribution of the means of production (162).

In “Where to Begin,” which was a commonly referenced article during the 1960s according to Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, Lenin states that a newspaper is essential to revolutionary practice:

In our [the communist party’s] opinion, the starting-point of our activities, the first step towards creating the desired organization, or, let us say, the main thread which, if followed, would enable us steadily to develop, deepen, and extend that organization, should be the founding of an All-Russian political newspaper. . . .

The role of a newspaper, however, is not limited solely to the dissemination of ideas, to political education, and to the enlistment of political allies. A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective

organizer. (20-1)

Lenin then clarifies the importance of such a newspaper in urban terms by comparing it to an unfinished building: “In this last respect it may be likened to the scaffolding round a building under construction, which marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communication between the builders, enabling them to distribute the work and to view the common results achieved by their organized labor” (20-2).¹⁹ As Lenin suggests, the nature of the urban landscape, where workers are in close proximity and so more easily able to communicate and organize, is essential to the proletarian revolution. The peasants and “social scum” are too widely dispersed to be organized into a politically viable force. They can agitate and march, but they cannot be included in the development of the proletarian party and its governing institutions.

This idea of the peasants’ uselessness to the cause was modified by Mao during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution of the 1950s and ‘60s. Mao’s disagreement was based on the assumption that the peasant is already educated in the country’s traditional (or true) cultures. Therefore, peasants bring to the revolution a foundation in the purity of a simpler and more egalitarian past. However, this assumption was misleading, merely part of Mao’s propaganda to get the populace on his side. In

¹⁹John Watson, the editor of the *South End* and the *Inner City Voice*, describes the importance of Lenin’s ideas to the development of his radical ideas: We had studied the history of the Russian Bolsheviks and found a specific pamphlet by Lenin called *Where To Begin*, written in 1903, before he wrote *What is To Be Done?*, where he described the role a newspaper could play. A newspaper was the focus of a permanent organization. It could provide a bridge between the peaks of activity. It creates an organization and organizes the division of labor among revolutionaries. Revolutionaries do something, not just a meeting on Sunday, making speeches, and passing resolutions. It creates the kind of division of labor needed not just for the newspaper but for a revolutionary organization. (59)

Hungry Ghosts, Jasper Becker details the almost unimaginable human loss suffered by the peasants during Mao's Great Leap Forward. Collectivization, and the apparent obliviousness of Mao himself, led to mass starvation. Nearly 30 million peasants were reported to have died the period from 1958-1961 (99-111). However, as Becker makes clear, little of this had been made public during the 1960s, and Mao, unlike Stalin, remained an inspiring revolutionary figure to many 60s activists.

As a location of ideological change, whether from a Leninist or a Maoist perspective, the underground newspaper becomes the emblematic rally point of a "revolution." The Detroit underground presses took this notion to heart and created what Lenin called "political newspapers" to reinterpret the working classes' relationship with the city and the means of production. Yet, as Lenin reiterates, a revolutionary newspaper needs to lead to action. Dogma, propaganda, words by themselves, although necessary, will change very little. What Lenin suggested is that there needs to be a dialogue, a dialectic, maintained between theory (ideology) and practice (revolutionary social action).

Lenin tied these precepts about "where to begin," or how to begin, the class struggle with the development of an oppositional, proletarian or "party literature." In "Party Organization and Party Literature," he describes literature's role in uniting the proletariat in a common struggle, based on commonly held beliefs and images.

[A party literature] will be a free literature, because the idea of socialism and sympathy with the working people, and not greed or careerism, will bring ever new forces to its ranks. It will be a free literature, because it will serve, not some satiated heroine, not the bored 'upper ten thousand' suffering from fatty

degeneration, but the millions and tens of millions of working people—the flower of the country, its strength and its future. It will be a free literature, enriching the last word in the revolutionary thought of mankind with the experience and living work of the socialist proletariat, bringing about permanent interaction between the experience of the past (scientific socialism, the completion of the development of socialism from its primitive, utopian forms) and the experience of the present (the present struggle of the worker comrades). (*Collected Vol X*, 48–49)

Lenin argues for a literature that will awaken the working class, the under-represented workers, to their common history, thus creating a national identity. The struggle for such an identity is to be realized by the present revolution, by the real and symbolic overthrow of the Czar. This is to be a nationalist literature, an ideologically thick representation, that will reinvent the worker as socially significant, as an element of fundamental political change. However, the worker and the working class portrayed in such a paper is not to be the decrepit worker of political special pleading but is rather to be that suggested by Kropotkin, a socialist working in the late 19th century:

Socialist papers have often a tendency to become mere annals of complaints about existing conditions.[. . .] I thought, on the contrary, that a revolutionary paper must be, above all, a record of these symptoms which everywhere announce the coming of a new era, the germination of new forms of social life, the growing revolt against antiquated institutions. Those symptoms should be watched, brought together in their intimate connection, and so grouped as to show to the hesitating minds of the greater number the invisible and often unconscious

support which advanced ideas find everywhere when a revival of thought takes place in society. [. . .] It is hope, not despair, which makes successful revolutions (qtd. in Mitchell xv).²⁰

This idea that a revolutionary discourse is one that codes the future with possibility, with hope, speaks prophetically of what *can be* rather than focusing entirely on what *is* because what is merely factual is always inadequate, repressive, fragmented. These criteria relate to the traditional socialist and communist poetry written in America during the 1930s, as described by Cary Nelson in *Repression and Recovery*. It is a tradition linked to canonical literature through Walt Whitman. We might compare this discourse to Walt Whitman's conception of the city in *Leaves of Grass*, where it appears as the result of complex negotiations of hope and prophecy. I am using "prophecy" here as defined by Cornell West in "On the Influences of Lukacs": "My notion of the prophetic is a democratic one in which, in the midst of the quotidian, the commonplace, in the midst of the messy struggle in which one's hands are dirty, [. . .] one is holding on to moral convictions and tries to convince others that they ought to be accepted even though these moral convictions themselves can still be subject to criticism and change in vision" (67).²¹ This kind of discourse projects fundamental moral and ethic precepts onto a future urban space, a totalizing space that encapsulates complex social relations into a specific

²⁰This excerpt is taken from Mitchell Goodman's collection of 1960s ephemera titled *Toward a New America*. Its inclusion suggests its importance to those activists, primarily the counter-culturalists, who were attempting to remake American society into a more culturally receptive (pluralist) environment.

²¹Earlier in this interview with Eva L. Corredor, West agrees that he is "more a social critic than a prophet" (51). He adds that if he is a prophet, he is one "without metaphysics." So his "notion" of prophetic discourse is bound by the necessity of social critique and, ideally, social action.

historical dialectic, like the one we see in the transcending conversation between Whitman the poet/narrator of “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” and the future audience who will eventually receive this poem:

It avails not, time nor place—distance avails not,
 I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so
 many generations hence
 Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt,
 just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd,
 Just as you are refresh’d by the gladness of the river and the
 bright flow, I was refresh’d
 Just as you stand and lean on the rail, yet hurry with the swift
 current, I stood yet was hurried
 Just as you look on the numberless masts of ships and the think-
 Stemm’d pipes of steamboats, I look’d. (160-1)

Both the narrator and the reader are united in an intellectual space, in which different times, past and present, are conflated into an idealized communal experience—an experience that persists as a distinct kind of social critique. This kind of prophetic projection is present in much of the work published in the underground presses.

Mao saw hope and prophecy, though he rarely used such language, in the Marxist dialectic, in the unity of discourse and action, through which he planned to create a “people’s” or a national culture. Mao’s ideas conformed, as one might expect, to those of Lenin and Kropotkin on most points of principle; however, he provided an interpretation

of Marxism closer in time and dogma to that employed by the Detroit underground presses. Indeed, John Sinclair's White Panther party (which later became the Rainbow People's Party, a name inspired in part by Mao's writings) had discussions about Maoist philosophy during meetings at their Ann Arbor headquarters. The reading list developed during these meetings illustrates the relevance of Maoist Marxism. The list includes Mao's "On Practice," "On Contradiction," *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*, and "On Literature and Art," which is particularly significant for the role it played in shaping the cultural productions (and poetics) of the underground presses (*Guitar* 363).

In "On Literature and Art," Mao discusses the role that literature and art should play in the Chinese communist revolution, which in the 1960s amounted to a cultural revolution and aimed, among other things, at changing China's prevailing feudal class structure. As with other communist revolutionaries in Russia and Cuba, for instance, Mao wished to reduce class antagonism by disposing of the aristocracy and, as it turns out, ignoring the plight of the poor. In this way, he created an isolated class of urban proletarians, which roughly resembled the Marxist ideal of the proletarian party, but was actually a Leninist style "revolutionary vanguard," as described by Joshua Muravchik in "A Cure Worse than the Disease" (163). This party was headquartered in the cities, where its members forced the peasants to meet unrealistic production quotas while simultaneously destroying the peasants' ability to meet those same quotas, as Becker chillingly describes:

After the first terrible winter of famine in 1958-9, apathy set in. The Party cadres

had increasingly to rely on force and terror to get the peasants to obey their orders. At the height of the famine, they wielded the power of life and death because they controlled the grain stores and could kill anyone by depriving them of food. In many places, the cadres ordered that only those who worked could eat and left the sick, the old and the young to die. In Sichuan and some other provinces, it took a mere six months for the communes to make the journey from Utopia, where each could eat his fill, to a hell where it was ‘work or starve to death’. (*Hungry* 111).

One need not consider this system and its leaders long to see how it was doomed to failure.

Literature and art, Mao argues, should be subordinate to the political activities of the revolution, such as redistributing power to the people. Literature and art are to provide support to this ultimate goal by critiquing the dominant group’s intellectual foundation for power and suggesting a new moral paradigm.²² Mao asks, “How can we tell the good from the bad—by the motive (the subjective intention) or by the effect (social practice)?” (28). This question establishes the dialectic that he argues should be used to evaluate and, thus, inform the creation and consumption of “good” literature and art: “To study Marxism means to apply the dialectical materialist and historical materialist viewpoint in our observation of the world, of society and of literature and art; it does not mean writing philosophical lectures into our works of literature and art” (36). Dialectical materialism can be seen as a means of using social and artistic criticism to infuse cultural

²²One might compare Mao’s ideas of “good” and “bad” in relation to those of Plato and the early Greek Philosophers.

artifacts with “proper” political ideology.²³ What Mao hopes “his” artists will produce is an organic, socialist style (recall “socialist baroque”), in which there is a “unity of politics and art, [. . .] content and form” (30), a unity between “motive” and “effect”; “the motive of serving the masses is inseparably linked with the effect of winning their approval; the two must be united” (28). Thus, the audience’s approval must include approval of the work’s political ideology (“good” art is a unified art). Therefore, Mao embeds the importance of political ideology over artistic enjoyment into a poetics. This makes it possible to interpret the artistic production’s political merit: a “proper” work of socialist art dissolves the dichotomy between the political and social, making them inherently present in the products of socialist culture. A cogent criticism here is that once art and politics are united, one is no longer able to critique the other, a task which is often considered the moral imperative of “good” art today: it must provide some means of seeing its subject differently and the more illuminating (or critical) that view the better the artistic discourse. However, the underground presses did not see things in the same way.

Mao further develops this idea of dialectical materialism in one of his most

²³The results of the unity of art and politics to teach proper ideology has been dubious. All one need do is recall the national artistic efforts of Hitler and Stalin, or the nationalistic bravado the dadaist and surrealists were reacting against after WWI. They were attempting to undermine nationalism with an intensely individualistic absolute or pure art, as Malcolm Cowley points out in *Exile’s Return*: “Dada, in art and life, was the extreme of individualism. It denied that there was any psychic basis common to all humanity” (149). He quotes the “Dada Manifesto” to further illustrate these points:

The new painter creates a world. . . . The new artist protests: he no longer paints (i.e. reproduces symbolically and illusionistically), but creates directly, in stone, in wood, in iron and tin, rocks and locomotive organisms that can be turned in every direction by the limpid winds of his momentary sensation. Every pictorial or plastic work is useless. . . . Order=disorder; ego=non-ego; affirmation=negation: all are supreme radiations of an absolute art. Absolute in the purity of cosmic and ordered chaos, eternal in the globule-second without duration, without respiration, without light, without control. . . . Art is a private matter; the artist does it for himself; any work of art that can be understood is the product of a journalist. (149)

Similar sentiments proved important in the artistic productions of late 1960s Detroit.

popular writings, "On Practice." In this essay Mao relates knowledge, or knowing one's place in history, to social practice, stating that, according to Marx, practice is a materialist matter, part of social practice, and that knowledge, as the central element in such practice, is dependent on 'production and class struggle' (1). Thus,

man's knowledge depends mainly on his activity in material production through which he comes gradually to understand the phenomena, the properties, and the laws of nature, and the relations between himself and nature [. . .] and comes to understand [. . .] certain relations that exist between man and man. None of the knowledge can be acquired apart from activity in production. (1-2)

Knowledge and practice are inextricable. Practice, or working in a factory for instance, determines how "man" understands his relationship not only to other workers but also to the natural world. This analysis of the relationship between knowledge and social practice leads Mao to the division of social life into material, political, and cultural spheres. However, all three spheres, while distinct, remain connected in the context of social interaction. What Mao is doing here is attempting to systematize consciousness by weaving cultural artifacts, such as literature, painting, and science, together with political ideology. The resulting tapestry is portrayed as a definition of how "man relates to man." Within this context knowledge, which makes socially responsible practice possible, becomes a means of critique through "rational" analysis of the "internal contradictions of objective things [real world objects like streets or cafes], of the laws and of the internal relations between one process and another. [. . .] Logical knowledge is capable of grasping the development of the surrounding world in its totality, in the internal relation

of all its aspects” (6).

In the late 1960s, Detroit’s underground journalists--primarily those editing and contributing to the *Artists’ Worksheet*, the *Warren Forest Sun*, the *Inner City Voice*, *Guerrilla*, and the *South End*—employed these Marxist political theories in editing the content of their papers. However, the two press factions, the counter-culturalists and revolutionaries, interpreted these theories and their potential differently. The result was a fundamental fracture in the city’s mode of dissent. One might think of this split as part of a revolutionary platform composed of competing ideologies that have found it increasingly vital to separate themselves from their comrades. The grounds for this migration were very complex, but often mirrored differences in race, age, gender, and, to some degree, class.²⁴

Discourse of Dissent

“Anarchists, socialists, communists, populists, Marxists, syndicalists, Trotskyists, Weisbordites, Lovestoneites—the American radical left is a dizzying array of movements, parties, and splinter groups,” Lauren Kessler states in *The Dissident Press*. “But throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they all agreed on one thing: Journalism was essential to the cause” (111). Journalism was a direct means of

²⁴Some of the more conservative activists, as opposed to the more militant Black Nationalists or Weathermen, were also the most financially secure; many had also fought in World War II. For those who grew up in the shadow of the New Deal, such as Norman Mailer, Robert Lowell, Dwight Macdonald, and Ed De Grazia there lingered an interest in slower, legislated reforms rather than rash (over) reactions to the current situations (see *The Armies of the Night* for some biting examples). For those who had found success as writers and teachers within the “system,” such a platform was understandable and seems ultimately to have been the more successful course, as illustrated by the triumphs of the civil rights and feminist movements.

communicating with the city's inhabitants and, as Lenin wrote in "Where to Begin," was deemed necessary for maintaining a revolutionary movement. Examining Detroit's underground journalism and the modes of dissent it employed reveals not only its Marxist leanings, but also the tension that existed between the established presses' dominant coverage and the underground's attempts to undermine it, for better or worse. In the late 1960s this relationship could be observed as a split between the gatekeepers of conservative values and economic power and those determined to re-define their social realities within the larger context of the city. This mode of dissent can be described, through Raymond Williams's "sociology of culture," as turning the "'informing spirit' of a whole range of social activities," such as "a language, styles of art, kinds of intellectual work," against "'a whole social order" in order to change dominant cultural values and thus change the ideological basis upon which people structure their everyday experiences (12-3).

The existence of this cultural tension, and the discourse growing out of it, suggests several characteristics of the underground presses. Although these presses were eclectic, mirroring the complexity of "real" cultural activity in an urban environment, some general patterns emerge and provide a lens for analysis: (1) The presses countered the dominant media coverage, re-articulating conservative political interpretations in revolutionary terms; (2) they delivered or presented this material in an oppositional style, upsetting journalistic, linguistic, and moral standards, infusing their work with references from history, China, Africa, and Russia or from marginalized or under-served groups living and working within the United States, such as the homeless, women, and racial and

ethnic minorities; 3) they attempted to develop a unity between empirical “thingness” and ethereal spirituality or philosophical abstractions, providing a counter-point to the western reasoning symbolized by figures such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

In the context of these characteristics, dissent can be seen as both pragmatic, focusing on overt forms of discrimination and ways to rectify them, and ideological, attempting to restructure consciousness in order to create lasting change by ensuring the assimilation of radical ideology into cultural practice. Lauren Kessler investigates such dissent, tracing its historical development in *The Dissident Press*. The driving force behind dissent, as Kessler points out, is not only a strong commitment to anti-establishment ideas, but is also a desire to diverge from the establishment’s reciprocal attempts to deny these ideas access to the public. Kessler identifies this lack of access as the injustice central to defining dissent. The so-called free marketplace of ideas “operates,” Kessler states, “by only a few rules,” and mapping access to this marketplace becomes a primary concern in understanding the development of dissent. Kessler describes this marketplace as follows:

- All ideas, although not necessarily all individuals, should have access to the forum.
- What is said (or printed) may be true or false. It may be selfishly or magnanimously motivated. (People, however, may be held responsible for falsehoods after publication.)
- If the government has a role in regulating the marketplace, it is only to ensure two conditions (1) that access to the marketplace is free and (2) that the diversity

inherent in society is mirrored in the marketplace. (11)²⁵

The boundaries of access are often invisible, and this invisibility is the problem. It causes the boundaries to appear natural, and so they come to be taken for granted in the profession of journalism. And it is the fashioning of this professionalism that implicates the institutions of journalism and, more broadly, universities--which perpetuate such journalistic ethics--in the control of social discourse and political ideas. Kessler describes three forms this lack of access tend to take in relation to dissident groups:

- (1) complete exclusion from the popular media marketplace of the [dissident] group, its ideas and goals;
- (2) exclusion of ideas, goals, and programs of the group, but inclusion of events (e.g. marches, strikes, demonstrations) in which the group participated;
- (3) ridicule, insult, or stereotyping of the group and its ideas rather than discussion, explanation, and debate. (14)

Even though such forms of gatekeeping may seem in retrospect a calculated attempt by the established presses to limit the power of aberrant or new ideas, the criteria for exclusion are not exactly clear or necessarily rational. Often critics view this use of power as primarily negative, devoted to exploitation and discrimination. Yet editorial decisions are as often as not based on an editor's adherence to dominant culture values, which of course may be implicated in exploitation and discrimination, but which are at least at one remove from any conscious discriminatory intent on the part of individual

²⁵The irony here is that much like the economic marketplace, the "free marketplace of ideas" is not really free, but is regulated by a few rich businesspeople and their companies.

editors. Such cultural values are evident in journalistic guidelines like those the Hutchins Commission published in 1947.²⁶ The commission felt that a responsible press should provide

- a truthful, comprehensive, intelligent account of the day's events in a context that gives them meaning;
- a forum for expressions on all sides of an issue;
- the projection of a representative picture of the constituent groups in the society, portraying conflicting groups fairly, without stereotypes based on a few incidents or individuals;
- the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of the society; and
- full access to the day's intelligence. (qtd. in Kessler 10)

These guidelines mirror the postwar ideal of inclusion, which is free of any acknowledgment of past improprieties on the part of journalists and is further characterized by a rhetoric of general equality, social unity, and urban renewal. This was a positive move and did turn journalism, in some cases, into a forum for debate rather than a conservative soap-box. However, this ideal, which was at the heart of a free marketplace of ideas, set up the irony that would frustrate so many activists in Detroit and thereby fuel dissent. Such postwar openness did not extend very far in practice, as it excluded the young, minorities, and women.²⁷ Notice, for example, the commission's

²⁶This commission was named after Dr. Robert Maynard Hutchins, who was the University of Chicago's chancellor in the late 1940s.

²⁷In Detroit during the late 1960s (as now), the minority groups included Blacks, Italians, Arabs, and Appalachian Whites. Other minority groups that had entered the middle and upper-middle classes by the 1960s were Jews, Poles, and Eastern Germans.

suggestion that the account of the day's events should take into consideration that event's context and, at the same time, clarify the goals and values of the society. These requirements effectively limit the others, constructing boundaries that by definition must be exclusionary. When an institution determines to clarify the "goals and values of the society," it is forced to project some dominant economic, cultural, and social framework onto the everyday lives, the daily contexts, of a broad demographic of individuals. In this way, exclusion becomes more than negligent oversight; it becomes methodological doctrine and, as such, is perpetuated through other social institutions, such as the courts and universities.²⁸

This process of maintaining cultural norms within the society is a self-perpetuating tautology that becomes codified in "coverage," as Jerry Herron suggests. "Coverage," as Herron describes it, is a tool of dominant culture and as such is a mode of representation that the underground presses struggled to revise. Herron's analysis of media coverage examines its ahistorical nature and the effect this has on a reading of Detroit's urban space. He perceives Detroit's spaces as containing the muted echoes of a culture that the media has carelessly, or perhaps callously, overwritten or "humiliated." "Coverage," he states, "is a parasitic or viral relation. Once the host is exhausted, the apparatus of coverage is incapable of reproducing itself, which is why the thing being covered must always be preserved or else a replacement must be found" (62). The host city--its closed factories, the crumbling warehouses, the abandoned business districts, the

²⁸Often the Detroit courts, universities, and newspapers became symbols of repression to both the counter-cultural and revolutionary presses.

poor ghetto inhabitants--is the collective space being re-inscribed and reinterpreted for a mass audience. This audience has been conditioned to consume rather than experience the city's social spaces. The result is a corporate space bereft of any cultural diversity that might have made it an intersection of understanding: a space where mixtures and insights would merge into an active dialectic. Media coverage turns the host into an emblem or simulacrum of the city that obscures the real social space.

What is lost is the sense of a shared history uniting a community to its lived space. This loss is the result of the media's desire to entertain, to shock, to sell products to a passive audience. (The media abhor critical interpretations of their work and perpetuate, indeed campaign for, the anti-intellectual reception of meaning, and, thus, culture).²⁹ The street names and urban stories that Michel De Certeau observes as central to creating and sustaining urban communities become through media coverage an informational marketplace where the city is reproduced, being transformed in the process into a fantasy. Having no voice of their own, the city and its inhabitants become a middle-class scapegoat: an image into which fear can be cast, contained, and perpetuated. The city, in this case, functions as a warning--a kind of apocalyptic emblem.

Such use of the city is not only revealed in the mass media, but also manifests

²⁹Spend a day gazing at commercials, or one evening watching the Super Bowl, and one will notice the intellectual values that are represented by them. There are the Mountain Dew gamers whose most complex thought is "dude!" And there is Budweiser's "What's Up." You have the prevailing message of "just do it" rather than "think about it, then do what makes sense." The very fact that most "cool" people would find my objections stiff and old-fashioned partially proves my point. For instance, if I mention to my freshmen students that the media is manufacturing the anti-intellectual stance so common now among college undergraduates, they respond with giggles. Of course, some of their discontent with the academy is warranted, but their avid disgust with anything that does not seem immediately applicable to the business world is disheartening, to say the least.

itself in the construction of and access to the suburbs. For example, try entering Grosse Pointe from Outer Drive or Gratiot Avenue. The roads suddenly become one-way streets when you approach from the west or south, much like those around L.A. as described by Mike Davis in “The Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Space” (154-80). The goal appears to be to keep the “ills” of the city away from one’s family. The apparent disease of urban life is cured in the suburbs through a symbolic re-creation of the pastoral, of the Victorian family: father, mother, daughter, son, and so on. The city, with all its racial and economic uncertainty, has no place in this image.

In the 1960s, Detroit’s underground presses struggled to recapture the city from such misrepresentations. The lack of a dialectic, and the conscious attempts to keep such a critical dialogue at bay, functioned to suppress differences and maintain dominant cultural values. Ultimately, these practices fueled dissent, providing a focal point at which to react. Often the underground presses’ reaction to these suppressive practices took the form of a re-articulation of the established media’s information (which was otherwise seen as “facts” and thus used to define Detroit’s needs). These re-articulations can be considered a type of cultural poetics, which might be defined as the convergence of expressions through which the public’s cultural consciousness is re-programmed. Such expressions could take the form of a news report, story, picture, cartoon, joke, painting, recipe, curse, music, or poem and beyond. Yet the poem, more than any other expressive form, tied the others together, acting as a bridge among the main categories of expression—textual, visual, and musical—which were being used to breach and, it was hoped, to change the public’s consciousness. This poetics grew out of underground

journalism, which gave this discourse its initial framework, allowing it to reach those excluded from or positioned against the status quo. These reformulations, these oppositional cultural productions, of the city's dominant vision attempted to map the "underside" of culture, as Robert J. Glessing describes it: "The whole history of the Underground Press is one of dissenters speaking out for political change and without fail damning the establishment" (xii-xiii). In Detroit, as previously noted, dissent was composed of two factions or ideological camps that remained in constant tension between cultural and revolutionary agendas.

Underground Presses

The social context that led to the 1967 riot and shaped the content of Detroit's underground presses was expressed in b.p. flanagan's poem, "The Ceremony":

"dearly beloved,

we are gathered

here today in . . .

. . . detroit, michigan: home of the "motown sound"/gm/ford/chrysler/rats
in the kitchen and roaches in the bathroom/no heat in winter & nothing cool when
the summer comes/pistons pounding out a DRUM beat . . . "do you take" . . . "to
love and cherish" . . . woodward avenue/junkies, whores & little kids on the way
up to take their places/a dime bag to get the day over with . . . "and do you take" .
. . . "to have and to hold" . . . the day shift, afternoons, midnights - at least 8 hrs
with the devil in hell/rouge, chevy, fisherbody (makes dead bodies), budd, eldon

gear & axle, dodge main, jefferson, iron foundries & specialty forge
 foundries/monsters that eat alive & spit out bloody hands/feet & pieces of skin
 and bone/ & with regularity - A DEAD BODY!!! . . . Friday nite . . . get that
 check /carry it on home to the crib (with wife & kids), then get out on the street:
 get fucked up/(reefer, jones, coke, ups & downs, johnnie walker black & red)/try
 to freeze yr head/can't think about the shit starting all over a gain on mon./ . .
 "and now a message from our sponsor" . . . watch tv/listen to the radio/read
 newspapers/they all say: "buy this, get that & YOU TWO can be a success."/damn
 brother, sister, a success in this motorized, computerized, iron and steel jungle is
 just staying alive!!!

"In sickness and in health"

Detroit, Michigan/any city

"for better or for worse"

My/our home

"Until DEATH

do us part." (10)

As Georgakas and Surkin state in *Detroit I Do Mind Dying*, this poem functions as an
 "ideological manifesto"; it juxtaposes the various tensions existing in Detroit, illustrating
 the complicated web of institutional and discursive forces that defined "everyday" life in
 the city. Using disruptive quotes, Flanigan portrays this Detroit as an ironic space, a
 marriage with manipulation and degradation. Incorporating the voice of the marriage

ceremony and thus the hypocritical voice of the religious or state representative, Flanigan suggests that Detroit, “any city/ my/our home,” is wedded to the industry that is destroying its inhabitants and the television that is selling us false images of success. Detroit is a simulation of life, of vital activity. In reality this marriage suggests necrophilia, as indicated by the end of the marriage vows that conclude the poem: “until *DEATH* do us part.” Flanigan’s emphasis on death and its relationship to “us” is significant in suggesting that Detroit’s fate is a collective one, as is the fate of any industrial city. On the one hand, the mistreatment of one group degrades the others; and on the other, those who are mistreated will inevitably resort to violence in order to liberate themselves. Flanigan’s aesthetic portrayal of Detroit’s social and cultural mind in constant tension, in a nervous conflict, is the context out of which the city’s underground presses emerged during the 1960s.

On November 1, 1964, John Sinclair, along with Magdalena (Leni) Arndt, Robin Eichele, George Tysh, James Semark, and twelve others, founded the Detroit Artists’ Workshop in a small storefront on West Forrest near the Wayne State University campus.³⁰ The aim of this workshop was to legitimize their disillusionment by nurturing a discourse of dissent, giving voice to the new artist’s vision. Their desire to promote the arts, and in doing so create a counter-culture, is revealed in the group’s 1964 manifesto. Central to this manifesto is the development of an artistic community through which the individual artist might gain support and inspiration. Sinclair points out in the

³⁰The other members of the Workshop were Larry Weiner, Charles Moore, Gayle Pearl, Ellen Phelan, Bill Reid, Joe Mulkey, Danny Spencer, Richard Tobias, Allister McKenzie, Paul Sedan, David Homicz, and Bob Marsh.

introduction to the collected writings of the Workshop, which also functions as an editorial statement for the *Artists' Worksheet*, that this community had been established to “do something about Detroit.” The Workshop imagined that art, the artist, and a community defined by the interactions of both were equipped to change Detroit for the better. What was better was equated with a socialized kind of artistic appreciation. To what extent such an appreciation could help the city is never made very clear. The development of this group, and others like it in other major cities, suggested that art could help tie the community to larger cultural appreciation, which could lead to a multicultural consciousness. By this I mean that art communes, if indeed socially active and diverse, could help present the different cultural matrixes of the urban environment. Those in the Workshop felt that this goal required wresting the individual mind from the negative influences of Detroit’s industrial triumvirate, GM, Chrysler, and Ford. This called for the establishment of a supportive community and the development of the communal artist and the counter-culture that would be devoted to changing society through artistic expression: “Our culture,” Sinclair claimed, “is a revolutionary culture” (*Guitar* 147).

Why a community of artists? We believe that one of the most important things to a young, formative artist is having a group of his peers (in the best sense of the word, taking into consideration his advanced level of consciousness & c) that he can be a part of, that he can talk to, work with, work out ideas &c and can give him support. Modern society has succeeded to a frightening degree in alienating artists from each other (and of course from people in general; or at least vice versa) and atomizing what could be a vital, active community into a group of lone,

defensive, hungup people who are afraid to talk to and/or work with anyone but themselves and (maybe) three or four friends. (1)³¹

Central to the Workshop and its communal definition of the “artist” is the dissolution of the individual, solipsistic ego. An artist, perhaps *the Artist*, should not work alone, as in the romantic and modernist traditions, to produce isolated artifacts, but should express himself or herself in relation to a larger context. The context for the Workshop was Detroit, but more immediately and importantly for its members, it was the workshop itself, which functioned as a kind of socio-cultural nexus. Remember the Workshop was in many ways a commune, and thus consciously attempted to separate its members from the everyday influences of the city and, regardless of the rhetoric of the manifesto, nurtured the aesthetic visions of each member, as Sinclair points out in the introduction to his collection of the *Artists’ Worksheet*, an early publication of the Artists’ Workshop: “There was always the concern too that each of us develop his own line, his own poetry as precise to our own senses of our selves as we could make it” (iv).³² The romanticism revealed in Sinclair’s statement that all persons should develop their own form of poetry and being, in relation to their individual inspirations prodded and pulled along by the

³¹About his use of sexist language, Sinclair states in *Guitar Army*, which is a collection of many of his writings, that “The Street Writings have been edited only to cut out esoteric references to local events and to eliminate the sexist language that was characteristic of much of my writing at that time—for this I want to thank my rainbow sisters Marian Roth and Liz Gaynes, who went over the manuscript and patiently and lovingly taught me to understand how this poison infests our culture and how it is degrading not only to sisters but to brothers as well” (58).

³²Recall, for instance, the commune, or utopian community, of Brook Farm. It hoped to thrive away from urban, industrialist society. Also of interest is to consider why the 1960s communes are critiqued so negatively while those of the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth centuries are often seen as examples of America’s adventurous spirit.

community, was characteristic of the counter-cultural ethos. The contradiction, I think, was intended. These products, even if a result of deep psychic conflict, supposedly stand as emblems of the individual mind, symbols of that elusive spirit, that genius which is able to comprehend and mysteriously produce truth. This truth for the Workshop members appears to have been appreciated as a distinct artifact separate from the social body and, therefore, capable of perceiving it. "But it was our truth," Sinclair states while qualifying his disclaimer of the work he had collected, "and that's finally what makes this collection exciting for me now" (iv). Sinclair's use of "truth" is not intended to mean the exposition of facts or the reporting of actual events, but the commitment to sincere artistic expression. And how does this kind of expression relate to truth? The answer to this question reveals one of the major tensions between those endorsing a more cultural activism and those demanding a more revolutionary type. Truth for Sinclair was the fulfillment of individual freedom; the end of any honest expression, no matter how banal or insipid, was that of "turning people on." Other writers and activists in the city saw truth as the exposure of what lay beneath Detroit's capitalist facade—the discrimination, the hatred, the disenfranchisement, and the suffering.

Groups found different ways of exposing and communicating the underlying ideological truths that defined the city's everyday political and social practices. Dudley Randall, for instance, the publisher of the Broadside Press, attempted to tie activist voices and counter-cultural agendas to the Black Arts Movement.³³ These efforts allowed him to

³³The Broadside Press was begun in 1965 with the printing of Randall's poem the "Ballad of Birmingham," which recounts the struggles of Martin Luther King and other black activists in Birmingham, Mississippi.

create a strong sense of cultural agency for blacks in Detroit, stating, “In a broader sense, though, Broadside Press is, in embryo, one of the institutions that black people are creating by trial and error and out of necessity in our reaching for self-determination and independence. I don’t think it’s necessary to belabor the importance of poetry. Poetry has always been with us. It has always been a sustenance, a teacher, an inspiration, and a joy. In the present circumstances it helps in the search for black identity, reinforces black pride and black unity, and is helping to create the soul, the consciousness, and the conscience of black folk” (*Memories* 28). Randall shaped this black consciousness by publishing broadsides and books containing the poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks, Etheridge Knight, Don L. Lee, Nikki Giovanni, and Audre Lorde, to name a few, and distributed them to Detroit’s black book stores. The press usually had limited printing runs of between 500 and 700 copies of each broadside, while managing runs of 5,000 for most of the books on its list. The limited presence of its titles had one notable effect—it forced Broadside Press to “build a stable base in” its community, encouraging local poets while providing them with a location to express their artistic visions and develop an social identity (31). As with Sinclair’s Artists’ Workshop, community was a central element in the creation of the Broadside Press. It emerged as a communal artifact, avoiding the “incestuous little cliques where poets of a narrow school or ideology band together, cry themselves up, and deride all others” (*Memories* 27). I am not sure to which school of poetry Randall might be referring, but certainly in the 1960s cliques, which is the term he might have applied to the Artists’ Workshop, became prominent more for the collaboration they promoted and taboos they transgressed than anything else. Take, for

instance, the New York School of poets, who enjoyed a close relationship to the New York school of painters. Unlike such “schools,” and unlike Sinclair and the other Workshop members, Randall was attempting to perpetuate an artistic tradition that began in earnest during the Harlem Renaissance, uniting current and emerging poets with the social activism of artists such as W.E.B Dubois, Langston Hughes, and James Baldwin. Randall was not attempting to create a counter-culture, even though it may have appeared otherwise to many in Detroit who knew little about African American history, but was attempting to recover a culture that had gone unappreciated by many blacks as well as whites. His vision was not revolutionary, either, in the sense of that word used by the underground presses. On the contrary, it can best be interpreted as a bridge between the work of the more overt counter-culturalists, such as Sinclair, and the more angry revolutionaries, such as John Watson.

For those in the Workshop (and for Randall and the broadside series he was publishing), artistic expression was a cooperative act in which one genre or technique was informed by another and another and so on. Culture, as told through the individual artist, was a text negotiated by the community. The members of the Workshop were aware of the dialogue and intertextuality that define the production of any work of art and felt compelled to promote them. The community events the Workshop planned further illustrate the role of this artistic vision in creating the counter-culture:

Other individual projects that are being planned as part of the Workshop’s total program [include] lectures on modern music, painting, poetry, and film, by the artists themselves that would serve to introduce & enlighten an often-puzzled

public to the artists' aims, purposes, & finished work; free jazz concerts & workshops, featuring in particular the work of Detroit's musical "avant-garde," with commentary on their work by the musicians themselves and by enlightened critics & students of the music; interpretive poetry readings, with background and explanatory commentary by the poets; screenings of films by Detroit experimenters and by independent film-makers from New York and San Francisco who are involved in what has been called the "New American Cinema," and whose work is not readily available, via commercial theatres, to its eager audience. All these will be "free," non-commercial affairs that are planned, programmed, & produced by the artists themselves. (3)

The events the Workshop imagined, and often did actually produce, illustrate its members desire to unite diverse artistic forms into a focused, responsible, and responsive artistic voice. Such a voice of dissent was important for getting at some basic truths, as the counter-culture saw them, which were often expressed, as by Sinclair in "A Total Assault on the Culture," as the "three essential human activities . . . : rock and roll, dope, and fucking in the streets!" (*Guitar* 67-8). The degree to which the Workshop and Detroit's other underground presses succeeded in these aesthetic aims reveals a great deal about the relationship between art, the city, and its social protests.

Sinclair's writings were ubiquitous in Detroit (and prominent nationwide); he contributed to a wide range of underground publications, such as *Fifth Estate* (one of the five original papers in the Underground Press Syndicate), *Guerilla*, *The Warren Forest Sun*, the *Ann Arbor Argus*, *Change*, and *Spero*. As revealed in his role in the Artists'

Workshop, much of Sinclair's vision of social change was articulated through various artistic, or aesthetic, practices. Sinclair imagined social revolution as a change that might be achieved through liberalized art appreciation, youthful civil disobedience, or both. As he puts it in describing the *Artists' Worksheet*, an early publication of the Artists' Workshop, "[It] was very much concerned at the beginning with turning people on, making them aware of new possibilities for self-expression, and sharing ourselves in whatever ways we could." The belief that art could critique society and thereby inspire social reformation is evident in the Worksheet. Driving the counter-cultural movement was the notion that a change in consciousness could lead to a change in reality. An examination of how this idea developed in relation to Detroit's larger social and political context can serve to outline the deeper struggles that took place there during the late 1960s.

An example of how the counter-culture approached cultural transformation is revealed in an article Sinclair published in the *Fifth Estate* in December 1968. The article, titled "Rock and Roll is a Weapon of Cultural Revolution," illustrates how the counter-culture attempted to unite cultural practice with the fulfillment of broad political agendas. The effectiveness of this approach, as one might expect, was dubious. In an attempt to further develop a transformational methodology, Sinclair unites revolution with music: "'The duty of the revolutionary is to make the revolution.' The duty of the musician is to make the music. But there is an equation that must not be missed: MUSIC IS REVOLUTION. Rock and roll music is one of the most vital revolutionary forces in the West—it blows people all the way back to their senses and makes them feel good, like

they're alive again in the middle of this monstrous funeral parlor of western civilization" (113). Within his self-proclaimed "total assault on the culture," an idea Sinclair borrowed from Mao and the Chinese Cultural Revolution, dissent from dominant values can be achieved only through a conscious act of transgression.

In another article "Total Assault on the Culture," published as a kind of manifesto in the *Warren-Forest Sun*, Sinclair extends this unity of cultural practices being modified to address political concerns. Sinclair states that the "*SUN* is a product of the lives of, and a reflection of the lives of a hard core of a community of total freaks. [. . .] Many of us are fighting in the city's courts and on the streets of Detroit to change the laws that supposedly control marijuana and other holy agents, that supposedly control and choke off freedom of speech, religion, assembly, of expression in any human form. [. . .] We are all part of the total universal energy scene and can't be separated from it! GIVE IT UP! Turn on to yourself! Tune in on the energy flow! Take over your bodies and your lives from the control addicts NOW! The world is yours—BE FREE! FREE!! FREEEEEEEEEE!!!" (70-1). This approach would keep the counter-cultural program ideologically opposed to that of the revolutionary presses. Detroit's counter-culture was primarily concerned with existential freedom: the right to think, fuck, smoke, and be differently from what dominant culture prescribed.

Randall, on the other hand, saw the poems he was publishing as part of an American form. In *The Black Poets*, Randall points out that many black poets before the 1960s used traditional forms, studying the work of John Keats, William Wordsworth, A. E. Housman, John Milton, T. S. Eliot, Hart Crane, and Ezra Pound (xxv). During the

1960s, however, many poets began to reclaim much of their African American heritage, using it in their poetry. Randall states that “alienation from white society initiated a turning away from its values and its poetry. Poets turned to poetry of the folk, of the streets, to jazz musicians, to language of black people for their models” (xxv-xxvi). These cultural elements were important to the poetry of Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Haki R. Madhubuti (Don L. Lee), for example. It provided both the line forms and meter that gave some black poetry its chant-like quality. For example, Baraka combines blues and jazz rhythms with the call and response of negro spirituals in the long poem “In the Tradition”:

Blues walk weeps ragtime

Painting slavery

.....

Sing!

Fight!

Sing!

Fight!

Sing!

Fight! &c. &c.

Boosheee doooooo doo dooooo dee

dooooo

doooooooooo!

Death to the Klan!

It is interesting to hear Baraka actually vocalize these last few lines. Like the scat artists before him, he reads his poetry much the way a jazz band might perform it. As with many poets of the 1960s, Baraka combines cultural forms into a single artifact, providing in his performance a complex version of what is meant by “African American tradition.”

On the other side of the issue of what to do about Detroit were the more overtly revolutionary presses. They perceived Detroit as a place defined by the active exploitation and repression of the city’s minorities, the majority of whom were black. This conviction is illustrated in their editorial philosophies, which were very different from those of the counter-culturalists. Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin describe the epistemological difference that shaped the two types of presses as follows:

In Detroit, the relations between the counter-culture and the political revolutionaries became especially strained and guarded. The erratic poet John Sinclair, with his Artists’ Workshop just off the Wayne campus, was the most visible example of the counter-culture. Sinclair wrote a regular column for the *Fifth Estate* in which he espoused music and drugs as viable revolutionary weapons of a youth insurgency. . . . In his 360-page memoir of the period, published in 1972 and titled *Guitar Army*, Sinclair exposed the gap between himself and the Detroit revolutionaries by simply avoiding all mention of the politics and views of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers or those of the people who flowed into and out of groups such as the Motor City Labor League. His omissions included Justin Ravitz, the attorney who did the legal work leading

to Sinclair's own release from prison. (129)

The revolutionary presses were interested in philosophy or ideology as a means to an end rather than as an end in themselves. This was a sentiment that Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam made popular in the 1950s and early 1960s, arguing that blacks should not wait upon the moral reason of whites, but instead should claim their freedom by force. Many of the revolutionaries argued that "stripped of the political sensibilities it consciously rejected, the counter-culture, like the Motown sound, was easy prey for the money boys of Broadway, the ad agencies, organized crime, Hollywood, and the recording industry. Its music, health foods, drugs, hairstyles, mysticism, and colorful clothing were transformed into new commodities to be sold in the American marketplace" (Georgakas and Surkin 128).³⁴ To avoid such cooption and the resulting dissolution of their critical position, the revolutionaries felt that "political focus and organizational structure were crucial to maintaining the momentum and integrity of the counter-culture" (128) and developed Marxist ideology to support this belief.

In the *ICV* and *The South End*, two of the most visible revolutionary presses in Detroit, the focus was on reporting the conditions of the city's working-class minorities. This constituency, they felt, was the basis of Detroit's new culture, its new social reality. "The editors of *ICV* wanted to present complicated revolutionary ideas in a popular and exciting format. . . . The unifying ingredient in all *ICV* material was the sharp emphasis

³⁴In *Dancing in the Streets: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit*, Suzanne E. Smith provides a detailed discussion of the relationship between Motown Records and the oppositional activities in Detroit. She states that Motown "itself was not oblivious to the importance of its role as a cultural force in the fight for racial justice" (24). However, the company's awareness of this important role was undermined by the desire to make money. The economic drive often kept Motown artists, as Georgakas and Surkin's quote suggests, at the margins of Detroit's political struggle.

on defining the strategy and tactics of the ongoing black liberation struggle and how it might prefigure and trigger a second American revolution” (16). As Georgakas and Surkin report, John Watson, an editor for *ICV*, “more than anyone else, was responsible for the existence of the *ICV* and for its characteristic ability to present complicated ideological analyses of capitalism in a popular style which made the leap from theory to practice seem almost automatic” (17).³⁵ Watson was a lynchpin for the revolutionary presses tying the young student activists to Detroit’s working activists represented by Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM). As editor of Wayne State University’s school newspaper *The South End* from 1968-1969, he felt that the newspaper, like the university, was a “public resource that must speak to the needs of the entire population.” This meant the *South End* would deal with the “needs of students as workers, as slum dwellers, as potential draftees, as taxpayers, as parents, and as performers of any other role the society expected of them” (Georgakas and Surkin 45). As with the *ICV*, *The South End* would use Marxist ideas to try to focus and possibly change the realities of Detroit’s black working class. It attempted to expand the context of Detroit’s revolutionary ideas, placing them within the larger world struggle for self-determination. While *ICV* primarily published information about the RUMs and the labor battles taking place within the city,

³⁵Georgakas and Surkin quote the following passage to illustrate Watson’s ability to transform complicated Marxist ideology into readable prose: “To struggle in our own interest means that the black people of the ghetto must struggle to overthrow white capitalism. The struggle against capitalism is world wide and the revolutionary struggle of the ghetto is crucial and essential in the over all world revolution. If the Koreans and Vietnamese can overthrow imperialism in Asia then Asia will be free. But if the Black Revolution can overthrow capitalism and imperialism in the U.S., then the whole world will be freed. This, then, is our role.

With this understanding, let us praise the Vietnamese and Koreans, but let us pass the ammunition and do our own thing” (17).

The South End would publish information about the struggles in the Middle East, conscious that many of the Chaldeans in Detroit were also being discriminated against.

The impact of this revolutionary rhetoric can be seen as it sifted down to the area's high school underground presses. *The Rebels' Voice*, for instance, carried "the official organ of the rebels" on its masthead. In the first issue of this paper, the editors, who apparently had a relationship with the *Fifth Estate*, conclude the article "Students vs. Students," which summarized their platform, with the slogan "WE MUST REALIZE!// WE MUST ORGANIZE!// WE MUST OVERTHROW!" (1).³⁶ They meant, it seems, to overthrow what many, such as Paul and Mitchell Goodman, saw as an outmoded public education system. Some of their major concerns with this system were as follows: "The schools are promoting competition among students," "achievement and I.Q. tests put students into false classifications," "the whole school spirit and sports idea breaks up a possible unity which we should feel with our brothers and sisters at other schools," "racism and sexism are splitting us up" (1). The overriding concern was a fear that schools were really agents "serving the corporate [sic] powers by supplying [sic] them with a mass of uneducated but well regimented young workers" (1). This is the same conclusion Jean Anyon draws in her study of schools in "Social Class and the Hidden

³⁶As was the case with many underground presses, and especially those run by high school students, more successful presses let them use their printing facilities. Beyond just being friendly, this was also seen as a way to educate the young, and education was a major goal of the underground presses.

Curriculum of Work.”³⁷ In March 1969, *A Piece*, A paper published in Mt. Clemens, exemplified this concern in its illustrated cover (Figure 1). Youth was perceived by many as an untapped resource, a potentially immense “revolutionary” force, which both those devoted to cultural and those devoted to political reforms claimed as their own. High school editors seemed to gravitate to the rhetoric of revolution while also being drawn to the freedoms promised by the “new culture.” It should be noted that both aims were perceived as different elements in the same revolution, even though any revolutionary aims remained, for the most part, opaque, more rhetoric than action.

A Radical Education

At this point it is necessary to look at the

underground presses’ vision of education to fully understand their mode of dissent. Most

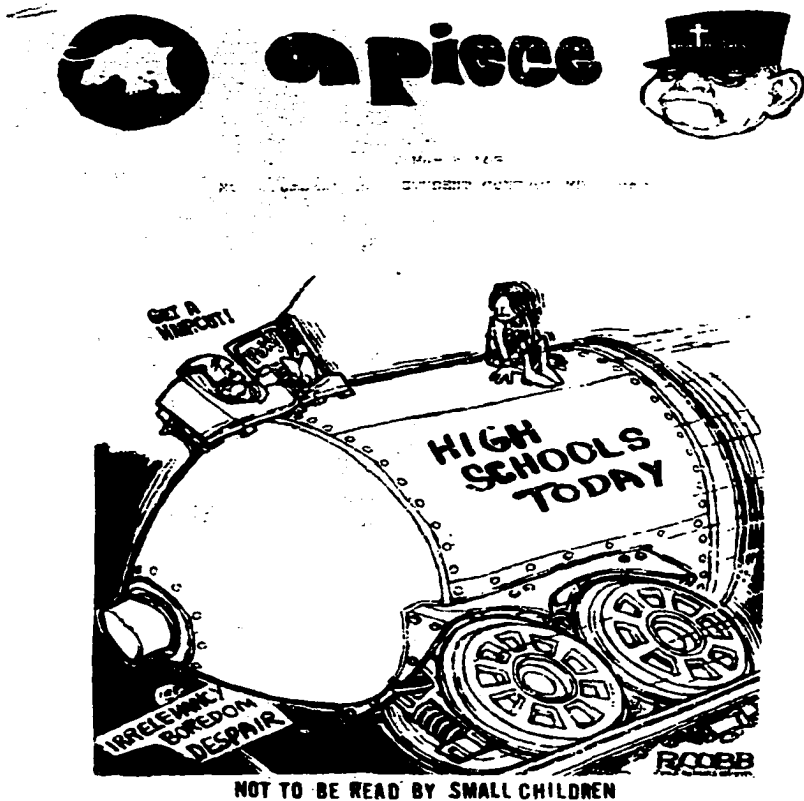


Figure 1: An illustration from *A Piece*, a high school newspaper published in Mt. Clemens. It illustrates the generational gap that is the source of much youthful disinterest and “boredom.”

³⁷ Anyon states that her article will “suggest that there is a ‘hidden curriculum’ in schoolwork that has profound implications for the theory—and consequences—of everyday activity in education” (5).

notably, their critique and subsequent development of education focused on establishing a space of intellectual freedom within the nation's antiquated educational practices. Mao states that "knowing requires experience of changing the condition of a thing, to see its components," and this statement is his definition "of perceptual knowledge, the first stage in developing rational knowledge, which proceeds, in order to be 'good,' to revolutionary action" (*Practice* 14). Mao's linear view of education and the relation of knowledge to action was translated into the ideology of the 1960s youth culture.

In Mitchell Goodman's broad collection of underground press material *A Movement Toward a New America*, Peter Marin argues in "The Truth of Youth" that a new educational practice is needed that values the experience and role of children in our culture. Marin states that

we must rethink our ideas of childhood and schooling. We must dismantle them and start again from scratch. Nothing else will do. Our visions of adolescence and education confine us to habit, rule perception out. We make do at the moment with a set of ideas inherited from the nineteenth century, from an industrial, relatively puritanical, repressive, and 'localized' culture; we try to gum them like labels to new kinds of experience. But that won't do. . . . Adolescents are, each one of them, an arena in which the culture transforms itself or is torn between contrary impulses; they are the victims of a culture raging within itself like man and wife, a schizoid culture—and these children are the unfinished and grotesque products of that schism. (1-2)

The value of individual experience is essential to education in Marin's terms. Control,

determining one's intellectual progress through an outdated heuristic, is to code childhood experiences as "immature," as moments to be overcome; phases mediated, to be bypassed if possible, by behavior-modifying drugs or psychological counseling if necessary. Marin argues that "first to twelfth grades [curiously excluding college instruction] acclimatize students to a fundamental deadness, [. . . teaching] order as the absence of life" (6). In America, children grow up devoid of experience, or of a sense that their experience matters and leads to any "productive" action, any viable products. They have no social agency; therefore, they make their own, defining it through drug use, violence, sex, and music. Only capitalists have valued this culture, Marin argues, turning teens into consumers without a voice or a space from which to resist such manipulation. They consume, buy, and accumulate stuff since they are given few other ways in which to enter the adult (i.e., productive) world. Marin seeks, in the language of expressivist rhetoric, which was growing in popularity at the time, to "create an expressive space" for teens (7). The space was defined by the mantra "there is no one over you," an idea Marin finds particularly liberating. Following the trajectory of Mao's theories, Marin argues for the teaching and thus valuing of an experiential knowledge that might be developed into the basis for a more reciprocal educational system—one that might change, in Mao's terms, the "objective world" by simultaneously "changing [the students'] own subjectivities" (*Practice* 20).

Unlike Mao, and illustrating where the underground press moved away from traditional Marxist theory, Marin states that the "individual is culture" and that "his culture resides in him" (*Towards* 8). Here is a politics of individualism, the fount of

dissent, according to critics like Timothy Miller and Sacvan Bercovitch. Marin is arguing for an expressivist education through which students are able to find and express their individual truths, their “natural,” primal, sense of knowing. On this point, Marin quotes Eric Erickson, who claims in *Young Man Luther* “that every sensitive man experiences in himself the conflicts and contradictions of his age,” thus suggesting that every “sensitive” person is conscious, at any moment, of what effect the larger context and their decisions within it will have on them (*Towards* 8). This is where Erikson turns up the abstraction, becoming the kind of new ager the expressivist rhetoricians, such as Peter Elbow, later resisted. Erikson suggests that each “man” is looking at himself from the future, seeing himself at the intersection of the discourses that define him within a specific historical moment. Likewise, Marin, in a rather insensitive move, compares the youth movement to “primitive,” such as native American, cultures. Marin’s attempt to define the youth movement as somehow politically and culturally innocent is furthered by quoting Paul Radin’s interpretation of primitive culture: “It is [. . .] an absorption in a life of sensations that is the outward characteristic of primitive peoples” (vii). Youth culture then is a “tribe” of individuals relating to one another through these absorbing sensations, through a commitment to sensation rather than conscious reasoning, which is associated with domination through instrumental practices of industrial society. Take, for instance, Gary Snyder’s definition of “Tribe” in his book *Earth House Hold*:

we [of the counter-culture] use the term Tribe because it suggests the type of new society now emerging within the industrial nations. In America of course the word has associations with the American Indians, which we like. This new

subculture is in fact more similar to that ancient and successful tribe, the European Gypies [sic]—a group without nation or territory which maintains its own values, its language and religion, no matter what country it may be in. (113)

This definition is part of his anti-industrial discourse, a perspective he never clearly defines. He does suggest, though, that “industrial” consciousness permeates all aspects of urban society, tainting it with the blight of capitalist greed and competition. In opposition to capitalism, Snyder identifies nature, defined in *No Nature* as a pervasive sense of eco-community, as the location of true insight, as represented in Buddhism’s respect for all life.

The objections to Snyder are obvious, and need not be recounted in too much detail here. However, as Geary Hobson discusses, this appropriation of aboriginal ideas by the white counter-culture leads to the erasure of these groups. No longer does the term, as Snyder appropriates it, refer to Native Americans; rather, it erases the Native Americans and replaces them with gypsies, further erasing their distinctiveness. Also, Snyder, and the counter-culture in general, all too often disregard the struggles these groups faced at the hands of the American government’s national policies. Native Americans were nearly eradicated by centuries of displacement, genocide, and political misrepresentation while the Gypsies, or Roma, were targets of violence throughout European history along with the Jews and “other” groups. In this context, Snyder’s appropriation of “Tribe,” his “white shamanism,” as Hobson describes it, seems rather insensitive and counter to his expressed claims of opposing the world’s industrial monoliths.

Marin, on the other hand, is attempting to equate the youth culture to some basic, foundational, aboriginal energies, in order to differentiate the young, disillusioned students from their capitalist fathers. However, this attempt reifies aboriginal cultures into a static past, a static representation, in which they are, as Alan Velie claims, always imagined as if they had never left the 19th century. Such shortcomings of the counter-culture inform the work of the underground presses in Detroit. When the counter-culture attempts to make a political statement, it is often defined by those it excludes, by those it appropriates, and by those it misrepresents for the furthering of some specific, local agenda. Even given Marin's insensitivities, however, his ideas for an expressive educational space continue to have merit. Central to his educational policies is the liberation of young students from the anachronistic, often repressive, socializing purposes of American education. Education needs to adapt to the evolving needs of young people; it needs to respect their ideas and creative perspectives. While society works to keep young people infants, dependents, longer and longer, their future depends upon them deciding sooner and sooner the course of their futures. These antagonistic agendas lead to an educational system that is decidedly ineffective, that is becoming increasingly similar to holding cells, a lesson in "dues" paying. Through education knowledge is doled out in a "need to know basis," and this need to know is determined by uncritical and unchallenged assumptions of what young people are worth. Education when Marin wrote "The Truth of Youth" as well as today, as Anyon, Sylvia Scribner, and Joseph Harris point out, functions more to mediate social possibilities than to liberate people to achieve their full potentials whatever those may be.

What conclusions can we draw about dissent from these examples? One notes initially that dissent is complex, composed of intersecting cultural forms and political agendas, which comment on the social, political, and cultural contexts that shape their creation and evolution. How it carries on this commentary, how it mediates it and thus facilitates a dialogue between different class, economic, and racial groups, is now at issue. By definition dissent is a mode of rejecting the prescriptions of a perceived dominant order, an order that is actively (e.g., through social policies) making decisions that directly impact the lives of the dissenters. In *The Rites of Assent*, Sacvan Bercovitch analyzes American dissent, concluding that it is a corollary of consensus, a traditional process of “co-optation” and the right to social accession. Bercovitch argues that American dissent relies upon the rhetoric of the ideal “America way” in order to dissent from the ills of the current age. Bercovitch discovered this process while critiquing the radicalism of the 1960s. His account further illuminates the various modes of dissent I have presented above:

The issue was not co-optation or dissent. It was varieties of co-optation, varieties of dissent, and above all varieties of co-optation/dissent. America was a symbolic *field*, continually influenced by extrinsic sources, and sometimes changing through those influences, but characteristically absorbing and adapting them to its own distinctive patterns. And in the course of adaptation, it was recurrently generating its own adversarial forms. The “alternative Americas” it spawned were (like the originating symbol) ideology and utopia combined. They opposed the system in ways that reaffirmed its ideals; but the process of reaffirmation

constituted a radical tradition *of a certain kind*. Hence the ambiguities that linked Douglass to King, Thoreau to [Paul] Goodman, Stanton to Steinem. In all these cases, dissent was demonstrably an appeal to, and through, the rhetoric and values of the dominant culture; and in every case, it issued in a fundamental challenge to the system: racism subverted in Douglass's story of a self-made man; patriarchy subverted through Stanton's revised version of the Declaration of Independence; the authority of government subverted by Thoreau's July Fourth experiment in self-reliance. (20)

What Bercovitch fails to consider, however, is how this dissent was distributed among those who might enact it. A key feature of the dissent of the 1960s was the development of underground presses which used the established press as a symbol of dominant culture, of the oppressive "other." The creation of this symbol as the enemy, whether the established press deserved the label or not, gave the underground press a rhetoric, vision, and audience to define itself against. Bercovitch points out, "This form of cultural work joined Jefferson to Thoreau and both to Martin Luther King, jr., in an omnivorous oppositionalism that ingested all competing modes of radicalism—from the Fourierists to Herbert Marcuse and Noam Chomsky—in the course of redefining injustice as un-American-ness" (19). The underground press found injustice in the form of journalistic conventions, which above all valued objective fact over individual expression and subjective experience and attempted to subvert them, calling upon individual imagination, communal love, and social pluralism to attack the staunch social and cultural conventions of the dominant order.

The underground presses called upon the tradition of freedom, that symbol of the “American way,” in order to promote their agendas for a different Detroit, for a more pluralist society, a more open-ended sense of self. Through the appropriation of Marxist ideology and the codes of journalism, they promoted “representative individualism,” as Bercovitch states, or “participatory democracy,” as Muravchik describes it, rather than a plan for communist collectivization or centralized totalitarianism. They wanted a Detroit, and an America, that would recognize them as a viable socio-political agent. They elevated socialism as a way to promote community and collaboration, individuality and self-sufficiency. The underground presses found imagination, and its artistic manifestations, to be a means of reviewing and critiquing dominant values. These efforts range from attempts at revolutionizing culture to tearing society asunder in the hopes of rebuilding it in their revised images of Cuba, the Soviet Union, or China. The efforts were often absurdist and contradictory, but at the same time they were imaginative, pushing the boundaries of what were perceived as eternal, deified, social and cultural conventions. Bercovitch defines this form of dissent, or “radical imagining,” stating, “I have called that form [utopian discourse] of radical imagining *dissent* because the term seems best to convey its distinctive emphasis on negation and transition, its resistance of principle to institutional controls, its open-ended, self-enclosed tropism for reform and change. It is a form of protest conceived at the interstices of free-enterprise theory, and developed within the gaps or lacunae in the principle of subjectivity itself between the actual and the ideal, selfhood and union; between substantive unity on the one hand and, on the other, a self-subsistent personal peculiarity with a consecration of its own” (356-

47). This complex definition relating dissent to a radical imagination is important as we begin examining the poetry of the underground presses, which more than any other artistic form carried the weight of the underground presses' ideology of dissent.

Chapter 2

Poetics of Dissent

As I rummaged through the old stacks and tattered reels of microfilm, and while I waited for the delivery of interlibrary loans from the distant archives in Michigan, I wondered why the poetry I was reading in Detroit's underground presses seemed so peculiar.³⁸ I read and felt as though I understood only the semantic elements, lines relating to one another along a journey toward sense or, as often, nonsense. The writing seemed quickly composed, frantic and confused. Sometimes I could not believe what I found: insane high school papers, wild monologues, confused ramblings about the nature of the cosmos or providing a mystical recipe for a re-energizing casserole made of left-overs. Yet all the poetry seemed tied to a vague subtext that suggested a depth of meaning I had not yet figured out how to describe.

What is significant about the history of marginal texts?

After a period of confusion, I realized that it was the socio-political forces that had originally driven much of this poetry, giving it its distinct voice. The poems reverberated with a muffled vibration that suggested an urgent need to communicate, to draw a different and deeper sense from the language and literary conventions that had seemed to become inadequate. I was struck by the lack of narrative elements in these poems. It was as if the writers felt that a story, the relating of one's individual experience as a

³⁸In *On the Walls and In the Streets*, James D. Sullivan describes the reception of once contextualized poetic works in his reading of Allen Ginsberg in the closed stacks. The gathering of these items, he argues, shapes their cultural significance. Being shelved, for instance, in such remote collections, this poetry becomes oracular, a fount of specialized, eclectic wisdom. This reception is quite different from what was originally intended.

universalizing perspective, could no longer do the necessary kind of cultural work. Instead, this work required obfuscation and the plumbing of the semantic interstices of history and language, the searching for thoughts that lie at irrational right angles to reasoned discourse, a surrealism without the leisurely pace of André Breton or the old-world streets to feed its mysteries.³⁹ Something dirtier, less learned, less refined, and less purposeful was coming out of the underground presses. Contradictions and a dialogic tension existed—euphoria and melancholy, beauty and gore, love and death. In all of this there was the search for a different level of commitment and participation in the poem for both reader and poet. Participation seemed to be the means that would produce and justify the social ends of this literature. It was around this sense of participation, defined by a freedom of choice and the will to dissent, that the various forms of expression in late 1960s Detroit converged.

Yet what I had not fully considered in my readings of this difficult poetry was their rationale, the point they were attempting to communicate, or the lessons they might be devoted to teaching. I wondered if the writers had risen early with a cup of coffee or a joint and decided that writing a poem, rather than organizing a march or writing a letter to the editor, was more apt to make the city a more accommodating social space. Who did they believe cared and why? What is the secret to this materialist view of poetry (is there a secret?) or is it all academic in that it seeks, as Mike Rose suggests in *Lives on the Boundary*, the vague text for the benefit of only a few specialists? Approaching the

³⁹I imagine that Breton's *Nadja*, for instance, would have been a much different book had he been required to work 8 to 12 hours a day on an assembly line.

historical haze surrounding these questions, I found that these poems were not written with a conventional aesthetic in mind, but rather evolved out of collaborative cultural and political efforts that coincided with the social realities of Detroit during the late 1960s. What was produced at this moment might be referred to as a Detroit school of poetry.

I am cognizant of the red flags many scholars raise when presented with such an over-arching interpretive category. Such a category, of course, is fraught with inadequacy and can lead any literary critique to oversimplified or reductive generalizations about distinct and complex artistic and political efforts. What I wish to suggest in using this category, however, is that the city of Detroit played a significant role in shaping the poetry produced in and about it during the late 1960s. The city can be seen as a point of convergence, as other cities were, through which many economic, racial, and cultural forces intersected to fashion a particular instance of an urban poetics. These converging forces could also be examined as forming a geopoetics, in which Detroit becomes the central motivating factor in the production, distribution, and consumption of the city's poetry and of art in general. In this chapter, I argue that the poetry published in Detroit's underground presses was crucial to the act of dissent and provided a practical instance of a postmodern aesthetic.

The Making of a Postmodern Verse

It is useful to think of the poets in Detroit as "poets of a Detroit school," which is a designation that suggests the influence of Detroit—its music, politics, and racial and economic tensions—on the poetry published in the underground presses during the late

1960s. I use this category for a reason similar to John Bernard Myers's use of "poets of the New York school" in his analysis of these poets. In the introduction to his book, he justifies his use of this term and details the relationship between poetry and other forms of expression, in this case painting and sculpture.

Notice: I have not called these writers "The New York School of Poets," but have deliberately refrained from so defining them because, properly speaking, they do not constitute a "school of poets" in the old-fashioned sense. Perhaps, despite the pejorative flavor of the word, it might be more accurate to call [the poets of the New York School] a 'coterie'—if we define as coterie a group of writers rejected by the literary establishment who found strength to continue with their work by what the anarchists used to call "mutual aid." The term "the Poets of the New York School" implies more than a coterie (even in the pleasant sense the word is offered) because what is referred to is a small group in a definite world: a fraternity of poets in a specific environment, with a sympathetic audience and a necessary freedom to breathe and exist in the vocation of poetry. In particular, all of them—including the youngest in the group, at this moment of publication—were and are involved with advanced styles in painting and sculpture, and with the artists who have been and are committed to these styles (7-8).

Those poets publishing in Detroit's underground presses during the late 1960s can also be thought of as a coterie. Certainly central to their identity as artists was their involvement in different forms of artistic expression, such as those sponsored or inspired by the Black Arts Movement, and the fact that they were marginalized from conventional means of

publication. Many were committed to the civil rights movement of the early 1960s. After Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis in 1968, however, some shifted, as Julius Lester did, toward the more militant black nationalist movement. Lester describes this shift and the in-fighting that followed it in "Beyond Ideology":

By 1968 the Movement that had begun with the singing of 'We Shall Overcome' was shouting "Black Power." I wrote a book called *Look Out, Whitey! Black Power's Gon' Get Your Mama*. It was the first book that sought to explicate Black Power, an angry book, expressing not so much personal anger as racial anger. [. . .] Both the Black and White movements attacked individuals within their ranks more viciously than they attacked the administration in Washington. The personal had become political, and the gray-flanneled conformity of the Fifties was replaced by a blue-jeaned and Afroed totalitarianism. A mysterious and mystical entity called The People became the standard against which everyone was measured and judged. (217-8)

The tension created by this totalitarian attempt to control any dissent from its own politics of dissent added an distinct separatist edge to the poetry produced during the late 1960s.

If we accept Myers's label of coterie, as he qualifies it, then we still need to realize that in late 1960s Detroit it represented a collection of neglected artists, worried about the splintering activist community and inspired by the city's political environment to establish and promote different, often opposed, social and cultural agendas. John Sinclair and the other members of the Artists' Workshop wrote in order "to do something about Detroit" by instigating a "total assault on the culture" while Dudley Randall and

John Watson imagined elevating the cultural heritage of the city's black inhabitants, and in Watson's case uniting it with Marxist ideology, in order to create (perhaps reclaim) a unifying black identity—what in some cases became a version of Black Nationalism as inspired by Malcolm X and the Black Panthers. Yet it is important to note that these editors and poets did not seek to create a “clique” of poets, as Randall states, bound together by “a narrow school or ideology,” nor a “Detroit school or anything,” as Sinclair points out (*Memories* 27; *Worksheet* ii).

While I feel it is necessary to take these qualifications into account, I do feel that it is possible to delineate an aesthetic emerging out of Detroit's underground presses. If the Detroit artists formed a general coterie, then they did so in a postmodern sense of the term. By “postmodern” I mean, as Paul Hoover states in *Postmodern American Poetry*, the

historical period following World War II. It also suggests an experimental approach to composition, as well as a worldview that sets itself apart from mainstream culture and the narcissism, sentimentality, and self-expressiveness of its life in writing. Postmodernist poetry is the avant-garde poetry of our time. I have chosen “postmodern” for the title over “experimental” and “avant-garde” because it is the most encompassing term for the variety of experimental practice since World War II, one that ranges from the oral poetics of Beat and performance poetics to the more “writerly” work of the New York School and language poetry. (xxv)

Detroit's coterie worked to refashion culture, to recover repressed artifacts from history,

to invest the city and the lives of its inhabitants with their heritage. Such efforts were multicultural and, in some cases, revolutionary, changing the way poets approached the practice of their art and how people read the city--its history and future potential. As with any artistic group in a time when structures of feeling were visibly dictated by economic, cultural, and political efforts often functioning at cross-purposes to one another, those in Detroit were suspended in a fragile dialogue, which created a tension that defined the fragmented sense of the city's urban realities.

Determining how to gain the freedom "to be" within this urban/artistic context was dictated by the search for identity and then by the need to provide a space in which that identity, that self, could speak. Identity, especially within a postmodern context, is a complex negotiation of historical, cultural, and social phenomena. The members of a group, to different degrees of awareness, have a sense of where they are from, what defines them racially, regionally, and ethnically, and what defines their current economic and communal situation. These considerations are held in a complex dialogue, changing with the values stressed during a specific moment. It is this aspect of one's search for identity that the underground presses sought to enable (in both the positive and negative sense of the word).⁴⁰ In the late 1960s, these presses provided a means for different groups to speak about themselves, their concerns, and their visions of how "to be." These efforts were egotistical (regardless of the rhetoric stating otherwise), but, at the same time, the multiplication of such egos, often represented in mimeographed papers, added a compelling texture to the representation of the city. It was no longer only Detroit the

⁴⁰In psychology, the term "enabling" denotes practices that facilitate a person's "bad" behavior.

“Model City,” but also, with the “mimeograph revolution,” Detroit the city fragmented by numerous competing, conflicting, and sometimes confusing voices. Thus, it became the postmodern lyric, the open form, an exemplar of field composition.

It is true that Detroit’s underground presses pursued different political and cultural agendas about which their artistic endeavors commented. However, the city, defined by converging social, political, and cultural realities, is the element that unifies the aesthetic visions of these presses into a distinctive poetics. It is the demands made on life in the modern city that inspired the art found in Detroit’s underground presses. This art, as revealed in the works produced by Motown, the Artists’ Workshop, the *Broadside Press*, *The Fifth Estate*, *The Inner-City Voice*, *Guerrilla*, or the *Sun*, corresponded to the conditions of the city; it was a distinct product of life on the streets, in the factories, or out in the suburbs. The poetry mirrored the psychic fragmentation and physical hardships often associated with de-industrialization, automation, racism, homelessness, strikes, and riots. As a representation of these “real” conditions, the poetry printed in the city’s underground presses recounted arguments for change and unity. It conveyed a fear of destruction and death, struggled against voices of opposition, and portrayed a faith in the power of art to inspire a more egalitarian and open society, even if its own efforts were not always so fair or open. The city, this poetry suggested, is only known through fragments, through texts produced about it. The acceptance of this fragmentation, obsfucation, or openness versus closure in art, as in life, is part of the postmodern turn.

This poetics was shaped in large part by Charles Olson’s ideas about a “projective open or field verse” (1950) and by the publication of Donald M. Allen’s poetry anthology

The New American Poetry (1960). Both of these sources revealed the importance of the alternative Black Mountain College in the development of a new poetics. At Black Mountain, poets such as Robert Creeley, Ed Dorn, Hilda Morley, Jon Wieners, and Robert Duncan conducted experiments concerned with the nature of poetics. The quasi-scientific characteristics of these efforts were revealed in Olson's writings, such as "Projective Verse," "Quantity in Verse, and Shakespeare's Late Plays," and "The Animate versus the Mechanical, and Thought." He was not attempting to part with the past, but to reshape it to better fit new sociological findings and his ideas about the different roles poetry might play in the increasing unsettled society of the 1950s and 1960s. As Hoover points out in his anthology, *Black Mountain Poets*, Olson's ideas had the largest impact, but other ideas originating in Dadaism and Surrealism, the Zen Buddhism of the Beats, the "plastic" poetics of the New York School poets, and the "study of ethnopoetics," "performance poetry," and the "invention of the term 'deep image'" also helped shaped the poetry of the late 1960s (xxxii-iii).

It is important to notice that what this new poetics revealed is a belief in the convergence of artistic forms, a belief that no art need be isolated from other cultural, social, or political ideas. One can work in several artistic forms and ideas at once, can develop a verbal or visual collage, which can comment on immediate political issues. Art can be ephemeral, transitory, even stupid, here one moment and gone the next. Permanency does not matter and is not necessarily the mark of quality. Across the country during this time, the multiplicity, or the intertextuality, inherent in any artistic product became central to the various alternative or underground art movements. For the

New York School poets painting and poetry could mutually inform each other; for the Black Mountain poets linguistic theory, history, primitive oral literatures and cultures, and science added depth to the structure of poetry, allowing poets to view linguistic representation as expressive of the poet as a culturally transected being through which different worldviews were always passing. Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), for example, could place stanzas of ooohs and aaahs to replicate the improvisational energy of jazz vociferations (known as “scatting”). A poem did not have to be confined to any one set of rules, even though it seems to me that rules (loosely conceived) remained important. The line was thought to reveal the conflation of science and Buddhist meditation in that it was at once a form of kinetic energy and an extension of the poet’s breath and, thus, body. Of course, such connections between a text and the author’s and reader’s physiology are hard to make; however, the attempt illustrated, at least, a desire to reassess the possibilities of poetry. Poetic rules turned the poem into a form of meditation, in which the body, linguistic meaning, and visual presentation melded into a powerful artifact of social and cultural significance. It was hoped that the poet’s ego would no longer be the sole source of knowledge. A poem became the expression of an experience (indeed an experience itself) rather than primarily a text to be read, memorized, and reproduced. One might say that poetry at this time had become a mode of inquiry, a heuristic for self-discovery, rather than a fetishized art form. The experience of creating a poem, the poem as a record of its own making, as Robert Duncan put it, was as much the point as the final product. The desire to thwart interpretation and complicate meaning was indicative of the counter-cultural’s mode of dissent. What better way was there to

upset conformity than by resisting conventional forms of communication? What better way was there to differentiate your artistic vision from those who came before than by making yours indecipherable to them, and then calling them stupid for not understanding your work? Sometimes these efforts were ugly, or simply hokum, but they were nonetheless characteristic of dissent in the late 1960s.

The influence of these ideas was important in shaping the poetry published in the underground presses around the country. In Detroit, the “new American poets” and Olson’s projective verse became the central “dogma” shaping the poetic efforts of the Artists’ Workshop, a fact Sinclair notes in his introduction to *The Collected Artists’ Worksheet*:

Since there was no leadership [i.e., experimental poets] in the city, and no one we had been able to find who was even aware of the existence of what we had found to be “projective verse” (reading Olson’s essay, even at that late date, had completely blown our minds, and we took it quite seriously as our single dogma to one degree or another), we wanted to get the news of what we had “discovered” to as many people as possible in what we hoped would be our community. [. . .] As I said above, we took Charles Olson’s “Projective Verse” essay quite literally as our doctrine, and the New American Poetry anthology was our Bible, for better or for worse. Along with our regular Sunday afternoon readings, we instituted a series of Friday night readings “from the New American Poetry” and tried to give our fellows a sense of the “national community of artists” we felt. (i-ii)

The idea of “community” was essential, but it was to be a community of distinct

individuals, one that contained, but did not resist, diversity. Reading the collected Artists' Worksheets published in 1967 reveals this sense of community, in which poets got together to think about their poetry within the context of Olson's ideas. The Artists' Workshop, which was the group that published the *Artists' Worksheet*, was the artistic extension of Sinclair's Trans-Love Energies group, a name which reveals Olson's influence and the direction in which Sinclair was taking those ideas.⁴¹ In Detroit, art had a sometimes silly, but sometimes compelling relationship with the notion of "energy" and its various means of transmission. For Sinclair, "fucking in the streets" was one appropriation of "energy" and its "transmission," while the appropriation of jazz and rock music as a means of shaping poetry was another. Which was more "useful" depends on your perspective. Regardless, Olson's poetics was a basis for a serious consideration of organic energies, of an embodied poetics, as a means of structuring poetry and representing experience within a poem.

Allen and Hoover begin their poetry anthologies with the poetry of Olson, whose article on "projective verse" was central to the poetics emerging in Detroit's underground presses.⁴² Olson's poetics and the new postmodern mode of versification that grew out of it differentiated themselves from closed verse, or what Olson refers to as "the inherited line, stanza, over-all form[, . . .] that verse which print bred and which is pretty much what we have had, in English & American, and have still got, despite the work of Pound

⁴¹Trans-Love Energies would become the White Panther Party after the 1967 riot and a series of confrontations with the police, and later the Rainbow People's Party after Sinclair and his friends moved to Ann Arbor.

⁴²Published in 1994, Hoover's anthology updates Allen's previous work.

& Williams” (“Projective” 386). This poetics “defines,” as Robert Creeley observes in analyzing Olson’s ideas,

a basis for structure in the poem in terms of ‘*kinetics*’ (“the poem itself must, at all points, be a high energy-construct and, at all points, an energy discharge . . .”), the ‘*principle*’ of its writing (form is never more than an extension of content), and the ‘*process*’ (“ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION. . .”). He [Olson] equally distinguishes between breathing and hearing, as these relate to the line: “And the line comes (I swear it) from the breath, from the breathing of the man who writes, at that moment that he writes . . .” (Allen 409-10)

Olson’s poetics critiques the conventions of verse that poets have inherited, those traditional semiotic structures that he finds unnecessarily strict. However, Olson does not ignore traditional writers and poets. On the contrary, he was a scholar of Melville and Shakespeare, writing a compelling book about *Moby Dick* titled *Call Me Ishmael*, in which he traces the influences of Shakespeare on Melville’s composition of that novel. He also invokes Shelley, Blake, Keats, Rilke, Pound, and Williams, finding in their work some of the elements he used in developing his “projective verse.” As a further example, he relates his objections to closed verse to Keats’s idea of “the Egotistical Sublime,” which is a phrase John Keats used to describe the poetry of Wordsworth and Milton. Olson believed that this sense of “me” and “my story” persisted in “what you might call the private-soul-at-any-public-wall” (Allen 386). Hoover details this objection, stating that an

important aspect of Olson's essay ["Projective Verse"] is the concept of ego:

"getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego . . . that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature . . . and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects." Olson's goal is to avoid the self-congratulatory elegiac mode, with its inevitable drift toward pathos. (xxxii-iii)

Olson's poetics is an alteration of the inherited forms rather than a reactionary departure from them. Modifying the poetic practices of earlier poets, elevating the importance of the poem's oral origins and its role as a record of this orality, this verbal energy allowed Olson to create a foundation for poetry that would more readily respond to the conditions he was observing. The scholarly basis from which Olson's new poetics arose, I believe, is what made it so popular with his underground contemporaries and Black Mountain peers.

Olson's projective verse begins with the reassessment of the syllable's role in the poetic line, both of which are the fundamental building blocks of poetic form. According to Olson, the syllable is the expression, the coding, of one's breath, and "each breath is a unit or measure of utterance" (Hoover xxxii). These measures (what might be called syllabic breaths) can be strung together to form a line of verse that embodies the act of reciting the poem--a formative principle of projective composition.⁴³ These organic

⁴³Hoover uses the phrase "Black Mountain composition" to refer to poems written using the concepts of projective verse. This reference suggests that projective verse grew out of Olson's collaboration with other Black Mountain poets, such as (and especially) Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, and Denise Levertov.

beats, extensions of the poet's body, are the smallest, constructive elements in Olson's theory of poetic discourse. They are, as he states, the "key and pin of versification, what rules and holds together the lines, the larger forms, of a poem. [. . .] It is by their syllables that words juxtapose in beauty, by these particles of sound as clearly as by the sense of the words which they compose" (Allen 388). Words have at least these two levels of signification that unite to determine the form and meaning of a poem. First, words, through the breath, correspond to the poet's organic body, the poet's own energy, thus bringing the author to life in a way denied by most poststructural theory, in which the author is no longer perceived as the authority of a given text. (Authority is superseded by the deconstruction of the text's language, an act which reveals the intertexts that have converged to form the present expression.) For Olson the author is the source of both the poem's meaning and its organic, visual form. This kind of composition can be thought of as an "embodied poetics," as discussed by critics such as Michael Davidson, who presented a paper titled "Missing Larry" at The National Poetry Foundation's conference "The Opening of the Field: A Conference on North American Poetry in the 1960s" in Orono, Maine. In this paper, he discussed the need to develop an "embodied poetics" that would take into consideration the role of the author's own body (a crippled body in the case of Larry) in the interpretation of poetry. As an imaginative conduit, the poet's body, state of mind, and spontaneous verbal performances are potentially inscribed onto the poem itself. For Olson, these inscriptions come in the replication of the breath in the length and breaking of lines, in the poem as a record of its own creation, or as Duncan puts it, as "an adventure [or] a communication below the threshold of language" (Allen

402, 407). From this perspective, original manuscripts, such as Walt Whitman's notebooks, owe much of their oracular value to the sense that poets are revealed in samples of their original writing. Something of their body, of their imaginative genius, is conveyed by the loop of their "t"s and so on.

On another level, words also function as symbols of the real object, or of experience as conditioned by the object that the poem is attempting to represent. In "Projective Verse," Olson attempts to define the role of a projective poem in relation to objective experience:

[Rather than "objectivism"] what seems to me a more valid formulation for present use is "objectism," a word to be taken to stand for the kind of relation of man to experience which a poet might state as the necessity of a line or a work to be as wood is, to be as clean as wood is as it issues from the hand of nature, to be shaped as wood can be when a man has had his hand to it. Objectism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the "subject" and his soul. (Allen 395)

The analogy of "objectism" to wood suggests that the poem adds a shape to the natural thing it represents; therefore, the projective poem shapes the language, through the presentation of the breath inherent in its reading, and, thus, the poem's object and the experience related to it. This "objectism," or "thingness," as Olson calls it in a letter to Elaine Feinstein, appears to be drawn from Rainer Maria Rilke's *Dinggedichte* (thing poems) and from the Imagists' interest in the object as seen in the poetry of Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, and Carl Sandburg. Rilke's thing-poems and the work of the Imagists were

influenced by the French symbolists, who felt worldly objects reflected the spiritual or abstract world, those ineffable experiences woven into everyday life. Hoover recalls the symbolist theory of correspondences, in which “nature may be read by means of its external appearances,” tying this aspect of the object into the “deep-image” poems of the 1960s, in which poems, such as those written by Diane Wakoski, were “organized as catalogues of self-sufficient images” (xxxiii). Rilke’s “The Lace,” for example, illustrates the emotional depth these poets discovered in material objects and the mundane ephemera of everyday life:

I

Humanness: name for wavering possession,
 still unconfirmed continuance of luck:
 is it inhuman that for this lace’s making,
 this small dense needless piece of lace,
 two eyes were paid?—Do you want them back?

You long departed and finally blind,
 does your bliss live on within this thing
 into which, as between trunk and bark,
 your great feeling, grown minuscule, went?

Through a rip in fate, a tiny hole,
 you extracted from your time your soul;

and it inheres so in this lucid work,
that when I think of “usefulness” I smile.⁴⁴

II

And if one day this doing and all
that involves us here should seem petty
and estranged, as if not recompense
for how we toil so for its sake to grow
out of childhood’s shoes—: Would this piece
of yellowed lace, this tightly woven
length of flowery lace, not then suffice
to hold us here? Look: it was *done*.

A life perhaps was spurned, who knows?
A chance at happiness was there and given up,
and yet finally, at whatever price,
this *thing* grew out of it, not easier than life
and yet completed and so perfect—as if
it were no longer too soon to laugh and soar. (93-5)

The piece of lace retains the sense of its previous wearer, and the relationship between

⁴⁴The phrase “your time your soul” in line eleven is “deine Seele deiner Zeit” (“your soul your time”) in the original. I do not see a clear reason for reversing the syntax of this line in the English translation. If Snow had used the original syntax, the line would read “you extracted from your soul your time.” The sense of this line suggest a stronger role of the individual in shaping history than Snow’s does.

her and the poem's speaker. The lace's tight weave is a symbol of the delicacy, the aged and complex nature ("yellowed"), of their relationship. As Rilke does with lace, Olson finds significance in, as he states, the "proper noun," a focal point around which a poem's form is built. Rilke used traditional poetic conventions to construct his *Dingdichte*, but Olson argues that a poetics should incorporate the energy of the object under consideration in order to develop a form complementary to it. In this way, form will always be, as Creeley thought it should, an extension of content. As an example, take Pound's oft quoted "A Station at the Metro":

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:

Petals on a wet, black bough. (35)

Nature is bound to man; one apparition invokes and informs the other. The black bough is reflected in the ghostly faces of the crowd waiting at a metro. Both wait for a change: the black bough for a change in season, the people for the arrival of the train. Both convey an essential, a spiritual, sense of fragility, as ineffable as a petal, as mundane as a crowd of faces.

To shape the breathed line, its organic measure, into a projective or field poem, Olson adds the concept of kinetic energy, which is, as Creeley points out in the above quote, the concept central to a projective poem's form. Scientifically, kinetic energy is the transformation of potential or resting energy into the energy of motion or work. Kinetic energy produces something, such as motion, and is defined as a scalar quantity, or what can be thought of as an end product, a magnitude. A poem's kinetic energy, then, can be interpreted as the degree to which the poem transforms its subject matter. A

vector quantity, which is the term Olson uses to describe an image, defines the combined influences of a magnitude and a direction on the material object with which it interacts. Therefore, an image can be thought of as the “vector,” from which the poem’s meaning, its textual inertia, is derived (Allen 399).

In art, the term “kinetic” is used more generally to designate a genre of sculpture, such as kinetic sculpture or the mobile, in which much of the sculpture’s meaning is in part represented by its motion. Alexander Calder was perhaps the best known kinetic sculptor. Janet L. Faber links his work to the Dada and Surrealist movements because of its “playfulness and chance arrangement”; she also states that “his sculpture responded to Constructivism by energizing art’s elements in the viewer’s space” (“Calder” online). This means that Calder used kinetic principles to bring a more interactive element to sculpture and its appreciation, delving into a sense of time that only motion can provide. Similarly, kinetic elements of Olson’s poetry are meant to move beyond the textual through a versification, that construction or recording of a poem’s form, that suggests a dialogic interaction. For example, “The Distances” illustrates many of the concepts of projective verse, suggesting motion in both its form and its content. The lines and subtle stanzas are fashioned from the possibilities of breath and, thus, from the interaction (what might be thought of, to use Olson’s terms, as the energy release) between author and reader. The poem’s images are vectors that dictate the progression of the poem toward each of its linguistic conclusions. Consider, for example, how what might be considered the poem’s first two stanzas function:

So the distances are Galatea

and one does fall in love and desires

mastery

old Zeus—young Augustus

Love knows no distance, no place

is that far away or heat changes

into signals, and control

old Zeus—young Augustus (Allen 37-9)

The line breaks do not conform to traditional conventions of meter and rhyme: this is not iambic pentameter or some other formal poetic foot that can be scanned, and there is no obvious rhyme scheme to be noted. Yet the poem produces a music, a beat created as one follows the visual presentation of it, a reading that assures the “progressing of both the meaning and the breathing forward” (Allen 394). Olson found this visual rhetoric important, believing that the typewriter was a machine that allowed the poet to create an organic form, one that captured the breath of the poet on the page:

from the machine has come one gain not yet sufficiently observed or used, but which leads directly on toward projective verse and its consequences. It is the advantage of the typewriter that, due to its rigidity and its space precisions, it can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspensions even of syllables, the juxtapositions even of parts of phrases, which he intends. For the first time the poet has the stave and the bar a musician has had. For the first time he can, without the convention of rime and meter, record the listening he had done to his own speech and by that one act indicate how he would want any reader,

silently or otherwise, to voice his work. (Allen 393)

The line breaks in “The Distances” suggest how to deliver the line in order to recreate the thought’s orality: where to provide a caesura, where to emphasize a syllable, space, or dash, and perhaps where to look up in order to catch the waning eye of a tired audience member. A projective poem is as much about reader reception as it is about composition. The poem provides the directions for and an imaginative record of a verbal exchange between the poet and reader. In theory, this aspect allows projective verse to be more engaging for the reader. A poem that is composed into lines and stanzas as the poet wills it (or breathes it) offers the reader a more intimate insight into the poet and the creative process; the poem is in all its aspects a construct of the poet’s imagination and intellect. The projective poem does not use prescribed forms such as the sonnet or villanelle, but attempts to unite the poem’s content, or subject, to its visual form. This type of poetics values the performance, or the imaginative interaction with the authorial voice of the poem, as a guide to an extra-textual insight and experience.

The projective form, as illustrated in “The Distances,” also suggests the Old English alliterative meter, in which one line is broken into two half-lines separated by a caesura. The stressed syllables in the first half-line alliterate with the syllables beginning the second half-line. The poet/musician (bard) often accompanied the delivery of the poem with a musical instrument, such as a Saxon lyre. Olson might see this relationship as part of the “prime,” or “primitive,” aspect of his poetics, with music a form of linguistic energy corresponding, or at least able to correspond, to the energy of the poem. Olson was interested in ethnology and linguistics, specifically as they pertained to the

study of “completely different ‘grammars’ as North American Indians present[. . .]. But also Trobriand space-Time premises,” along with the recoveries of Hittite, Canaanite (Ugaritic), Sumerian, Celtic, Aryan, and Achaean-Trojan languages and cultures (Allen 398). He built a modern poetics out of an appreciation of the word as a source, a finite fount, of socio-cultural power. There was, he suggests, an observable influence of these ancient languages, those root sounds and senses, on the development of poetic form as “set by Sappho & Homer,” which “hasn’t changed much since” (Allen 398). There is also the sense that these surviving fragments of linguistic history provide an essential unity between the experiences of all people. One might claim, in using Olson, that the energy of human survival is expressed in the root sound, those archaic breaths, that have survived centuries of socio-cultural fluctuation and change. In many ways, Olson was combining Romantic poetics with pseudo-scientific principles, attempting, it seems, to recapture the Romantic ideal from its unskilled practitioners and its debunking at the hands of modernist poets, such as T.S. Eliot.

The diction in “The Distances” suggests the importance of the “primitive” influence, or, as Olson suggests, the oral expression as the prime motivation in language as revealed in many of the classical poetic texts, such as Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The suspension of the breath between lines and the emphasis on the single-word lines invests the poem with an organic beat that feels improvisational, by which I mean that it allows for subjective associations that build off the nouns that are stressed, such as “old Zeus—young Augustus.” Olson describes the projective elements of a printed poem as allowing it

to have the reading its writing involved, as though not the eye but the ear was to be its measurer, as though the intervals of its composition could be so carefully put down as to be precisely the intervals of its registration. For the ear, which once had the burden of memory to quicken it (rime & regular cadence were its aids and have merely lived on in print after the oral necessities were ended) can now again, that the poet has his means [the typewriter], be the threshold of projective verse. (Allen 394)

To the objection by his contemporaries that his poetics was too abstract or “mysterious,” Olson states that he “pleads so.” Along with reassessing the syllable, line, and poetic form, his ideas are also a reexamination of the sentence as a completed thought. To fashion a form of expression that is not entirely dominated by such thoughts, by ideas organized to fit a prescriptive grammar and traditional logic, is important to Olson’s concept of expression. A poet, or any writer, needs a way to present the contingencies inherent in making meaning, the necessary negotiations central to a reader’s reception of a text. This belief favors the fragmentation and the associative nature of much postmodern verse. It reveals an acceptance that meaning need not achieve closure, that an open expression can create a greater degree of interaction between poet and reader and so create the kind of dialogue necessary for change or for the recognition of a specific reality.

This idea of a kinetic form, of a projective open or field verse, as a transmission of energy suggests a central relationship between the poetry of the underground presses and the city’s blues, jazz, and rock music. It was around this idea of energy and its inherent

movement and transformation that much of the poetry in Detroit during the late 1960s converged. The energy of this poetry was also seen in its role in dissent, in the advancing of the underprivileged voice and alternative socio-political view against dominant, and sometimes oppressive, values. Olson's development of this discursive field for dissent, this projective verse, did not rely only on the reevaluation of literary models and concepts, such as the syllable, meter, line, and stanza, but also incorporated and formalized the aural elements that were playing a significant role in the emergence and elevation of different cultural perspectives.

A Convergent Form: Jazz

Jazz evolved from African-American oral culture and the transformation of that culture in southern blues music. As I noted earlier, this oral aspect is also central to Olson's projective verse. The breath is a source of prime influence or the primal, which is a term that suggests sincerity, for Olson, rather than barbarism. The spontaneous expression, or the surprise, as the surrealists, such as André Breton, might have put it, is to be valued for its relationship to truth, to artists' unmediated sense of themselves, their culture, and their society. In the first issue of *Guerrilla* published in January 1967, the editors Allen Van Newkirk and John Sinclair published Breton's and Diego Rivera's "Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art," which was originally published in the *Partisan Review* in 1938.⁴⁵ While explaining the importance of writers and artists in sweeping "clean the path for a new culture," Breton and Rivera state: "We believe that

⁴⁵Dwight MacDonald translated the original that was published in the *Partisan Review* in 1938.

the supreme task of art in our epoch is to take part actively and consciously in the preparation of the revolution. But the artist cannot serve the struggle for freedom unless he subjectively assimilates its social content, unless he feels in his very nerves its meaning and drama and freely seeks to give his own inner world incarnation in his art”

(6). However, it was often the case that the egoistical and economic needs of the artist could interfere with grander political aims. Indeed, it was often the case that economic success, and the appropriation that came with it, turned the revolutionary ideas contained in some art into advertising copy. By the 1960s, many surrealists had become mainstream and the message of their art seemed more attuned to market desires than to social change. Also, in the 1960s, I am convinced that few, even though they freely quoted Marx on the subject, really knew what revolution their art might inspire. Jazz, as opposed to the more literary texts, made few claims to social revolution, even though many critics, such as Amiri Baraka, spoke of it in those terms because, for him, its relationship to African culture provided a basis for a distinct black American culture, which might empower black identity and separatism.

Nonetheless, if jazz is “the soundtrack of America,” as Ken Burns claims while discussing the making of his documentary *Jazz*, then we might look to jazz for some sense of America’s identity. Later in his discussion, Burns adds that

what each of the three subjects [the constitution, baseball, and jazz] daily reminded us was that the genius of America is improvisation, our unique experiment a profound intersection of freedom and creativity, for better and for worse, in nearly every gesture and breath. Nowhere is this more apparent than in

jazz — the only art form created by Americans, an enduring and indelible expression of our genius and promise. And so, in *JAZZ*, we complete our trilogy of American life, finding in the music's lines and phrases and riffs not only a meditation on American creativity, but a joyous and sublime celebration of the redemptive future possibilities of this remarkable republic. (“Jazz”)

Even though Burns is being elegiac, his belief in jazz as providing a lens through which to see the American “experiment” remains important. In Detroit, for instance, jazz came north with the black southern migrants and became established in the clubs of Paradise Valley and, in the 1960s, the Twelfth Street area. As Sydney Fine says, the institutions of black culture based along Twelfth Street, including jazz clubs, blind pigs, bars, and dance clubs, were important to black community life in the late 1960s. Blind pigs, such as that located on the corner of Twelfth and Clairmount Avenues, the raiding of which led to the 1967 riot, were not only illegal after-hours drinking establishments, but also provided meeting places for activist groups and social associations.

As Burns mentions, it is the improvisational quality of jazz that most influenced the city’s poets. Many found in the digressive, associative nature of jazz arrangements, especially as observed in the improvisational solo, a model for composing a more immediate kind of poetry. These characteristics can be related to Olson’s projective verse. Note, for instance, that jazz is predominantly a music produced by the breath; its energy comes from the saxophonists’ or trumpeters’ (which fronted most jazz bands after

the popularity of Luis Armstrong) “blowing,” as horn playing was often called.⁴⁶ Jazz, as a uniquely American form of expression—spontaneous and, thus, always new, always in a state of revision and transformation—inspired many American poets who attempted to invoke the freedom, the improvisational energy of it, into their poetry.⁴⁷ Many of Detroit’s underground poets found the spirit of blues and jazz music conducive to poetic expression, providing a link to a specific set of cultural, historical, and social significations.

In many of the *Artists’ Worksheet* numbers, for example, John Sinclair was attempting to develop a poetic form based on the musical structure of blues and jazz. In *Worksheet #2*, Sinclair attempts a “blues form” poem. In the headnote to “Blues for Elvin: (2 drafts; & a note),” Sinclair defines this “blues form” as being “12 ‘bars’ (or lines) long, in structure, like its musical equivalent. The long lines here are meant to suggest Elvin’s [Sinclair is referring to Elvin Jones, John Coltrane’s drummer] playing in long meter, which never rambles but always fits what’s being done” (9). According to Sinclair, the poem “Blues to Elvin: after John Coltrane” exemplifies this form:

born with ears, even now, packed with esoteric garbage. the stuff
of dead men. wax, & elbows. sewage, seaweed, debris

⁴⁶In Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty are fascinated by the “blowing” of the black jazz artists in the clubs around San Francisco. This experience is pivotal for Paradise and Moriarty, who link this new music to subtle changes in America’s artistic sensibilities that, for them, would be best characterized by the spontaneity and freedom of the road and the art of their friends, such as Carlo Marx.

⁴⁷Some poets and critics of jazz did not make a strong distinction between it and the blues. One reason for this, it seems, is that the blues were integral in the development of the jazz form and remained significant to its various styles. Jazz, it could be argued, was primarily, or initially, the transformation of the blues: the “swinging” of the blues scale.

of forgotten oceans, or shells. or

the shells & shit they beat the indians with.

for us to shut up, what they can offer. pitiful. so

small, can it bend the ear. paper, & shells. to fill

our ears, & forget, that we ever cd hear. to sing,

made some improbable propositions. to get thru,

some genius we wanted to cry, to the moon, like

weird wolves of illusion. insanity. the stoppage.

Drained, & collapse, on the floor, finished, with love, &

unsettled ears. to begin to go, where the music goes, out, to you (10)

Neither in its form nor content does this poem strike me as being particularly *bluesy*. It does suggest the rhythmic stops that might correspond to the blues when projected by the right performer. Its single-word sentences provide the kind of breathed caesura that a horn player might exhibit during those transitions between notes and chords. Also, the “blueing” of the line could be represented by the poem’s use of enjambment. The sense trails in a way reminiscent of a “swing” chord. Perhaps this poem could be read with a blues beat, with the kind of vocal “scatting” Amiri Baraka uses, but, as if to illustrate what Baraka argues in “Jazz and the White Critic,” Sinclair’s poem does not suggest the “attitude” of blues and jazz, that emotional foundation upon which “real” blues is said to rest. “The music,” Baraka states in discussing John Coltrane, “is the result of the attitude,

the stance. Just as Negroes made blues and other people did not because of the Negro's peculiar way of looking at the world" (185). This "attitude" is grounds for an argument against its appropriation. From Baraka's black-nationalist perspective, African-American history has embedded the "attitude" of blues and jazz into the cultural memories of blacks, while the exploitation perpetrated by whites has doomed them to mere technical proficiency; the mode of blues and jazz music is not *in* their blood; the struggle necessary for the production of these rhythms was never coded into or imprinted upon their biology. According to Baraka, Benny Goodman might sound like he is playing jazz, but he is not. What he is playing is a simulacrum of jazz, its commodified, mass (re)produced version, diluted by money, popularity, and an unfortunate racial incongruity. In "The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)," Baraka provides a description of the blues as an African-American musical inheritance:

Blues (lyric) its song quality is, it seems, the deepest expression of memory.

Experience re/feeling. It is the racial memory. It is the 'abstract' design of racial character that is evident, would be evident, in creation carrying the force of that racial memory. [. . .] For instance, a white man could box like Muhammad Ali, only *after* seeing Muhammad Ali box. He could not initiate that style. It is no description, it *is* the culture. (A.D. 1966)

The Spirituals . . . the Camp Meeting Songs at backwoods churches . . . or

Slave Songs talking about deliverance. (189)

The "attitude" Baraka speaks of is the image the music constructs for him, the rhythms imbedded in the sound that recall his African heritage, that enliven his experiences as an

African-American. This relation reveals the power of music to resurrect cultural memory, much as poetry does in Cary Nelson's *Repression and Recovery*, which is a literary history that links working-class and activist poetry to the preservation and recovery of cultural memory through the analysis of the marginalized, activist poets of the early part of the Twentieth century.

In the mid-1960s, Sinclair's "blues form" was an attempt, as was his creation of the White Panther Party in the late 1960s, to ally himself with the city's black artists and activists. Still, his "blues form" fails, I think, to capture this cultural "attitude," one that might be categorized as a cultural will to improvisation (an act embedded in the cultural history of African Americans). Sinclair's poem tells a story of angst, more akin to punk-rock lyrics--which revel in isolation, discontent, and hatred--than to the mournful, often humorous, and communally oriented lyrics of many traditional blues songs, such as B.B. King's "The Thrill is Gone." Sinclair's poem is more of a comment on the power of jazz as a means of dissent, in which the flotsam and trinkets of American consumerism, the "esoteric garbage," "wax," "sewage," and "shells," are overcome by the "music" going out "with love" to "you." This "blues form" is really a poetry about blues and jazz, a poetry attempting to capture the freedom implicit in this uniquely American musical form.

In *Worksheet #8*, Sinclair modifies his ideas, referring to the poems he is attempting as "jazz poems." In letter to Vincent Coleman--the editor of *Island Magazine*, an underground publication out of Toronto, Canada to which Sinclair had submitted a few of these poems--Sinclair attempts to justify jazz as a means of structuring poetry. In his

letters to Coleman, Sinclair states,

I'm concerned in my poetry with the new music, STRONG The MUSIC comes out of the whole way of looking at the world, now, & is a logical & necessary opposite choice [. . .] The style, i.e. form, of the poem ["the Whip"] the short strokes, hard, an extension of the content, as Creeley and Olson. [. . .] I come out of Roi a lot, phrasing &c, or rather we use the same "inspiration," i.e. JAZZ, its rhythms & phrasings. [. . .]" (*Worksheet 34*)

In his replies to Sinclair, Coleman is not convinced. He succinctly articulates his disagreement, stating, "I just don't think the song [jazz musicians] sing is as easily transcribed: what I think you're doing to it. I see Jazz, the music, as a force behind, not in, the word(s), & these two poems ["the Whip" and "Rufus"] haven't changed my mind." Coleman later adds, "As a man said, says: 'the medium is the message.' & I take that & say, saying the poem is never only score for the voice, the voice IS your medium, & its use is not/cannot be instrumental, as a played musical thing. WCW [William Carlos Williams] said, ' . . . the words don't so much matter . . . ' (Underline mine); but they do. Matter. . ." (33). In response to these objections, ones which seem to overlook the importance of "scatting" in a jazz performance, Sinclair ties his effort to create a viable jazz poem to what he learned from Charles Olson:

My concern starts with the line as breath unit, natural, I subscribe to the WHOLE of Olson's essay & practice, &c, that's where I COME from, but for me the CATS have (& are) taken/taking care of that, I need to do something more, talk abt myself, my OWN needs, feelings, intelligence, how I sound, & thence the jazz

orientation. For the last 4 years I've lived with jazz musicians, listened to jazz records an average of 12 hours a day (literally), spent all my money on records & going to clubs, talked for hours almost daily w/ musicians, written abt jazz, &c &c, to me I see all art defined & crystallized in music, & projective verse especially in jazz.[. . .] It isn't as simple a thing as you seem to want to make it sound, this making of jazz poems, I am not trying to use words as notes &c as you charge, no, I'm taking the whole thing on an abstract level, i.e. what I've learned from jazz & how it can be applied to poetry & to life, i.e. daily living. For me, principles that WORK, can be USED, in art, can also, when & after abstracting, be used in the same way in living, getting along in this world from day to day.

(Worksheet 36)

Coleman is standing on the more sound ground artistically; however, when relating jazz to Olson's poetic ideas, Sinclair's efforts have some merit. Coleman holds to the belief that art forms are artifacts, separate from each other. Sinclair does not maintain this premise, believing instead that art can cross socio-cultural boundaries to inform and inspire other aspects of (everyone's) daily life. Baraka's discussion of jazz would seem to support Sinclair's belief. Jazz, for Baraka, comes from a communal tradition, one in which art and life, the life of slavery and field work, are inseparable. Olson's ideas detailed in "Projective Verse" illustrate that art is best viewed as a convergence of cultural forms, in the same way that cities and their inhabitants are the social and socialized products of complex urban interactions. For Sinclair, his "blues form" or "jazz poems" come down to an appreciation of the role of art--poetry and music in this case--in

defining his “attitude,” as Baraka uses the term, toward his life (take notice of the presence of the first-person singular pronoun in these discussions):

So to the poems—I see jazz, feel it, for me, as the most vital thing going—esp. music of John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, Archie Shepp, Charlie Mingus, Charles Moore, et al., & their music makes it worth it for me, out here , as L. Jones [Amiri Baraka] sez in liner notes to COLTRANE LIVE AT BIRDLAND: “John Coltrane’s music is one of the reasons that suicide seems so boring,” or some such, that’s for me too. I want to pay homage to these men, & show them that, yes, I have learned from them, see, I can abstract from yr music & put these principles to work in my own art, & MAKE IT . . . As the form/content thing applies to poetry, so does it apply to music, & so to life. I don’t think I need to list specific examples for this, I’m sure we’re all of us each hip to that.

(Worksheet 36)

Examples that would support what he is claiming would be helpful. The relationship between form and content and between music and poetry seems clear enough, or at least I can imagine some examples, such as seen in Baraka’s poetry. However, the relationship between these kinds of poems and life is more difficult for me to illustrate. This relationship is often discussed in terms of a feeling, grooving, or exchanging of energies. Yet Olson’s relating of poetry to the breath and so to the oral basis of poetry, a basis that is supported by the rich oral history of all languages and cultures, provides a means of talking about poetry in relation to living acts, such as inhaling and exhaling; it provides an image of the author as active and the reader as experiencing more than only the text.

The poem in this case offers more than knowledge, becoming a distinct experience, more akin to music in this aspect than to other kinds of writing. Take, for example, Lawrence Ferlinghetti's comments about his poem "I Am Waiting," as quoted by Paul Hoover: "Ferlinghetti has indicated that some of the poems in *A Coney Island of the Mind*, including the enormously popular 'I Am Waiting,' were 'conceived specifically for jazz accompaniment and as such should be considered as spontaneously written 'oral messages' rather than as poems written for the printed page'" (43).⁴⁸ Jazz, as a mode of composition and as a means of critique, functions on a performative level. For one to claim, for instance, that a poem uses a blues scale, rather than a tempered one, or uses polyphonic or contrapuntal arrangements of sounds and senses rather than diatonic ones is pointing to the poem as a record of performance. These aspects of a poem are not inherent to its language, but, rather, need to be acted out through an exchange with an audience. As an example, in "Performance," Henry Sayre interprets the transformation of Leadbelly's "Black Betty" in Vito Acconci's *Learning Piece*:

But Acconci's performance is not merely a traditional performance, occurrence, or interpretation of the prior work [Leadbelly's "Black Betty"]: a transformation of the original has taken place. The private, repetitive exercise of rehearsal has become the work of art itself

"What I was doing," Acconci told an interviewer in 1979, "was making blatant what it seemed like any artwork does—private person doing work, putting it

⁴⁸In 1999, Dana Colley, a member of the band Morphine, supplied the music to Ferlinghetti's reading of *A Coney Island of the Mind* (Coyle).

into a public space” (White 1979, 20). Furthermore, the action, he has said, “was done not as a private activity . . . but as an exemplar, a model” (Kirshner 1980, 10) for the potential activity of the audience. *Learning Piece*, in more precise terms, is a model for our relation to all art. Its difference from traditional performance is comparable to the distinction made by Roland Barthes in *S/Z*, his essay on Balzac’s story “Sarrasine,” between “readerly” and “writerly” texts. *Readerly* texts, according to Barthes, “are products (and not productions)” (Barthes 1974, 5). They represent “a kind of idleness” in which the reader becomes “intransitive,” a passive receiver. The goal of the *writerly* text, on the other hand, “is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text” (Barthes 1974, 4). (93)

In the late 1960s, the poetry inspired by the mechanics of jazz and Olson’s projective verse took advantage of many artists’ desire for an artistic community, for the sympathies of like-minded creators, to produce a more interactive art form, one in which the reader was integral in making meaning. This was a form that incorporated multiple types of media and expression, as seen also in the relationship between visual art and poetry illustrated by the surrealist collage and by the works of the New York school painters and poets.

Dudley Randall and many of the poets he published in the *Broadside Press* also turned to jazz in the 1960s, seeking an authentic black cultural experience and mode of expression. For many of these poets, jazz seemed to encompass the breadth of African American history, drawing from slave work songs, Negro spirituals, and blues an

authorial, performative voice many blacks found unifying and uplifting. Amiri Baraka traces this history of jazz in “African Slaves/American Slaves: Their Music,” arguing that blues and jazz—two native-American musical forms—grew out of West African musical traditions. He states that blues and jazz by extension are “a native American music, the product of the black man in this country; or to put it more exactly the way I have come to think about it, blues could not exist if the African captives had not become American captives. The immediate predecessors of blues were the Afro-American/American Negro work songs, which had their musical origins in West Africa ” (22). This fact allowed many black poets in the 1960s to trace their cultural work back to their African and American heritage, allowing them to recover and construct out of the experiences of their ancestors an African-American literary tradition. Along with the civil rights movement and the Black Arts Movement, blues and jazz functioned as a route to what might be considered a more distinctive African-American voice and worldview, circumventing the dominant culture’s tendency to absorb, sanitize, repackage, and mass market oppositional cultural discourses. It also provided the cultural foundation for the Black Panthers and other black-nationalist groups. The poetry Randall published, but not what he himself wrote, reveals some of these tendencies. Haki R. Madhubuti’s (Don L. Lee) “blackwoman” is one such example and reveals some of the elements of Sinclair’s “blues form” but with a more *bluesy* attitude.

blackwoman:

will define herself. naturally. will

talk/walk/live & love her images. her

beauty will be. the only way to be is
 to be. blackman take her. u don't need
 music to move; yr/movement toward her
 is music. & she'll do more than dance. (Randall 16)

In a note to this poem, Randall describes Madhubuti's style as "unformed, varying between rimed verse and free verse" (16). Yet this poem also employs the short stops, the transitional caesuras, of a jazz performance to give the image of a blackwoman its tenor, "naturally." The music in this poem is created through the exchange between reader and poet, who is essentially recording the oral characteristics of his voice, a recording that defines the text's representation of its object. As the poem suggests, it is the movement toward "others," a desire to let them tell us their stories, that will establish their identity. The "music" backing the poem is jazz, which leads the generalized characters "blackwoman" and "blackman" back to the heritage and cultural forms that support their relationship with each other. Madhubuti's poem is an instance of "Everyman," of a morality play that attempts, briefly, to delineate the moral boundaries of a community: how one interacts with another. It is a poem calling for respect, for purity, and for the independence of men and women, lessons he might have gleaned from his membership in the Nation of Islam. As Malcolm X describes, the Nation preached purity and respect for other members of Islam. (The contradiction was that women, though respected, were, as this poem suggests, also subject to the man's power and right to "take" the object of his desire). At the same time, however, Islam preached a form of black separatism or nationalism, of which Malcolm X was the most visible proponent,

that made many blacks in the more conservative civil rights movement and its liberal white allies uncomfortable.⁴⁹

Sonia Sanchez, another Detroit poet from the 1960s, combines Olson's ideas of breath with those of jazz to provide the structure for "black magic":

black magic

magic

my man

is you

turning

my body into

a thousand

smiles.

black

magic is your

touch

making

me breathe. (Randall, *Memories* 18)

The touch inspires a breath that the poet shapes into this poem. The poem is structured using the embodied principles of projective verse and the contrapuntal moves of a jazz

⁴⁹I use the term "conservative" in relation to the civil rights movement in the same way Todd Gitlin does in his afterward to *Reassessing the Sixties: Debating the Political and Cultural legacy*: "Cass Sunstein is right that the civil rights movement was conservative, aiming as it did to conserve the universalism of the Declaration of Independence. [. . .] But the civil rights movement [. . .] was far from conservative in its means" (294).

arrangement to direct the poem's voicing. The poem is also structured around the instances of voice, around the structure of a sung, or projected, song. Randall also suggests these links in his note to this poem: "[Sanchez] has a unique way of reading, giving each syllable equal weight, sometimes breaking into a chant or a song. The contrast between her bold words and her soft feminine voice makes her words even more effective" (we could find very similar rhetoric in the description of any number of jazz performances) (18). In this observation, Randall could be seen as defining the practical manifestations of projective verse—theory put into practice. Sanchez's singing her poems also invokes the reading style of Amiri Baraka, who not only sings when he reads, but inscribes those "notes" onto the printed page. He discusses the impetus for this practice in his brief essay "How You Sound?":

this means that we want to go into a quantitative verse . . . the 'irregular foot' of Williams . . . the 'Projective Verse' of Olson. Accentual verse, the regular metric of rumbling iambics, is dry as slivers of sand. Nothing happens in that frame anymore. We can get nothing from England. And the diluted formalism of the academy (the formal culture of the U.S.) is anaemic & fraught with incompetence & unreality" (Hoover 645).

Such a verse is to be drawn from what one knows; in this case Baraka is calling for an African-American poetry. He states that "the only 'recognizable tradition' a poet need follow is himself . . . & with that, say, all those things out of tradition he can use, adapt, work over, into something from himself. To broaden his own voice with. (You have to start and finish there . . . your own voice . . . how you sound.)" (645). Blues, jazz, and

projective verse were supposed to provide a means to achieve an individual kind of poetry within a larger poetic community, creating an embodied poetics that was the record of the poet's authorial voice and functioning as the extension of his or her own body.

The Neighborhood: Motown

In Detroit, African-American music was often closely related, spatially if not ideologically, to the racial, economic, and housing struggles that African Americans were experiencing during this period. More than just an entertaining diversion from the frustrating realities of daily life (which were characterized by the chronic unemployment caused by prejudiced hiring practices, deindustrialization, automation, and the repressive activities of the city's police department), blues, jazz, Motown music, and the poetry that revolved around them established a communal identity by reviving and redefining African-American cultural practices. Motown, for instance, became the nation's black and urban voice, the working-class tremolo, which, by the time the music industry refined the "Motown" sound, did little to disturb social misconceptions of the struggles the working class and blacks faced in Detroit or elsewhere. The marketing of Motown mirrors the realities of those living within Detroit's inner-city neighborhoods. For example, Suzanne Smith states in *Dancing in the Streets* that the Motown sound grew out of the material conditions of the city's neighborhoods: "Whether it was a street corner, a gospel choir, a blues club, or a high school music class, the culturally rich environment of Detroit's black neighborhoods nurtured the artists and musicians who came to define the

Motown sound" (76).

Smith's view requires a certain qualification, for there were different ways of viewing Detroit's neighborhoods. For instance, John Sugrue in *The Origin of the Urban Crisis* and Sydney Fine in *Violence in the Model City* report that Detroit's neighborhoods in the late 1960s had been degraded by poverty, unemployment, and racism. These neighborhoods had become a "ghetto" (Sugrue includes the quotation marks around this term) or a kind of socio-economic trap, a Catch Twenty-Two. Fine points out the inequities in grocery prices, for instance, in education, and in other fundamental social institutions. Sugrue traces the complicated history of housing discrimination that kept blacks from leaving these inner-city neighborhoods while money and opportunity migrated to the suburbs. Smith does mention these problems but claims--and for her case, I think, justly--that Motown was a positive form of political and cultural expression to emerge from the inner city.⁵⁰ The Detroit poet Nikki Giovanni, whom Randall published during the 1960s, provides important insight into the daily lives of black inner-city inhabitants:

childhood remembrances are always a drag
 if you're Black
 you always remember things like living in Woodlawn
 with no inside toilet

⁵⁰Motown's relocation to Los Angeles in 1972 was seen by many as a kind of betrayal to the city and the people who had made the company and its sound possible. Smith, however, suggests that the move was an inevitable end to the company's success. Smith, instead of deriding Motown for this move, devotes most of her book to the positive legacy of Motown in African-American history.

and if you become famous or something
they never talk about how happy you were to have your mother
all to yourself and
how good the water felt when you got your bath from one of those
big tubs that folk in chicago barbecue in
and somehow when you talk about home
it never gets across how much you
understood their feelings
as the whole family attended meetings about Hollydale
and even though you remember
your biographers never understand
your father's pain as he sells his stock
and another dream goes
and though you're poor it isn't poverty that
concerns you
and though they fought a lot
it isn't your father's drinking that makes any difference
but only that everybody is together and you
and your sister have happy birthdays and very good christmasses [sic]
and I really hope no white person ever has cause to write about me
because they never understand Black love is Black wealth and they'll
probably talk about my hard childhood and never understand that

all the while I was quite happy. (Randall, *Memories* 10)

The economic conditions of the city do not always accurately indicate the personal feelings of those living in poverty and among the detritus of industrial factories. A family “goodness” is not necessarily a condition of wealth; however, money alone can reduce, if nothing else, the fear of hunger. Regardless, people do learn to adapt, to live together, and develop communities that make surviving such difficulties possible. Smith’s account of Motown takes this reality into consideration when she discusses how the inner-city public schools, in horrible condition by all accounts, helped shaped the musical abilities of many of Detroit’s aspiring singers.⁵¹ Smith states, “Detroit’s public schools provided aspiring singers with more than acoustical hallways. In the classrooms the schools offered the first formal music training to many of Hitsville’s artists and musicians” (157). Much of Motown’s initial musical and educational efforts, such as those of Randall and many of the other underground poets in Detroit, were devoted to elevating the value of Detroit’s black heritage, neighborhoods, and families. Yet as Motown’s sound became more of a mass product, made, as Smith notes, more for those listening to car radios and dancing at sock hops than for those struggling to make a living in the city, it lost its relationship to the black community and, like the inner-city neighborhoods, began to disappear from view, as the music became separated from the material conditions to which it had initially responded. As Smith reports, the *Inner City Voice* was critical of Motown’s lack of activism:

⁵¹For some accounts of the condition of Detroit’s public schools refer to Johathan Kozol’s *Savage Inequalities: Children in America’s Schools* (198-205).

In December 1967 the *ICV* ran an article entitled “How U Sound Motown” by John Cosby Jr., in which Cosby asked, “what has Motown done for the environment that put it on the map?” He continued, “if some of the better than 15 million per annum doesn’t funnel back to some lay blackies, it really shouldn’t matter about Motown. And talk of being a source of pride, to the serious minded, is nonsense.” The *ICV* article voiced a growing sentiment among black activists in Detroit that Hitsville, U.S.A, was more interested in its own profit margins than in the fight to improve economic opportunities for everyone. Motown’s international success in the record industry and its ambitions in film and television had begun to alienate the company from the community that had produced it.

(223)

In an analysis of the 1998 Super Bowl Half-Time tribute to Motown, Smith asks the question, “What gets lost when a cultural phenomenon such as Motown drifts further and further away from its historical moorings and deeper and deeper into the sea of cultural mythology?” (248). Baraka might argue, as he does in his analysis of swing jazz, that it moves from “verb to noun” or, in other words, from an active discourse to a normative product appropriated for mass production and mindless consumption. Smith answers her question, stating,

What gets lost are those details and facts which do not fit easily into the more streamlined narratives that constitute the American Dream. The belief that with a little luck, pluck, and hard work anyone—regardless of race, class, or gender—can rise to the top of his or her field and succeed will always have a strong hold on

American consciousness. [. . .] As this book has argued [. . .] a closer historical analysis of the Motown Record Company and its origins in Detroit reveals a complicated story and one that, in fact, offers a critical tale of the limits of that myth—particularly for African Americans. (248)

What Motown's story reveals to me, in addition, is how the appropriation of art swallows the context which originally made it vital and politically important, those "details and facts" Smith provides in her book. For Baraka, this process is part of a (predominantly) white bourgeois conspiracy to strip black culture from the community and so sanitize urban space in order to appease the racial anxieties of the powers that be. Of course, such conspiracy theories are common enough and of little use, but what this appropriation seeks is to turn one's "private" artistic efforts, to recall Acconci's use, into a product that everyone can use, enjoy, and consume. This, as Theodore Adorno might state, is one of the worst and best things about American Democracy and its foundation in "free" market capitalism.

African-American poetry attempted to avoid this kind of appropriation while, at the same time, capturing the Motown sound's infectious spirit and relation to the community. Boone House, for example, the writers' community established by the poet Margaret Danner, collaborated with Motown Records to "produce the Black Forum poetry releases" (Smith 231). The Black Forum label brought out the politically energized poetry and music of those struggling across the nation for black civil rights and for the recognition of the cultural contributions of African-Americans. Smith quotes the record label's "credo, published on the album covers," which stated that "Black Forum is

a medium for the presentation of ideas and voices of the worldwide struggle of Black people to create a new era. Black Forum also serves to provide authentic materials for use in schools and colleges and for the home study of Black history and culture. Black Forum is a permanent record of the sound of the struggle and the sound of a new era.” (230). Here was an attempt to tie the poetry of blacks to a growing sense of an African-American cultural tradition, in which poetry, music, and other forms of art converged to establish a historical identity, one that would transcend easy stereotypes or neglect by dominant cultural practices.

Sub-Suburb: Rock Music

In Detroit during the late 1960s, Rock music, the most celebrated medium of the growing suburban youth counter-culture, was strongly influenced by punk bands (or what some consider proto-punk bands), such as the MC5, The Stooges, and The UP. Much of this proto-punk/rock music was performed at the Grande Ballroom (1966-1972) at 8952 Grand River Avenue one block south of Joy Road. Taking a moment to peruse the show list from the late sixties reveals that internationally famous bands such as the Who, Led Zeppelin,



Figure 2: This poster, created by the prolific graphic artist and member of Sinclair's Trans-Love Energies, Gary Grimshaw, advertises the October 7-8, 1966 shows (Show List).

Pink Floyd, the Fugs, and Cream played the Grande Ballroom. The Ballroom was an important touring location at a time when touring, and the record company's role in it, was just beginning.

Central to much of this music, whether called punk, rock and roll, or as one Ballroom poster put it, "avant-rock," (Figure 2) was the ritualization of dissent through the use of anti-establishment rhetoric, psychedelic art, and the shunning of the music business and its attempts to appropriate the popularity of this "revolutionary" sound. Rob Tyner, the lead singer of the MC5, describes the significance of this music in the liner notes to the re-release by Elektra Records of the band's 1969 album *Kick Out the Jams*. His thoughts are in response to the question, why is the re-release of this album important?:

Because this album of songs is a microcosm of the times that spawned it. It was an idealistic attempt to make something more significant than the mere product that dominated the charts. This record has within it the vision and the violence of a turbulent time in America. This music expresses the frustration and future shock of the soul of the sixties. This is a portrayal of the struggle to create a world that was destined never to be. An impossibly beautiful dream that was doomed by the nation's descent into the disco inferno of the seventies.⁵²

Kick Out the Jams was recorded live at the Grande Ballroom on October 30 and 31, 1968, during Devil's Night and Halloween, of course, but also during the "New Year of the

⁵²Recall that on July 12, 1979 a group of rock fans, and disco-phobes, blew up a box of disco records at Comisky Park between the games of a twilight double header between the Detroit Tigers and the Chicago White Sox.

revolutionary Zenta calendar” (Tyner). Taking the entire spectacle into consideration illustrates how this record captures the converging forms that characterize the energy of the punk, rock, and poetic performances in Detroit and elsewhere at the time. These convergences add an interpretive depth to these art forms that can lead one to inform the other.

In *Repression and Recovery*, Cary Nelson suggests the “interpretive possibilities” of reading converging forms of art within the context of activist publications. Part of his study focuses on reading working-class poems “in the context of entire journals. The challenge,” he states, “is to read journals as if they were themselves coherent mixed genres [. . . .] Not all journals, of course, are such coherent enterprises, but some are, and they offer perspectives on the American culture that are simply unavailable in volumes by individual authors” (219, 222). In Detroit, reading the poetry published in the underground presses requires a consideration of the music and political purpose to which both were put. Such a reading begins to reveal the poetics that defined the city’s artistic efforts in the context of unrest that characterized the late 1960s. In the underground presses forms of expression came together in a ritualized form of dissent, a “rite of assent,” Sacvan Bercovitch might say. These efforts were often silly, but nonetheless they energized a growing suburban culture of youths who wanted more freedom, more choice of how they would think and who they then might become. The “revolution” of which the MC5, Sinclair, and other bands spoke was a revolution of consciousness, a call to tweak one’s world view, to accept difference, fragmentation, and confusion, to let “everything” be “everything,” as Tyner states in the liner notes. Such beliefs offered a

new sense that society might be *improvised*: changed moment by moment through cathartic and polyphonic moments of collaborative self-expression.

As one such example of this kind of ritual, take the MC5's *Kick Out the Jams*. Imagine the band stepping onto the Ballroom's small stage dressed in sparkling gold outfits and facing a crowd dominated by sweating suburban teenagers, as the band's entourage waited in the wings or helped with the album's production. This entourage included their manager at the time, John Sinclair; their religious and spiritual leader, Brother J. C. Crawford; their photographer, Magdalene (Leni) Sinclair; and the creator of the band's psychedelic show posters, Gary Grimshaw. Next, imagine Crawford's "revolutionary" monologue that introduced the band. This monologue was a political statement that sounds as if it were written by Sinclair (many critics of the band argue, as Tyner points out, that the MC5 was simply "John Sinclair's primary political tool," as The Up would be when Sinclair and the White Panther Party/The Rainbow People's Party moved to Ann Arbor):

Brothers and sisters, I wanna see your, see your hands out there [the crowd is clapping rhythmically], let me see your, see your hands. I want everybody to kick up some noise, I wanna hear some revolution out there, boys; I wanna hear a little revolution. Brothers and sisters, the time has come for each and every one of you to decide whether you are going to be the problem or you are going to be the solution. You must choose brothers, you must choose. It takes five seconds, five seconds [of] decision. Five seconds to realize your purpose here on the planet. It takes five seconds to realize that it is time to move; it's time to get down with it.

Brothers, it's time to testify, and I want to know are you ready to testify, are you ready? I give you a testimonial, the MC5! ("Kick Out the Jams")

Immediately following Crawford's statement, the heavily distorted guitars of Wayne Kramer and Michael Davis, the drums of Fred Smith, and Tyner's vocals break into "Ramblin' Rose" and then into the band's trademark song "Kick Out the Jams," introduced by Tyner's exclamation, "Right now, right now, right now . . . it's time to . . . kick out the jams, motherfucker!" The recording moves through "Come Together," "Rocket Reducer No. 62," "Borderline," "Motor City is Burning," a song describing the Riot of 1967, and "I Want You Right Now," adding the sex to the drugs and rock and roll, ending with "Starship," a fitting culmination to this counter-cultural performance. This song's psychedelic chords, its drawn-out riffs, continue for eight and a half minutes, backed at one point by chanting. The song would fit well onto a *2001-A Space Odyssey* soundtrack, especially its last six minutes, which match the spectacular journey through space and time that concludes the movie.

The performance's "trip" is certainly one in which the audience experiences a variety of expressive forms, from the advertisement to the band's costumes and to the concert's final song's roaring, maybe soaring, guitar solo. The desire to be elsewhere, "leaving the solar system," as the lyrics put it, was characteristic of the counter-culture, especially in its suburbanized forms. Freedom, as a mindless journey beyond the bounds of social expectation, is conveyed in this act of dissent. It is not a formal protest but, rather, a metaphysical rite of assent, a journey back to a supposed primal, or "prime," consciousness. The sense of dissatisfaction that emanates from this music, and from

those who listened to it, defined the audience that read many of the city's underground presses.

In describing the underground presses, Sinclair states that these papers were to be "the solution to the problem of separation, because they are so together. The underground press is totally committed to the revolution as the revolution is committed to driving people out of their separate shells and into each other's arms" (167-8). He also saw the underground press as the literary counterpart to the music of the MC5, believing, it seems, that there should be "no separation" between these cultural forms, as his discussion of his "jazz poems" also suggests:

The underground press is the revolution, in all its applications. There is no separation. Everything is everything. [. . .] Give it up—come together—get down, brothers and sisters, it's time to testify, and what you have in the underground press is a living testimonial to the absolute power and strength of papers. Go wild! The world is yours! Take it now, and be one with it! Kick out the jams, motherfucker! And stay alive with the underground press. (*BAMN* 168)

The similarities between Sinclair's rhetoric and that of Crawford's introduction illustrates how Sinclair attempted to "attack the culture." During the 1960s, he was trying to form what can be consider a self-sufficient community, one that could speak to itself, about itself, and thereby sustain itself.⁵³ It is a somewhat cult-ish formula, and it led many critics to see the underground press as closed-minded and even totalitarian in practice.

⁵³It should be noted that a large portion of Sinclair's later political efforts, and that of the Rainbow Peoples Party, was devoted to legalizing marijuana. It was his possession of this substance that led to his ten year-prison sentence in 1969.

In *Guitar Army*, Sinclair further explains the MC5's, the underground presses', and the Ballroom's "revolutionary" intentions:

We had to take the cultural revolution and bring it within the context of the political struggle we had been trying to ignore for so long. It wasn't a question of doing something different so much as it was a question of redefining what we had been doing all along, of adding a new dimension to our "TOTAL ASSAULT ON THE CULTURE" which would bring all the kids who were into our cultural attack into an awareness of what we saw as the basic political reality of our lives: that the cultural revolution was not separate from the political struggle, that we were being attacked by the pigs precisely because our culture was a revolutionary culture, and that as our slogan went, "IF WE WANNA GET HIGH WE'RE GONNA HAVETA FIGHT." (45)

As this quote indicates, Sinclair was trying to transform his counter-cultural discourse-- aimed primarily at disrupting the status quo by providing alternative drug and artistic outlets for the emotions of Detroit's disgruntled (white, middle-class, and suburban) youth--into revolutionary action. With this revolutionary agenda in mind, he established the White Panther Party, which alienated him from many of Detroit's African-American activists, who did not appreciate the intrusion of white revolutionaries in a primarily black struggle. These seemingly confused revolutionary intentions, along with the MC5's modest musical success and John Sinclair's drug conviction in 1969, led to the band's disintegration in the early 1970s, after their second and third albums garnered little popularity.

If we turn to the underground press, we find these different influences transecting to form a practical instance of postmodern verse. Nelson's investigation in *Repression and Recovery* of modernist poetry in the various working-class journals between 1910 and 1945 offers insight into the importance of looking at Detroit's underground presses to gain a different sense of postmodern poetry. Nelson states that

concentrating on a limited number of major figures emphasizes the heroism of individual achievement or the equally romantic tragedy of individual failure. Yet most poets work within a contextualized sense of what is possible rhetorically: what innovations are made available to them by the work of their contemporaries; what tendencies are to be emulated, transformed, or resisted; what issues it seems necessary (or unimaginable) to address; what cultural roles have been won over or lost for poetry. If we want to restore a more full awareness of the discourses at work in this period, we need to regain a broader sense of the range of poets publishing in books, journals, and newspapers. New discursive tendencies [. . .] are often established by a considerable number of poets, only a few of whom may survive the canon's restrictive vision. As a result, we lose the complex play of similarity and difference, stimulation and competition, that shapes the discursive options for poets. (71)

An analysis of Detroit's underground press reveals the making of a poetics, the development of a postmodern coterie that was attempting to use verse as a means for political and social change. Yet what is postmodernism as it pertains to this poetry? What were the discursive tendencies of this poetry and what does it tell us about

postmodernism in practice and the efforts of Detroit's poets to change the face of the city by changing the way it was perceived?

One common interpretive mistake is to think of any new discursive developments as inherently beneficial or distinctly new. It is easy for me to read the poetry of Detroit's underground presses and be moved by the artistic efforts attempted in them. I am struck, for instance, by the workshop atmosphere, by the willingness of several poets to publish (even if to a relatively small group) their works in progress, by their ability to be self-critical and to enjoy themselves. At the same time, I am aware that some of the poetry was sloppy, quickly drafted and published with little or no editorial review or concern for its status as a "work of art." Yet this fact adds to the character of this poetry, to the mood of experimentation that defined much of it. It is a rough but ready response to a specific moment, to a specific need. There is power in its transience, in its willingness to accept its own dissolution. In a time when the concept of "intellectual capital" is sectioning off ideas from the general public and turning copyright into a boundary to research and intellectual debate, the underground presses' tendency to freely share texts and ideas is refreshing (even if in some cases impractical). The Underground Press Syndicate (UPS) and the Underground Press News Service (UNS), for instance, provided information cheaply to its member papers, and several underground papers allowed activists to freely reproduce their content. This openness made economic survival difficult, as many underground presses folded, but it also helped create a community of sympathetic readers.

What, however, can these presses and the poetry they published explain about the relationship between art and culture, between urban life and writing, between anger and

forgiveness? What are the contingencies among these intersecting issues? Does this poetry provide some proof that postmodern poetry is different in “feeling” from modern poetry or that it is simply (neo)modern, composed in response to historically different modern conditions? Turning to some of Detroit’s presses might provide a few answers while proposing some useful questions. In these presses the poetry often commented on a specific occasion, formulated the elements of a “new age,” or called for revolution either against those ever vague dominant values everyone hated (but few seemed able or willing to identify) or against specific discriminatory practices within the city’s auto factories, public institutions, or neighborhoods.

The Poetry of Detroit’s Underground Presses

With what D. R. Wagner and Robert Glessing have called the mimeograph revolution, the underground presses were able to publish poetry that could respond more immediately to specific moments. This fact alone was significant in shaping the nature and often the quality of much of the poetic content in these papers. Unlike older poets, such as Robert Lowell and Philip Levine, who published books of poetry, the poets of the underground press found inspiration in ephemeral expressions (here one moment gone the next). For this reason, the poetry included in these publications tended to provide less of a narrative, focusing more on polemic, satire, or language experiments that attempted to transcend the artistic distance observed in more established literary conventions. As Sinclair states in the introduction to the *Collected Artists’ Worksheet*, the members of his Artists’ Workshop could find no literary models in Detroit to help them shape their

experimental efforts. Yet I do not believe that these artists disparaged canonical literature. Both Sinclair and Randall, for instance, taught literature: Sinclair received a masters degree in English and Randall taught literature and creative writing at the University of Michigan. The difference between these writers recalls Sayre's previous comments about performance art. The underground press, exploring the linguistic innovations of the Beats and Black Mountain poets, tended to produce *writerly* texts that at their best created multimedia expressions that blended the lines between visual and textual art, revealing how different art forms could simultaneously engage an audience. At their worst (and some might say most common), these texts were juvenile and confusing, only posing as avant-garde. Examining the poetry published in the underground presses as writerly allows us to work around the notion of "the poetic," as Cary Nelson states in *Repression and Recovery*, that "is maintained in part by the repetition of the long-standing general insistence that poetry has no relation to 'the popular'" (67). It also allows us to avoid the us-versus-them model that is often used when destabilizing established literary hierarchies with the works of neglected writers. The different perceptions of poetry and its role in the community reveal a different sense of the cultural work to which poetry might be put. Nelson states that the canon often "maintains a limited and apolitical notion of poetry in part by decreasing the chance that people will read poems that provide counter-examples" (37). Yet he also points out that literature does not exist outside its institutionalization, arguing that "the canon structures literariness in terms of power; it does not so much overpower as *empower* literature in a particular (and selective) way, investing it with restricted but effective social meaning by

giving it differential relations with the culture's other hierarchically elevated categories" (56). A study of the underground presses falls within Nelson's method of literary history, a history like that which Tillie Olsen perceives as permeated with silences: "Literary history and the present are dark with silences: some the silences for years by our acknowledged great; some silences hidden; some the ceasing to publish after one work appears; some the never coming to book form at all" (6). My study of the underground presses is an attempt to recover the kinds of silences that Olsen describes and to place them in a dialogue with those canonical works that have moved history and shaped literary taste. Doing this might provide us with a better understanding of our cultural and social realities.

The poems published in the underground papers are not always "good": they were often heavily rhetorical, focusing more on the proliferation of language than the careful selection of images to produced a carefully considered meaning. In *The Old Formalism*, Jonathan Holden refers to this tendency in amateur poetic style as "rhetoricity." He attempts to define this term through a critique of Charles Altieri's definition of the term in *Self and Sensibility in Contemporary Poetry*, landing essentially on "rhetoricity" as the careless use of language in order to approach "sincerity or naturalness" (42). The difficulty in interpreting the effectiveness of a poem is due to its relation to the "fashion" of the day: "What is natural and what is artificial, then, is entirely a matter of fashion" (43). As Nelson suggests, working-class poetry and the poetry devoted to political activism does not hold up well under the kinds of exegesis often conducted on canonical texts. These poems have a different relation to Detroit's history, in this case, than does

Philip Levine's poetry about the city. This observation is a critique of the values inherent in the canon, "as it now exists," as Nelson states, that serve "as much to prevent (or at least discourage) us from reading certain kinds of texts—particularly texts marked as disruptively political—so as to ensure that what we have judged to be the best literature will continue to be read" (37). Noting this does not relieve me from the responsibility of evaluation, but the evaluation needs to consider the social and cultural role of the ephemeral texts in history. Also, sometimes sloppy examples can be as instructive as finely polished ones; sometimes these examples reveal an element of "the poetic" that would otherwise go unnoticed.

Occasional Poetry

In *On the Walls and in the Streets*, while discussing the poetry broadsides published in response to the Vietnam War, James D. Sullivan describes this instance of "occasional poetry" through a quote by W.D. Erhart, who states, "I find it extremely difficult to sit here and talk about the Vietnam War as art. I don't give a goddamn about art. I'm not an artist. I'm an educator, and my writing is a tool of education.[. . .] If I cannot affect the course of my country as a result of my experiences, then whatever I do as a writer is an utter failure" (55). Erhart's statement mentions two important issues to consider when analyzing the poetry found in Detroit's underground presses: the first is the issue of education. The poetry and other contributions to these presses were not intended to be consumed but rather to change the public's consciousness, or at least the consciousness of those who read the papers. The second issue concerns the way in which

social change is achieved. The aim of much of the poetry in these presses was to initiate social, political, and cultural change through the exchange of experience. Much of this exchange was defined by “sex, drugs, and rock and roll,” which was a slogan that covered the desire, often hackneyed, sometimes compelling, to revise social mores and reshape one’s relationship with one’s life and with one’s sense of self.

Obviously, these two issues are related. As we have seen in the last chapter, education was often considered to be a means of change, of social improvement, even a way to promote social restructuring. However, different ideas of education were at work during this period. There was public and private education, which functioned, as Jean Anyon, Sylvia Scribner, and C.H. Knoblauch have variously argued, to maintain the status quo, to perpetuate a specific class hierarchy throughout society. Then there was the education provided by the underground presses, which resisted many of the values perpetuated in the public school system, seeking to affect a critical consciousness; or an awareness of one’s relation to the means of production and the machinery of exploitation, as a means to ensure emotional and physical freedom. Paulo Freire’s 1970 *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* reveals the worldwide influence of this desire to teach the “oppressed” underclass or poor to resist the repression of their personal freedoms. This book was well received by the activist educators, such as Paul Goodman, who had been working to change America’s educational system during the 1960s and became an important work in the development of contemporary educational research (if not teaching).⁵⁴ The premise of

⁵⁴Freire’s ideas were too far left to find their way into mainstream education practices during the 1960s. Many educators during the 1960s were culturally and politically conservative and believed that one of the main goals of education was to maintain the status quo.

this pedagogy is not neutral, as Richard Shaull states in the introduction to Freire's

Pedagogy:

There is no such thing as a *neutral* educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes "the practice of freedom," the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (16)

While Shaull sounds like a contemporary liberal educator, Freire's own description of this pedagogy is more overtly Marxist:

This book will present some aspects of what the writer has termed the pedagogy of the oppressed, a pedagogy which must be forged with, not for, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity. This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation. And in the struggle this pedagogy will be made and remade. (30)

For Freire education is an important means of organizing the working class to struggle (perhaps even revolt if necessary) against their oppressors. Education, in his case, is a way of keeping the ills of power in sight so that they can continue to be resisted over generations. Freire's vision is one of a long revolution, because even when no pressing need to resist presents itself, this system needs to perpetuate itself, needs to create

opponents and problems. Creating such dogmatic fictions led to the kind of totalitarianism many activists recognized during the 1960s.

The ability of literature, or literacy, to change contemporary social mores was never certain; yet it remained a goal, in one way or another, of most of Detroit's underground presses.⁵⁵ Poems were seen as potential catalysts, or vectors, to action, to revolution, even though revolution was perceived differently among those editing and contributing to the different underground presses. What united the underground presses and the literatures they published was the desire to construct a space for resistance, for the voicing of difference, and for the recognition of cultural agency.

The difference between revolutionary and counter-cultural presses was not always clear-cut. For instance, what was revolutionary could also be counter-cultural and *vice versa*, as Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin discuss in *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*:

Exactly where the counter-culture left off and hardcore revolutionary culture began was not always clear in the 1960s. Mammoth anti-war events reflected both. The counter-culturalist of one summer might be the political activist of the next, and vice versa. Those who regarded themselves as primarily political activists, especially those in SDS [Students for a Democratic Society], were often enthusiastic about the spirit of the counter-culture and the beauty of its artistic efforts while remaining uneasy about drugs, non-violence, and the notion that

⁵⁵In "Literacy and the Politics of Education," C. H. Knoblauch points out that literature plays a role in developing a specific kind of cultural literacy often at the marginalization of other ethnic literatures. In "Literacy in Three Metaphors," Sylvia Scribner finds that this kind of literacy is often perceived as a state of grace.

youth could be regarded as a revolutionary social class or category. (128)

Even though there are similarities between these two oppositional ideologies, it is useful to maintain this distinction because it can help outline some important differences among the various presses, based primarily on their different radical agendas, which were composed of more specific social, economic, and political acts of resistance.

In *Guitar Army*, a collection of John Sinclair's contributions to Detroit's underground presses, he describes his conviction that texts, that information, could lead to beneficial socio-political change. In "A Total Assault on Culture!" he states that the *Sun*,

unlike most papers, . . . is the printed organ of a conscious community of artists and lovers who live together, work together, share all things, smoke dope together, dance and fuck together, spread the word together every way we can—through our dress, our freedom of movement, our music and dance, our talk and formal literature, our gestures and printed designs, our economy, our human and social forms, through our every breath on the planet (67).

Sinclair is defining Detroit's "counter-culture," famously symbolized by the sixties' cliché—which the MC5, as we have seen, dramatically wove into their music—"sex, drugs, rock and roll." Yet beyond this he is attempting to establish a set of criteria defining a different way of experiencing community and individual expression. In the *Sun*'s "statement of responsibility" he describes this paper as "a product of the lives of [. . .] a community of total freaks." He continues, "We are not afraid anymore! Many of us are fighting in the city's courts and on the streets of Detroit to change the laws that

supposedly control marijuana and other holy agents, that supposedly control and choke off freedom of speech, religion, assembly, of expression in any human form” (70).

Sinclair had been arrested for marijuana possession and in 1969 would be sent to prison for ten years after being caught with two cigarettes. He and the members of his Trans-love Energies group often referred to such drug prosecution as “police harassment.”

Sinclair’s call for an “assault on the culture” is aimed at the area’s youth and is juxtaposed against the city and its government, as Sinclair suggests: “The *Sun* represents a growing body of people who live and work together in the city. It doesn’t follow any ‘line’ except the line that goes straight from us to you, and we’re trying to make that line straighter all the time, not crooked” (67).

As was usually the case, the underground presses attempted to sell their style as more honest than the government’s, police’s, or established press’s double-speak. “Truth” was seen as a corollary of pleasure, as inherent in the act of individual expression in a sympathetic group. The MC5, Stooges, The UP, and the punk music ethos in general gave this ethos its most energized, and irrational, expression. As an irrational discourse, and by that I mean a discourse motivated by emotion and feeling, rather than more conventional modes of reasoning, the counter-culture employed an unconventional pathos in order to facilitate its ends. Such essentially egotistical aims, even though many underground writers believed they were doing away with the ego, were clearly opposed to the rationalizations of the city’s policy makers. Those who could not understand the reasons for the riot of 1967, those who honestly believed that Detroit was a “model city,” did not practice the kind of self-criticism many activists felt was necessary. As Sinclair,

John Watson, and John Hersey felt, the police and the city's attempt to "maintain order" was a symptom of deeper racial and economic problems surfacing at the time. In the introduction to Hersey's, *The Algiers Motel Incident*, Thomas Sugrue states that "decades of racial conflict and economic inequality provided the tinder for the 1967 riot; a police action provided the spark" (xii). This action was the raid on the blind pig on Twelfth and Clairmount Avenues on July 23. However, this raid pointed out the tense relationship experienced between the police and the inhabitants of Detroit's inner-city neighborhoods before and after the riot.

The businesses that had been located on Hastings Street relocated to Twelfth Street during the 1940s and 50s (Smith 193). This street became the new cultural center of the black community in the 1960s and was also the location of the blind pig at which a raid spurred the riot of 1967.⁵⁶ Twelfth Street counted blind pigs, night clubs, cabarets, and jazz clubs among its various businesses. Many of these clubs had relocated from Paradise Valley, bringing with them some of the traditional cultural values the southern migrants had carried from the south. Both Smith and Fine point out that these clubs and blind pigs were important to the black community. They did not only enable illicit and illegal behavior, which was certainly part of their place in the community, but were used for various social events, among them meetings of political groups such as the United Community League for Civic Action, the Adult Community Movement for Equality, and its Afro-American Unity Movement and Afro-American Youth Movement successors

⁵⁶Smith states, "The blind pig that the police raided on July 23, 1967 was located at 9125 Twelfth Street and had existed since 1964" (193).

(Fine 136). Fine documents the police harassment that members of these groups faced, which amounted to an attack on the black community (127-154). The tensions between blacks and the predominantly white Detroit police force were seen as one of the major problems in the city, as Harlan Hahn and Joe R. Feagin state:

Perhaps the major domestic conflict of the 1960s was produced by the urban confrontation of predominantly white police forces and expanding black communities. . . . Black hostility toward the police became so common and so intense that the mere presence of a white policeman performing routine duties in the ghetto, when coupled with other conditions conducive to unrest, often was sufficient to ignite explosive violence (qtd. in Fine 95).

These confrontations shaped Detroit's neighborhoods, turning them into paranoid spaces that seemed more like war zones than communities.

An example of this police/neighborhood relationship is illustrated in the establishment of and protest against the STRESS (Stop Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets) unit. This unit was formed by police commissioner John Nichols in January 1971. Fine describes this unit as having been "composed of about one hundred, mostly white, police officers and serving in high crime, predominantly black areas. . . . STRESS," Fine continues, "engaged in surveillance and, of far greater importance, decoy operations. Since it was responsible during the three years that it functioned for the slaying of twenty-two citizens, most of them black, STRESS came to be viewed in the black community as 'a killer squad'" (457). In protest against the activities of this unit, the activist group From the Ground Up published in 1973 a 63-page pamphlet titled *Detroit Under Stress*.

From the Ground Up describes the STRESS unit as essentially a terrorist group, relating its actions to those surrounding Watergate and the My Lai massacre:

STRESS has attracted many headlines and has left marked impressions that shape the attitudes of all Detroiters. But while studies have repeatedly been conducted, court suits initiated and rallies held, Detroiters have not had ample opportunity to study the true facts on STRESS. The real facts deserve attention and they are as revealing, in ways, as are the facts surrounding Watergate and the My Lai Massacres [sic]. (ix-xx)

In this pamphlet, From the Ground Up presents the Algiers Motel Incident as an example of the kind of police misconduct that characterized the STRESS unit's approach to justice: "Into this atmosphere of permissiveness of police misconduct and brutality, STRESS was born" (3). As indicated by From the Ground Up in *Detroit Under STRESS* and John Hersey in *The Algiers Motel Incident*, the police deeply affected the shape of the city's neighborhoods, creating an atmosphere of mistrust and fear.

Sinclair's party line described a society founded on mutual pleasure rather than on the proliferation of social controls. Yet Sinclair did not perceive his underground press in conventional political terms or as invested with an overt political agenda, even though involvement with the *Sun* or the *Artist's Worksheet* was certainly inherently political. It was not the express purpose of the paper to attack Detroit's general social and economic policies. Rather, the paper intended a more exhibitionistic expansion of individual consciousness: "The *Sun* brings you the news of our lives, that we are alive and well and that all of us can be well too. We have found that there are three essential human

activities of the greatest importance to all persons, and that people are well and healthy in proportion to their involvement in these activities: rock and roll, dope, and fucking in the streets!" (67-8). The paper was devoted to the "the news of our lives," not the news from the Detroit legislature, not the news from the unions and other revolutionary groups, not the news from around the nation. It was rather an attempt to build an expressivist community, one based on the romantic idea of a "spiritual oneness." This idea may now seem, as it did to some then, a bit tongue-in-cheek or even "simply ridiculous" (Georgakas and Surkin 129). Yet it was this approach to revolutionary action that separated the counter-cultural groups from their more revolutionarily motivated counterparts:

The counter-culture succeeded in generating a new feeling of liberation which came to characterize much of the 1960s. To develop and sustain the proposed cultural revolution, it was necessary to integrate that revolution into the everyday lives and politics of ordinary people and to keep it beyond the grasp of capitalist co-option and commoditization. Political focus and organizational structure were crucial to maintaining the momentum and integrity of the counter-culture, and only the political revolutionaries sought to provide that focus and structure. For them a successful cultural revolution could only come upward from the people within the context of an overall social, economic, and political revolution. (Georgakas and Surkin 128).

For Sinclair and Detroit's counter-culturalists, revolution began with an alteration of consciousness, with an expansion of one's cultural awareness, and with the realization

of the potential afforded through artistic expression. These ideas took form in the poetry published in the *Artist's Worksheet* and *The Warren Forest Sun*. In the manifesto to the *Artist's Worksheet* Sinclair describes the role of creative activity in the socio-political turmoil of Detroit and in the community in general:

Why a community of Artists? We believe that one of the most important things to a young, formative artist is having a group of his peers (in the best sense of the word, taking into consideration his advanced level of consciousness &c) that he can be a part of, that he can talk to, work with, work out ideas &c and can give him support. [. . .] A community of artists means that a group of highly conscious people have resolved their individual ego problems and can *help* each other in very real ways—by giving support, stimulation &c. (1)

The *Artist's Worksheet* was a means of developing a textual community through the voices of its contributors in order to counter the sense that their community of “freaks” and activists was under siege by the city’s police and government officials. Community is not simply given but developed; and through sharing, through the communicating of ideas, the boundaries of a given community, of a discourse community in this case, begin to expand both physically and philosophically. Physically more people join the group, and, perhaps more importantly, more people begin to “speak,” and one’s consciousness or awareness expands. Yet what is meant by this “expanded consciousness,” which seems a central tenet of counter-cultural poetic thought?

Consciousness

In attempting to draw the boundaries of this term, Sinclair quotes Henry James, who defines consciousness as “perception at the pitch of passion” (qtd. in *Worksheet 1*). In Sinclair’s appropriation of James’s phrase, the idea that passionate perception leads to a clearer consciousness fit well with the use of drugs as a means to find the communally receptive voice that expressed a set of pure or more “true” emotions or states of being. This heightened consciousness was seen as necessary for poets who were trying, in the words of Amiri Baraka, to make something “out of the garbage of their lives” (1). Expanded consciousness, as a central tenet of counter-cultural poetic composition, was a means of seeing, organizing, and communicating socially oppositional ideas, a means that Sinclair applies in his description of poetry:

Poetry (or any art) does not need to be ‘sullen’ (solus:alone) any more. We are now in a period of expanded consciousness in all the arts, the most immediately important aspect of which is the transcendence of what is understood as the ‘ego’ (in the accepted—worst—sense of that word). . . . Each individual involved must (--has to--) learn a sense of personal responsibility, must take an active role in the life of his community, assume its problems and (this too is difficult any more) its rewards & achievements, as his own, pitch in and help those around him who are trying but who haven’t succeeded in getting themselves together as soon as he has.

(1-2)

In these presses, and in the counter-cultural movement in general, “good” poetry needs to lead to action, just as Mao Zedung, whose ideas in part shaped those of Sinclair, argues it

should in his treatise *Literature and Art*.

George Tysh's "A Statement On Poetics" in *Artist's Worksheet #10* portrays consciousness as a means to achieve this kind of community-centered poetics:

earth men
 after them
 her breath comes
 short
 panting panting panting
 the gold
 angel melted down, divided, portioned out to virtuous greed; the bosses
 slide in on damp grass, squeak
 and eliminate
 themselves—simple, parallel,
 a row lined out beside themselves: half bottles lie,
 pointing, darkness at the other side
 of green grass; cloth hangs
 down a coverlet for her
 worldly
 hang-ups (41)

In an explication of his own poem, Tysh articulates some of the main points of his poetics:

justification and contention are low points in consciousness. Try to forget them,

put them out of mind; but they appear and re-appear everywhere, forever. Both come of the same nervous stomach; both are forms of energy turned in on itself; onanism of spirit; two components, of one. . . . the poem is an aspect of your animal potential. You are not a saint. You are energized meat and the poem a part of "meat science." The poet is not "special" but just another kind of animal, a species which could become dominant simply because it already exists as physical phenomenon. Natural selection may soon demand the tendency (41).

Again central to this poetics is an altered or alternative awareness. In this case, his poetics of consciousness requires an identification with a oneness of spirit, a unification of observation and living with the act of composition: the poem is a realization of the body's energy, its breathing as a means of shaping poetic form.

Geary Hobson has argued in the *Remembered Earth* that such ideas often lead to "white shamanism," in which authors appropriate the culture of Native Americans to argue their own political agendas. This kind of appropriation is what happens, for instance, in Peter Marin's essay "Open Truth," in which he equates youth culture with a generalized idea of primitive culture: "Primitive culture dealt with [the problem of educating youth], I think, through their initiation rites, the rites of passage; they legitimized and accepted these energies and turned them toward collective aims; they were merged with the life of the tribe and in this way were acknowledged, honored, and domesticated—but not destroyed" (*Movement 3*). At the time, however, many writers adopted these kinds of ideas as a way of arguing for the importance of youth as a revolutionary class. This sense of youth is detailed, for example, in Theodore Roszak's

essay “Youth and the Great Refusal.” Roszak states that in the 1960s much of what was “provocative and engaging in the arts, in politics, in education, in social relations (love, courtship, family), in journalism, in fashions and entertainment, [was] very largely the creation either of the discontented young or of those who addressed themselves primarily to the young” (*Movement* 85). The consciousness of Tysh’s poetics is attached to, and qualified by, this youthful perspective, which Roszak defines as a prolonged childishness in which

being human has something to do with pleasure and freedom. . . . One may flippantly construe this exodus as the contemporary version of running off with the circus, but the more apt parallel might be with the quest of 3rd-century Christians (a scruffy, uncouth, and often half-mad lot) for escape from the corruptions of Hellenistic society: it is much more a flight from than toward. Certainly for a youth of 17, clearing out of the comfortable bosom of the middle-class family to become a beggar is a formidable gesture of dissent. One makes light of it at the expense of ignoring a significant measure of our social health. (*Movement* 86)

Tysh’s description of poetry as a “meat science” also recalls the phrase “meat poetry” used by Douglas Blazek to describe the poems he “showcased” in his magazine *OLE*. These poems develop “direct, and imperative poetic forms using street language and often startling imagery” (*Outlaw*, 390). For instance, the “meat” poetry of Steve Richmond, A. D. Winans, and David Roskos is experimental and seems obsessed with the bits and pieces of the body. Following Olson, the body and its various

extenuations—the breath, sweat, voice, blood—are to be a fundamental shaping force.

However, the “meat” experiment, unlike Olson’s work, seemed amateurish, similar to the blood and guts poetry commonly produced in writing seminars.

Even though some of these efforts suffer from the kind of “rhetoricity” Holden discusses (in which a proliferation of language is used in place of controlled images that might convey a well-considered message), they do provide a different sense of the body. The physicality of the body is perceived as a means to the “soul,” or, in other words, a means to capture the inexplicable. In essence this “body” functions as a new kind of metaphor: gore and banality become a source of pure beauty. Slop or the irrational is revealing in the fragments of continuity that emerge from it. As the influence of Olson, jazz, and rock music reveal, improvisation—or as the Surrealist might put it, the surprise—is important in revealing a less mediated “truth.” In a time when television was being critiqued as the scourge of America, in which the established media was seen as a tool of oppression, and in which the author “died,” the stripping away of mediation in favor of fragmented or minimalist discourse had become very appealing. For instance, in “A Bukowski Writing Lesson,” Richmond begins with the following image, depicting the brutal exposure of the poet’s inner muse:

i tore my nails into
my stomach ripping a hole
big enough to put my hand
into me with blind fingers
feeling between intestines

and liver for the flower of
 me, until i found it pulling
 it out, holding it in my body
 right hand until my left hand
 got hold of my soul, and i
 took the two and smashed them
 together until they became a
 solid piece of total beauty
 for me to throw with all
 my strength into the
 stars (*Outlaw* 391)

As in Richmond's poem, the meat poet of the 1960s often mined the body for its own salvation: destroying its corporeality to abstract meaning from it. It was an inward turning poetry that tried to extract the human goodness, the transcendent spirit, from the grit of the corporeal form. The social message implicit in this image is clear when we realize that similar investigations of the social body were taking place across the nation during the 1960s. The Berkeley Free Speech movement, the Civil Rights movement, and the Students for a Democratic Society used the underground press, and the poetry published in its pages, to seek out those sympathetic to its revision of dominant cultural values.

In *Artist's Worksheet #1* Jim Semark incorporates these poetic ideas in his "Blood Echoes," which, despite its lack of conventional poetic form and its use of brash imagery,

positions the poetry published in the *Artist's Worksheets* within a tradition. "Blood Echoes" begins with an excerpt from an Arapaho Vision Song, which suggests the stories in the blood, the cultural traditions, that tie a people together in a common plot:

The star-child is here.
It is through him that
our people are living. (7)

Illustrating the appropriation of Native American religion important to a growing youth counter-culture seeking a different worldview, this excerpt leads Semark into a dream monologue, a rambling free association, in which he juxtaposes urban life and modern capitalist repression with eastern spiritual liberation:

I'm washing in the madness of holy holy holy while the mad robots around me rejoice with glee. I'm listening to the blood echoes of humanity which flower in the base of the spine and flow up to the brain in a sweet-sour song of life-death. Timothy Leary et. al. call it game-playing. . . . In this vast city of Detroit I see everyone washing themselves in the blood echoes of their soul, in the beneficial and harmful karma they created in the blood and sweat and laughter and tears and orgasms and hysteria of their past deeds. . . . And I've tried to believe his words, Allen [Ginsberg]; I've read the Lankavatara Sutra every day for over two years and I've tried to believe it but I still want to deny myself from it and run from it.
(5-6)

Semark is looking to the Beats and their appropriation of eastern religion for a way to judge the situation in Detroit. Interesting here is Semark's use of "blood echoes" as a

critique of a tradition of violence that he sees as an extension of heritage. There was a sense initiated by the Civil Rights Movement in Detroit and elsewhere that everyone—no matter what race, religion or creed--was pretty much the same, and that egocentrism, or that notion which proposes that the individual is separate from the community, was responsible for old-fashioned sectarianism and, thus, made intolerance and hatred possible. Therefore, deliverance from this egocentrism was central to a critical, cultural awareness, as illustrated by a quote Semark includes from the Lankavatara Sutra: “There is no ego-substance, nor any thing belonging to it; the ego-self (Vijnana) is originated by ignorance, deed, and desire, and keeps up its function by grasping objects by means of the sense organs, such as the eye, etc., and clinging to them as real; while a world of objects and bodies is manifested owing to the discrimination that takes place in the world which is of Mind itself, that is, in the all-conserving consciousness (Alayavijnana)” (6). The presumption was that such an “egolessness” would lead to an ability to observe and appreciate, as Semark states, “the sound of shit falling against an alarm-clock ringing.” Semark feels lucky to have gotten “this far and not busted and sentenced to involuntary lobotomy. We’re lucky in this free democratic republic rally-round-the-flag-boys society of ours to get by without any kind of mind-copping brain job” (7).

For the 1960s youth counter-culture, social institutions, such as school, government, and law enforcement, had become symbols of mind control, a brick in the wall of fascism. Much of this kind of critique was short sighted and reactionary. Why respond to the situation in Detroit in this way? Semark provides something of an answer when he states that he is not “trying to be sacrilegious or blasphemous or revolutionary”

but, rather, is speaking out against all this “mind-copping brain job society” around him, which is “crashing into [his] cerebrum and sucking out the blood echoes of the soul with transfusions of milksop formaldehyde silly-ass ignorant thought-police game-playing”

(7). Many in the counter-culture in Detroit and elsewhere desired to hide a profound confusion and fear behind a rather inarticulate rhetoric. They, as have many writers before them, sought a bosom in which to find solace, a safe haven from the deaths in Vietnam, the fear of poverty, unemployment, and pollution. Semark ends his poem by invoking the name of Allen Ginsberg, like Whitman before him a symbol of artistic peace and security, in a kind of benediction that ties his ideas to this iteration of the poetic patriarch:

Therefore I say, Allen, Allen,

Blessed is he who divorces himself from game-playing, for immense peace will be
his.

Blessed is he who turns on for he shall gain beneficial karma and likewise he who
turns others on will gain immense merit or grace.

He who busts others is doomed to rebirth and rebirth until he realizes his own ig-
norance.

Blessed is he who works for the day when our own Middle-Ages feudal society
has

been swept away in the satori morning (not the junksick dawn) of morning
pri-

mordial consciousness.

Blessed are those who do not cry out "OH! WOW! AM I High!" and give play to
 other fantasies of the ego-self, but who let their ecstasy absorb itself in
 them
 and express itself. These will gain the ultimate truth and will stop the
 wheel
 of transmigration. (7)

This is a blessing to the underclass, the young, and the poor. The benediction identifies those who play the role of the peasant in modern capitalist society. In the mid-1960s, Detroit's auto industry was still reeling from the recent economic repression. Auto sales and auto worker jobs had not recovered, and the city suffered. Also, in the city at this time, new poets, such as Semark, were looking to the Beats for inspiration. Since the Beats attempted to be apolitical, preferring to extricate their work and their lives from bureaucratic influences, much of the work produced in Detroit's and the nation's early underground presses tended to mirror the Beatific discourse. In many cases, consciousness, as produced through artistic efforts, drugs, and music appreciation, was offered as an alternative to a society centered on work and the acceptance of an established power structure.

Yet the question remains, how does a poem like "Blood Echoes" "do something about Detroit," as the manifesto suggests poetry can? The answer to this question is difficult to glean from the work of the Artists' Workshop. My quick answer is that it does nothing, and is intended to do nothing, about Detroit. Being heavily influenced by the Beats and the Haight Ashbury hippies, Detroit's counter-culture felt that to do nothing

politically about the city was an implicit attack on the established will-to-order. Of course such subtle or abstract gestures did little or nothing to help improve life in the city.

This question then leads to the broader one, how can art change society? This is the question the Detroit counter-culture failed seriously to ask, in most cases. It was as if invoking the name of Ginsberg, like that of God or Buddha or Muhammad, would legitimate their ideas. In many cases, Detroit's counter-cultural artists were trying, as some of the beats had before them, to package a product for a kind of inconspicuous consumption, to present a novel perspective that people would pay to behold, as the manifesto admits: "We do believe, however, that commercial ventures will come into being as logical and desirable outgrowths of the workshop as it has been conceived and as it is now operating" (2). These market efforts were intended to facilitate the publishing of *The Artists' Worksheet* and *Guerrilla*. The writers, as Semark illustrates, were working to develop a mass expression, paralleling the mass production of automobiles just a few miles down the street. They were creating artifacts, objects to be individually appreciated, universal, ahistorical, and apolitical. They were self-contained objects, neither commenting cogently on nor significantly related to the socio-political moment. This poetry forms what might be called the discourse of the drop-out, an expression produced by the disenchanted suburbanite who does not want to be privileged.

Sinclair's own statement in the preface to the collection of *Artists' Worksheets* is an apt critique of this kind of cultural mass production: "We were very much concerned at the beginning with turning people on, making them aware of new possibilities for self-expression, and sharing ourselves in whatever ways we could. We were so naive, though,

and the writings that made up the *Artists' Worksheet* are very precise to that weird innocence we had. Reading this work over now is an embarrassing experience for me, and I find it really hard to believe that we were in fact that totally naive, such a short time ago" (i-ii). The group that made up the Artists' Workshop and published the *Artists' Worksheets* came together in 1964. The different *Worksheet* numbers were collected in 1967 after the riots of that summer, which, as this disavowal of his group's previous work suggests, increased Sinclair's political awareness and sense of social responsibility. Detroit's counter-culture would, at this time, attempt to join in the political struggle in the city, whether it be through a "Total Assault on the Culture" or the development of the White Panther Party as an ally of the Black Panther Party. Sinclair organized the White Panther Party and helped compose its ten-point program, as detailed in "The White Panther State/meant":

1. Full endorsement and support of the Black Panther Party's 10-point program and platform.
2. Total assault on the culture by any means necessary, including rock and roll, dope, and fucking in the streets.
3. Free exchange of energy and materials—we demand the end of money!
4. Free food, clothes, housing, dope, music, bodies, medical care—everything free for every body!
5. Free access to the information media—free the technology from the greed creeps!
6. Free time & space for all humans—dissolve all unnatural boundaries!

7. Free all schools and all structures from corporate rule—turn the buildings over to the people at once!
8. Free all prisoners everywhere—they are our comrades!
9. Free all soldiers at once—no more conscripted armies!
10. Free the people from their phony “leaders”—everyone must be a leader—freedom means free every one! All

Power to the People! (*Guitar* 105)

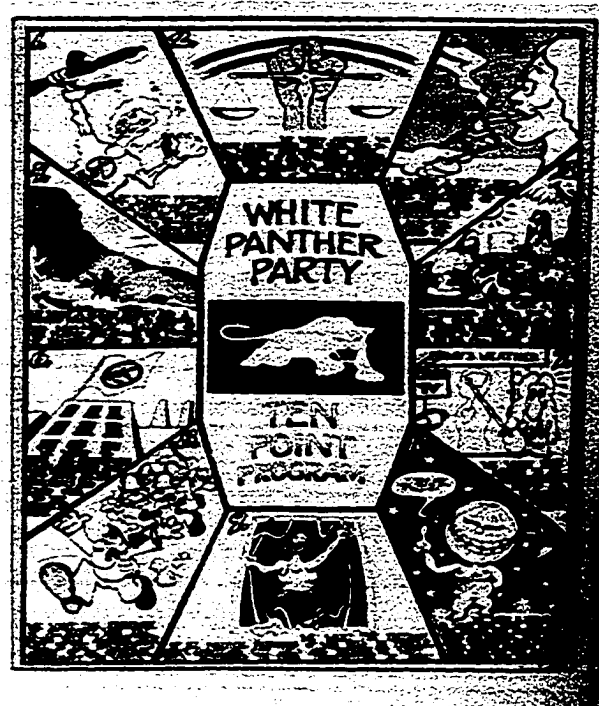


Figure 3. This is Gary Grimshaw's artistic rendition of The White Panther Party's ten-part program. The absurdist quality of Grimshaw's rendition seems particularly appropriate.

Although they were meant to be more self-consciously political than Sinclair's previous ideas, these points are based more on uncritical reactions to real and perceived repression than to practical insights into the nature of contemporary political insensitivity and exploitation. To some extent, these points echo communist rhetoric, particularly that of Chairman Mao, whom Sinclair and the other members of the White Panther Party read, in that social and cultural change is to be for “the people.” Specifically, these points argue for a free society, which would be a society no longer based on surplus, no longer shaped by capitalist prerogatives. Providing free food, free housing, and so on would

require a great deal of social and economic restructuring, issues Sinclair never takes up. As Georgakas and Surkin point out, his aimless demands annoyed those in Detroit who were attempting to achieve real and lasting change. Sugrue describes the more cogent issues of work, housing, police harassment, and education that many activists in Detroit were working to address:

By 1960, black unemployment rates were more than double those of whites.

Young blacks were hit especially hard. Thirty-five percent of nineteen-year-old black men, but only 8.9 percent of nineteen-year-old white males, were out of work. Many underemployed youths hung out street corners unable to find work; others were drawn into the city's expanding underground economy. [. . .] As the city's black population expanded between World War II and the 1967 riot, white Detroiters joined in an enormous grassroots movement to protect their segregated community from black "invasions." [. . .] In a city that was more than one-third black, 95 percent of police officers were white. [. . .] In Detroit, the riot began when police raided a "blind-pig"—an illegal after hours bar. Most of these police incidents were, on the surface, minor events. But to many African Americans, the police came to "symbolize white power, white racism, and white repression. [. . .] By the late 1960s [. . .] blacks grew increasingly pessimistic about the possibility of racial harmony. Whites professed to be more open to the idea of racial integration, but racial divisions remained deep, particularly in housing and education. (Hersey xi-xvii)

Sinclair and Detroit's counter-culture failed to address many of these issues. Through the

Workshop, he did provide a kind of alternative education and a means to deal with the frustration of unemployment. Yet most of his group was white and suffered less from the economic hardships than the city's black inhabitants. Therefore, his politics might better be thought of as daydreams rather than thoughtful programs; nonetheless his efforts did interrogate the status quo, did provide a voice and a place for difference to emerge, and in their own way were a vivid, funny, and disturbing critique of the dominant cultural values of the time.

After the riot of 1967, the trajectory of the poetry and other artistic contributions in the underground press was intended to be politically charged, aimed at changing the prevailing social practices by turning poetry, music, sex, and visual art into a critique of Detroit's repressive power structures. The *Sun* contained a poetry section with the heading: "Flash! This is the News! Poetry is Revolution!" These selections attempted more clearly, or directly, to affiliate art with social, economic, and political change. An undated issue of the *Sun*, published after Sinclair and its other editors moved to Ann Arbor, begins with Jim Semark's

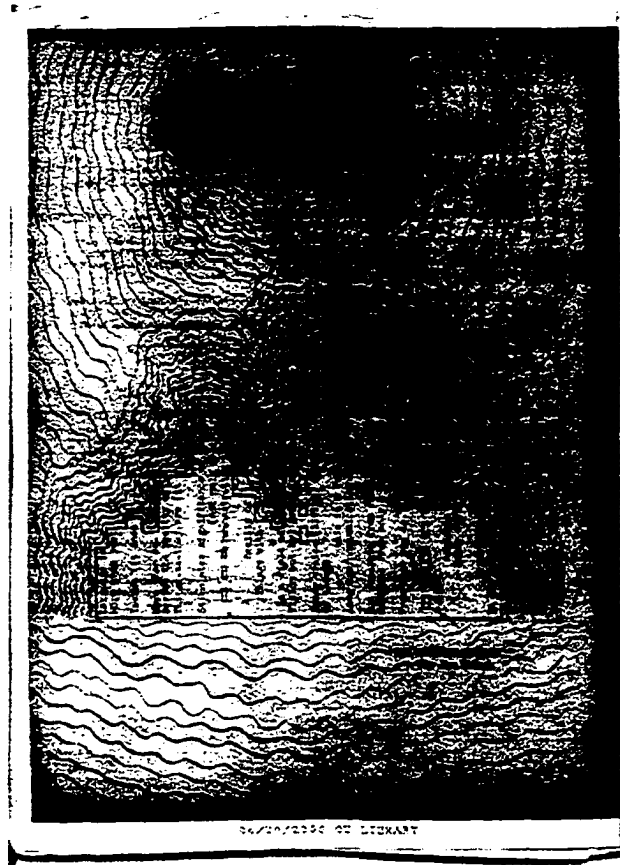


Figure 4. This cover was designed by Pun Plamondon and Genie Johnson, members of what was then the White Panther Party (1).

poem inserted into the outline of Detroit's cityscape with waves of heat radiating upward toward the *Sun* title as one might see it from Windsor. This drawing was perhaps created by Gary Grimshaw, a counter-cultural artist who worked with Sinclair to promote the music of the MC5 and The Up. The poem represents the city as a readable text, as a collection of discourses, a dialogic or polyphonic construct:

Language is
 More than just
 Image (it does
 More than de-
 Scribe the reality of
 Things-as-they-are (it
 Stimulates significance of things by
 (not only objectively
 demonstrating the
 reality of
 things with-
 In a field of
 Vision but by) going into the
 Inner vision (living) (mystery) (significance)
 Of things.
 This is a form of
 Language/communicating. Image is

Not separate from function & mind not
 Separate from body & what you say not separate
 From what you do.

With one stroke we

Nullify the

Academic

Essay style

Perpetrated

In our minds/idea. (cover)

Semark's poem critiques dispassionate formal writing, focusing, as the imagists did for instance, on the image, in this case the "deep image," to uncover a fundamental relationship between objects and their meanings. These meanings depend on a kind of inner vision, what can be recognized as a version of the Romantic nurturing of inspiration. In contrast to strict realism, Semark suggests an individualistic kind of expression, characterized by personal association and an individualized political voice. This is supposed to be a political voice that is achieved through a critical analysis of language, deconstructing it to examine its deeper implications, just as a political activist needs to deconstruct the rhetoric of the city to better understand the issues pertinent to it. In this conception, art is a critique of social institutions, such as education, the media, and civil government, which project an objective sense of reality upon urban residents. The drawing in which the poem is imbedded suggests that a "New Renaissance," which is printed in the lower right hand corner of the drawing, might be achieved through the

destruction of Detroit, recalling the title of an MC5 song “Detroit is Burning.”

In this same issue, in a section of poetic protest letters from various writers, Diane Di Prima comments in “Revolutionary Letter #6” on the means by which capitalism reduces the experience and the vital energy of living:

Avoid the folk

Who find Bonnie and Clyde too violent

Who see the blood but not the energy

form

They love us to practice

birth control

They love us and want the Hindus

to kill their cows

They love us and have a colorless

tasteless powder

Which is the perfect

Synthetic food . . . (5)

Living under capitalism, the poem suggests, is like ingesting poison, colorless and tasteless; like breathing carbon monoxide; like residing in the city that feeds its inhabitants pollution, that asks them to conform to the ideology of the state, to act in accordance with the decisions of a small group of officials. The poem suggests the way some “folk,” perhaps referring to the older generation, attempted to separate people from their natures, from their instinctual responses, from their human traditions, and in so

doing forced them to rely upon the synthetic, the simulacrum, the marketable community. The synthetic, which was a fairly new idea in postwar expansion, became an image of dishonesty and manipulation. The proliferation of critiques about synthetic man, synthetic food, and synthetic experiences in science fiction entered the public's consciousness during this period. Consider *I, Robot* (1950); *2001: A Space Odyssey* (movie released in 1968); *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968, adapted for *Blade Runner*, which was released in 1982); *Brave New World* (1946, reprinted in 1969); and *1984* (1949, reprinted with an afterword by the social philosopher Eric Fromm in 1961).

The poetry selections that follow Di Prima's, coded as revolutionary discourse, attempt to tie the counter-culture to the activities of the more revolutionary groups in Detroit. In examining some of these revolutionary presses we can better understand the tension between these groups and synthesize what, if anything, came out of their interaction. According to Georgakas and Surkin, the revolutionary presses in Detroit, "rather than depending on the outside ranks of the counter-culture, . . . drew on their own ranks for artistic and cultural work. Besides film making and the book club forums and the bookstores, the revolutionaries encouraged the use of original artwork and writing in all their publications" (129). Revolutionary presses, unlike the counter-cultural presses, had a more overt tie to the politically militant environment of the city, specifically the worker's anti-union groups known as RUMs (Revolutionary Union Movements), which worked against organizations like the U.A.W.

Many minority activists were angered by the collusion between the auto companies and the U.A.W., which often worked more to maintain the company's bottom

line than to ensure the well-being of the union members. Sidney Fine characterizes the rise of the RUMs, stating that “In the months following the establishment of DRUM, demonstrations directed principally at the Chrysler Corporation and the UAW led to the formation of additional RUMs. The RUM organizations joined in 1969 under [General Gordon] Baker’s leadership to form the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, which pledged itself to wage ‘a relentless struggle against racism, capitalism and imperialism.’ The League, whose efforts led to a ‘significant increase’ in black foremen and black UAW stewards, collapsed in the early 1970s” (381). Many of the underground presses, most notably *Inner City Voice* but also the *Michigan Chronicle* and the *South End*, published material in support of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. The presses were primarily intended as the educational and ideological arms of the organization, as John Watson describes:

I want to emphasize that education and knowledge are the most powerful tools that we have available in engaging in the struggle to make a better world. It is through the control of knowledge that the ruling class maintains its power. The struggle over the control of knowledge itself is a political struggle. The ruling classes have for many centuries understood this very clearly. Back to the days when the typical statement that you might hear from a slaveowner was, ‘Hell no, I don’t want my slaves to learn how to read and write because educated niggers become uppity.’ That’s exactly correct, and the man understands it very clearly today. (Georgakas and Surkin 73)

In November 1969, for instance, the *Inner City Voice* published the League's demands of the U.A.W., which called for the end of racist hiring practices, more control over the shop floor, the end of the collusion between the union and the auto companies, and more effective use of the union's "political and strike powers" to help the black community (14). The aim in these publications was to educate the public about the difficulties faced by black workers and to develop and articulate an ideological and political program for the League. One apparent goal was to portray the black worker's struggle as not only economic but also moral. As Suzanne Smith reports, quoting Paul Gilroy, blacks in Detroit during the 1960s saw "waged work as itself a form of servitude" (192). Therefore, there was a sense in Detroit in the late 1960s that black workers were not only fighting for better working conditions but were, on another level, struggling against a new form of slavery—"wage slavery." In this context, the RUMs, League of Revolutionary Black Workers, and the underground presses took the moral high ground, portraying the auto companies and union leaders as not only racist but racist in the same way as southern plantation owners had been.

Where counter-cultural presses attempted to create both a physical and intellectual alternative to the city, respectively through communes and presses, establishing a support system for enjoying an alternative lifestyle through discussions of poetry, visual art, music, drugs, and sex, the revolutionary presses affiliated themselves with the RUMs and the needs of workers and Detroit's minority groups. Those editing the counter-cultural presses tended to be white, addressing a suburban audience of restless youth hungry for freedom from conservative social expectations, while those editing the revolutionary

presses were predominantly black, addressing an inner-city audience that was more concerned with issues of equality in work, housing, and education.

The *Inner City Voice* was an important example of such a revolutionary press. Georgakas and Surkin differentiate this press from the counter-cultural or alternative presses in Detroit, claiming that the *Inner City Voice* “was not like the alternative-culture newspapers of that period. Its editors did not see its function simply as one of a principled opposition to the dominant culture. Using their own resources, they tried to build their paper into a vehicle for political organization, education, and change” (14). Artistic expression was one tool used to achieve these aims by at once bringing the struggles of the black auto workers to a broader audience and also providing a means of critiquing the corporate ideologies that made such exploitation, such inequalities, possible. In the November 1969 issue of the *Voice*, the paper’s founding rallying cry was illustrated in a full-page poem that ran beside the image of a black worker in the act of swinging a sledge hammer. The poem ties the different RUMs, which were established in the different auto plants around the city, into a single urgent voice. On one level the message is clear:

Join the League of Revolutionary Black
Workers

Long live Black people in the racist
land and death to their enemies. Long live
the heroic black workers struggle.

LONG LIVE D.R.U.M

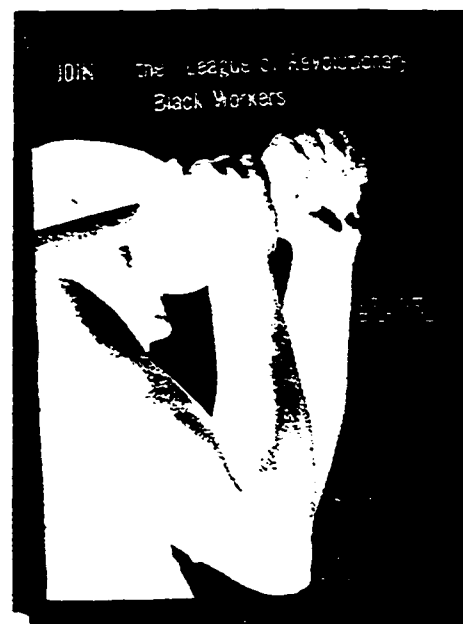


Figure 5. From the November 1969 issue of *Inner City Voice*.

LONG LIVE F.R.U.M

LONG LIVE E.L.R.U.M

LONG LIVE M.A.R.U.M

LONG LIVE L.R.U.M.

LONG LIVE J.A.R.U.M

LONG LIVE U.P.R.U.M

Long live the league of Revolutionary Black Workers

Fight, fail, fight again

Fail again, fight on to victory. (24)

This poem is a mantra, the kind of activist slogan that many groups used to communicate their message. It also reveals the common appropriation of capitalist marketing techniques to further dissent. Such an approach has often been critiqued as attempting to enact change with the “master’s tools,” an approach many activists feel is doomed to fail precisely because the object being critiqued can turn criticism to its own uses. This poem is a call to continuing in the face of discrimination, setbacks, even failure. It represents the struggle against unions like the UAW and against the auto companies as a process, an action that, in order to remain vital, needs to be adaptive, open to change and reinterpretation. This poem differs from one published in the *South End*, the revolutionary paper published at Wayne State University, revealing a different side to the rhetoric of the black workers’ struggle:

Deep in the gloom

Of the oil-filled pit

Where the engine rolls down the line,

We challenge the doom

Of dying in shit

While strangled by a swine

. For hours and years

we've sweated tears

trying to break our chain

But we broke our backs

And died in packs

To find our manhood slain

But now we stand

For DRUM's at hand

To lead our Freedom fight,

And now 'til then

We'll unite like men

For now we know our might,

And damn the plantation

And the whole Chrysler nation

For DRUM has dried our tears,

And now as we die

We've a different cry

For now we hold our spears!

U.A.W. is scum

OUR THING IS DRUM!!!! (Georgakas and Surkin 109-10)

Georgakas and Surkin claim that this poem, written as in the form of a revolutionary jingle, “became an organizational trademark with the words FRUM, CADRUM, JARUM, and so on substituted for DRUM” (109). In the revolutionary presses, poetry and other forms of art were intended to initiate action, to turn neo-Marxist theory, which many leaders such as John Watson studied, into practical ideas that the workers could use to organize and to fight against unfair employment practices. As Nelson points out, while discussing modernist working-class poetry, working-class poets were “sensitive to the uses of poetry as a special discursive terrain.[. . .] [Their poems] become representative cultural texts, examples of workers’ experience that have at once the conditional authenticity of confession and the generality of types” (106). The poetry from and about the working class in Detroit was part of this underground tradition, part of a collection of texts that have fallen from our “cultural memory.” Indeed, I make a similar argument about Detroit’s postmodern workers’ poetry that Nelson makes about its modernist precursors:

The myth that has facilitated the elimination of much of this poetry from our cultural memory holds that the resulting literature was always formally conservative, thematically monochromatic, and rhetorically wooden. My argument here is that, to the contrary, this diverse and highly interactive period of political poetry is one of the real treasures of our literary heritage. Even at the time the sheer variety of socially engaged poetry astounded writers on the left. As the preface to the poetry section of *Proletarian Literature in the United States* points out, “there are orations, descriptions, exhortations, narratives, reveries, satires, epigrams, songs. And in form the diversity is as abundant as in the

moods. From the simple tap rhythms of workers [sic] songs we go into echoing mazes of counterpoint; and from statements as direct as outcries we go into a diction as subtle, and at times, unfortunately as obscure, as anything to be found in contemporary poetry” (102-3)

The reason working-class poetry of the 1960s remained similar in spirit to that of its earlier manifestations is that the conditions faced by factory workers had not essentially changed. Their experiences on the shop floor remained defined by struggles with union and corporate management, with family and neighborhoods, and with racial inequality. In the late 1950s and 1960s, increased automation and decentralization led to the elimination of several types of unskilled jobs. Sugrue found in the first years of automation (between 1951-1953) that there was a net job loss of 4,185 jobs.⁵⁷ Henry Ford II realized the significance of this job loss to some urban communities, as revealed in a quote Sugrue includes in *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*: “In some areas where industries have been partly obsoleted whole communities may suffer” (134). However, Ford did little to change this trend. By the late 1960s, the government, as Sugrue points out in the introduction to Hersey’s *Algiers Motel Incident*, was more or less considered an enemy of the working class, and the black working class especially: “By the late 1960s, [. . .] Hersey’s racial liberalism was fading in fashion.[. . .] Impatient with the slow pace of change, a vocal minority of black activists and their white allies demanded that blacks take power into their own hands” (xvii). Nelson finds that the activist and working-class discourses in the 1930s, “under the pressure of social life, [. . .] underwent a realignment

⁵⁷According to Sugrue the “only detailed statistics on automation and its effects on employment” were provided by a “UAW-sponsored study of Ford” (*Origins* 133).

to form a new field of meanings. These are meanings that must—to the extent we are able—be read contextually and relationally, both in the light of the 1930s and in the light of the interests and resistances of our own time” (169). In the late 1960s, such a realignment was also visible as New Left activists and poets moved away from the kinds of revolutionary programs promoted by the Old Left, dominated primarily by liberal reforms as seen in the New Deal. For some, communism, which was a major ideological force in the 1930s, had been debunked; for others it had just moved from its Russian form to that practiced by China or Cuba. The domestic concerns had shifted from the New Deal’s federal assistance programs to a hatred of government control, in its various forms, to distrust of our role in Vietnam, and to the movement for civil rights, either by pacifist means or armed conflict. Because of this change in the context of activism in America, the poetry had to discover a different way of constructing meaning. Often experimentation was used to draw away from the institutionalized conventions that were seen to dominate the published poetry of Robert Frost, Philip Levine, and Wallace Stevens, to name just a few. Some sought a more personal voice, a more associative vision in the face of political impotence. Others, such as the black artists Randall published, returned to the past to recover a heritage and poetic tradition that had gone relatively unnoticed.

In Detroit, revolutionary working-class poetry tended to be lyrical and, in many cases, it developed alongside the city’s blues, jazz, and rock music. Revolutionary poetry was attempting to establish an image base that blacks, for the most part, could rally around, could claim as their own. Therefore, black poetry tended to be less experimental, exhibiting a closer relationship to other black urban cultural forms. The poems in the

revolutionary presses were not intended to be self-contained artifacts. They were often meant to address specific situations, and for this reason many of them are hard to find. For instance, Mr. Toad's poem, "It's out of my hands" published in the November 1969 issue of the *Inner City Voice*, is accompanied by a photograph of black workers on strike.⁵⁸ The poem builds off of the refrain, one commonly heard on the shop floor, "it's out of my hands." A fairly long poem, it tells the story of work in the auto factories, the senselessness of bureaucracy, the daily struggle for the right to satisfy even the smallest desire and to gain some control.

The shop was like a sweat box,

The heat was ninety-three.

I had a little grievance,

As anyone could see.

I went to see the foreman

And called to him by name.

I asked him could he open up

That nailed-down window pane?

But my boss said, "it's out of my hands."

The cadence of the poem, its meter, is reminiscent of a blues song. The struggle for even the smallest consideration is almost comical; it initially brings a smile. But as the poem continues, one is introduced to the bureaucratic machine, the paperwork, the delays, the

⁵⁸Mr. Toad was a pen name for an anonymous poet who contributed to the *Inner City Voice* and *Speak Out*, in which this poem was first published.

curious channels of authority that wipe away any ethical connection to the original grievance. After this lengthy run-around the worker is granted his request:

Of one hundred grievances
 We lost ninety-nine.
 But the one that was salvaged
 Turned out to be mine.

The window was opened
 On a cold wintry day
 I shivered and shook
 Till I thought I'd giveaway.

I went to the foreman
 And called him by name.
 And asked him to shut
 That d—d window pane.
 But he said, "it's out of my hands." (21)

At this point, the request no longer bears any relation to the original complaint. It is no longer hot, so why open the window? What this poem illustrates is the power of bureaucratic practice to keep decisions out of the hands of the workers, to keep them on the line amidst ridiculous hardships while their complaints are being reviewed by an executive in a comfortable office, separated from the hardships of the shop floor.

· Taken together, both counter-cultural and revolutionary presses worked to create a

space of resistance within Detroit. The space was characterized by a postmodern move toward multi-culturalism, a convergence not only of different cultural values but also of their poetics, their sense of beauty and of the possibilities of art as a force of political voice and social change. Art in the underground presses was inextricable from its contexts. The polyphonic nature of dissent did not simply mean allowing the disenfranchised to say “no” to the discriminatory practices of Detroit’s political leaders but was rather the building of an ideological infrastructure that could promote and support continued change. For the *Inner City Voice*, such change became the unifying principle for the material it contained, as Georgakas and Surkin state: “The unifying ingredient in all *ICV* material was the sharp emphasis on defining the strategy and tactics of the ongoing black liberation struggle and how it might prefigure and trigger a second American revolution” (16). Revolutionary presses promoted action, developed strategies for it, and published art that gave the need for such action a human voice. In contrast, the counter-cultural presses focused on the establishment of a new culture, a youth culture in most cases, that would restructure people’s sensibilities, allowing for difference. The counter-cultural presses, more generally, were abstract, and since few of the writers were auto workers or relied on such work for their daily survival, they remained detached from the concrete struggles of Detroit’s industrial life.

In the poetry of Detroit’s underground presses, I get a different sense of the 1960s than when reading the books of Philip Levine, for instance. His poetry has the quality of authority, of a history that has convincingly been *made*. The other music, noise, and various intersecting cultural interactions of the city would have remained too much in the periphery had I focused only on Levine, only on a few established poets. What the

Detroit underground poetry of the late 1960s reveals is an ability to accept contingency and indeterminacy and to fight for one's continued right for self-expression. Indeed, it is a legacy of freedom, of finding one's way in a world of conflicting information, political agendas, and social expectations.

In the final section, I take a closer look at the reaction of the underground presses to the dominant social order in Detroit. This order was founded on the idea of work as a means of production, control, and socio-economic fulfillment. This cultural order, with the social practices defining it, serves as a point of convergence for many of the issues that undermined the belief that Detroit was the "model" of effective race relations in the late 1960s.

Chapter 3

Waiting in Detroit: Work and the Underground Press

I first saw Detroit when my family and I attended a twilight double-header at Tiger Stadium late in the summer of 1983. Driving on I-75 south of the 696 interchange, I noticed that Detroit appeared to be a collection of homes, churches, and factories that barely managed to break the horizon. For this reason, Jonathan Sugrue and others have referred to Detroit as a low-rise city, thereby differentiating it from high-rise cities, such as New York and Los Angeles. If you have never been there, then imagine the sprawling auto factories stretching on for acres intersected by expressways and railroad tracks. Imagine the ingenuity used to build noise-reduction walls and the sunken or elevated road and railway foundations necessary to separate this industrialized space from the city's "better" neighborhoods. Imagine the sinking feeling of this fragmentation, this discontinuity between areas devoted to work and those devoted to the home. As we drove through the bisected neighborhoods of Highland Park, I noticed acres of asphalt and parking lots full of shiny new cars surrounded by large metal buildings with broken windows that seemed to leer, in a gaped-toothed fashion, at the history that was written on Detroit's urban surfaces. Piles of slag, scrap metal, ball bearings, and tires remained as ugly reminders of the auto industry's susceptibility to economic fluctuations. Such discarded objects represented the nature of Detroit's social currency, in which the marginalized, the forgotten took on a palpable value. The city was transected by contradictions, such as those represented in the poetry of Philip Levine, and emerged after the riot of 1967 as a rough patchwork of fragmented representations. Detroit contained

the visions and delusions of Diego Rivera, Levine, John Sinclair, Dudley Randall, John Watson, the *South End*, and the *Inner City Voice (ICV)*, all of which mingled to define the sense of waiting, of deferment that characterized Detroit's urban environment. Central to these visions was *work*, which I consider here to be a practical theory of everyday life, a perspective through which notions of the body and the mind continue to be composed and revised. The underground presses attempted to counter the negative aspects of work, seeking to turn disenfranchisement into a form of communal identification and power.

Working

"Hard Work Pass It On" asserts a recent social service commercial produced by The Foundation for a Better Life. In the opening scene of this commercial introduces the viewer to two African-American boys who in the process of building a brick wall. They refuse sports and the company of their friends in order to complete the wall and gain, through these sacrifices, their father's acceptance. The commercial concludes with the father, still stern-faced, proclaiming, "Now don't ever tell me there's anything you can't do." The boys smile with their heads humbly averted in respect and modest pride. Airing during afternoon cartoons, this commercial is intended to inspire an appreciation for work in the viewer and, I assume, his parents (images of women are all but absent from this commercial).⁵⁹ One of the commercial's underlying assumptions is that inner-city, and primarily African-American, children, whom social analysts have found often lack the guidance of a male parent, can be delivered from the ills of the inner-city ghetto by

⁵⁹Near the middle of the commercial, the mother of the boys gazes up at her husband, who is watching the boys work. His expression is one of guarded anxiety.

working hard for someone else's sake.⁶⁰ However, the commercial's idealized message, that hard work is morally right, has little to do with the reality of work and the kinds of competition and ambition that characterize its morality. Yet a more striking implication of this message is what the building of a wall suggests. Walls symbolize respect for the property and privacy of one's neighbors and express an appreciation of the social benefits to be gained by isolation. The wall the boys are building separates them from their surrounding community, suggesting that work does not create community (which we might think if the friends had stayed to work with the boys), but is instead a means of social separation requiring the erection of distinct boundaries between this community (which might lead the boys astray) and the boys' more communal desires. One interpretation of this message is that the body, presumed to be self-destructive if left to follow its own urges, and the intellect, presumed to require the discipline of hard work to remain healthy, are perceived as irreconcilable. The implications of such boundaries shape our understanding of the relation between work, the city, and its residents.

To further delineate these urban relationships, I investigate further the relationship between the mind and the body. Stephen Priest, for instance, discusses the evolution of the boundary between the mind or intellect and the body in *Theories of the Mind*. This relationship is referred to as dualism, which Priest defines as

the theory that two and only two kinds of substance exist: minds and physical objects. A mind is a purely mental, non-material or spiritual substance, and a

⁶⁰Several studies have addressed this topic. Two examples include David Blankenhorn's 1995 study, *Fatherlessness America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem*; and the Committee on Labor and Human Resources's 1996 report, *Encouraging Responsible Fatherhood: Hearing on Children and Families*.

physical object is a purely material, non-mental, spatially extended substance. It logically follows that no mind is a physical object and no physical object is a mind. A person, on the dualist account, comprises both a mind and a body, but most dualists maintain that a person is *essentially* his or her mind but only *contingently* his or her body or, to put it another way, a person is his or her mind but a person *has* or *owns* his or her body. It follows that if a person's body should cease to exist it is logically possible that that person should continue to exist; but if a person's mind should cease to exist, then that person necessarily ceases to exist. In principle, minds may exist without bodies and bodies may exist without minds. (1)

Dualists perceive this relationship as a natural part of human consciousness. But as Priest points out, this bifurcation can be thought of in many ways: "Some dualists think casual relations hold between mind and body[. . .]. Some dualists hold that events in minds are simultaneous with events in bodies [. . .]" (3). What Priest does not address in his survey is how the environment, such as that experienced at work, conditions the perception of the mind-body split. For instance, labor before machines, even though slower and in some cases more difficult, involved a closer relationship between the worker's imagination, intelligence, and body. In the case of quilting, for instance, the quilter had to imagine and design a pattern and chose the desired fabric. The quilter also needed to have acquired the knowledge to perform the quilting stitches to combine the two layers of fabric around the cotton stuffing, and finally had to have the physical ability to perform all of the necessary manipulations required to complete the quilt. In this example of work, mental events lead to a physical result; however, in modern industrial work this

relationship is denied and the body is no longer involved in creating that which the mind imagines. This condition causes a sense of fragmentation that defines the modern (and postmodern) urban condition. In *The Postmodern Condition*, David Harvey calls attention to the machine's role in this fragmentation: "Intelligence (knowledge, science, technique) is objectified in the machine, thus separating manual from mental labour and diminishing the application of intelligence on the part of direct producers" (105).

Whether or not we think of work as the central activity in our lives, it nonetheless continues to be perceived as an ethical prerequisite. Throw a dart at the history of the struggle between politics and labor, from the debates between federalists and anti-federalists to the current arguments concerning soft-money contributions, and you will find labor, either organized or not, playing a major role in the creation (or manifestation) of America's "destiny." Influenced by this myth, people perceived unemployment, welfare programs, and other forms of economic assistance as a degradation of America's moral character, a kind of corruption that could only lead to crime, poverty, and the sins both encouraged. However, the creation of jobs and a company's responsibility to ensure its stability have rarely been questioned by the government. Why, for instance, is corporate "downsizing" allowed to go unchecked? Why is a company allowed to cause extreme hardship in the lives of its workers in order to maintain its profit margin? The answer, of course, is found in the accepted, and apparently natural, social models developed through economics. Would it not be worse, for example, for a company to go out of business rather than simply laying off a few thousand workers to ensure "optimal" operating conditions? In *Roger and Me*, Michael Moore vividly illustrates that this kind of instrumental logic can have dire consequences for society. A better option might be to

change society or the model of market capitalism in order to ensure lifelong employment, which would then ensure lifelong economic support. Yet conventional wisdom says that “good” Americans can find jobs, can make fortunes, and can pull themselves up from their bootstraps and force history to bow to their (un)common persistence. Throughout American history, the *idea* of work has been represented with the simplicity of such fairy tales, which even today belie the true complexities of work.

Philip Levine, perhaps the most popular and prolific Detroit poet of the twentieth century, provides a portrait of work in Detroit during the late 1960s. An examination his portrait can, in large part, help us understand the reactions observed in the city’s underground presses. I begin my analysis of Levine with Diego Rivera’s mural depicting Detroit’s auto industry. He finished painting this mural on the walls of the Detroit Institute of Art in 1933. Juxtaposing this mural with Levine’s poetry helps define some of the essential criteria that characterized work in Detroit during the late 1960s (see Figure 6).

When searching for a model to help him translate his work experiences into poetry, Levine discovered Rivera’s mural. As he recounts in *The Bread of Time*, Levine was especially moved by the panels that depicted “the making of an automobile at Ford’s River Rouge empire” (142). This mural provides a commentary on the nature of work in Detroit during the 1930s. According to Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, the mural “became familiar to the people of the Motor City throughout the years, and radicals were especially fond of using them in their literature” (*Detroit* 111). In accordance with such radical sympathies, Rivera’s mural might be taken to suggest that working-class identity is defined by the harmonious relationship between man and machine, both involved in a

mutually fulfilling process—the making of an automobile. Each appear healthy and intent upon his labors, a productive player in the industrial world. However, Levine provides a

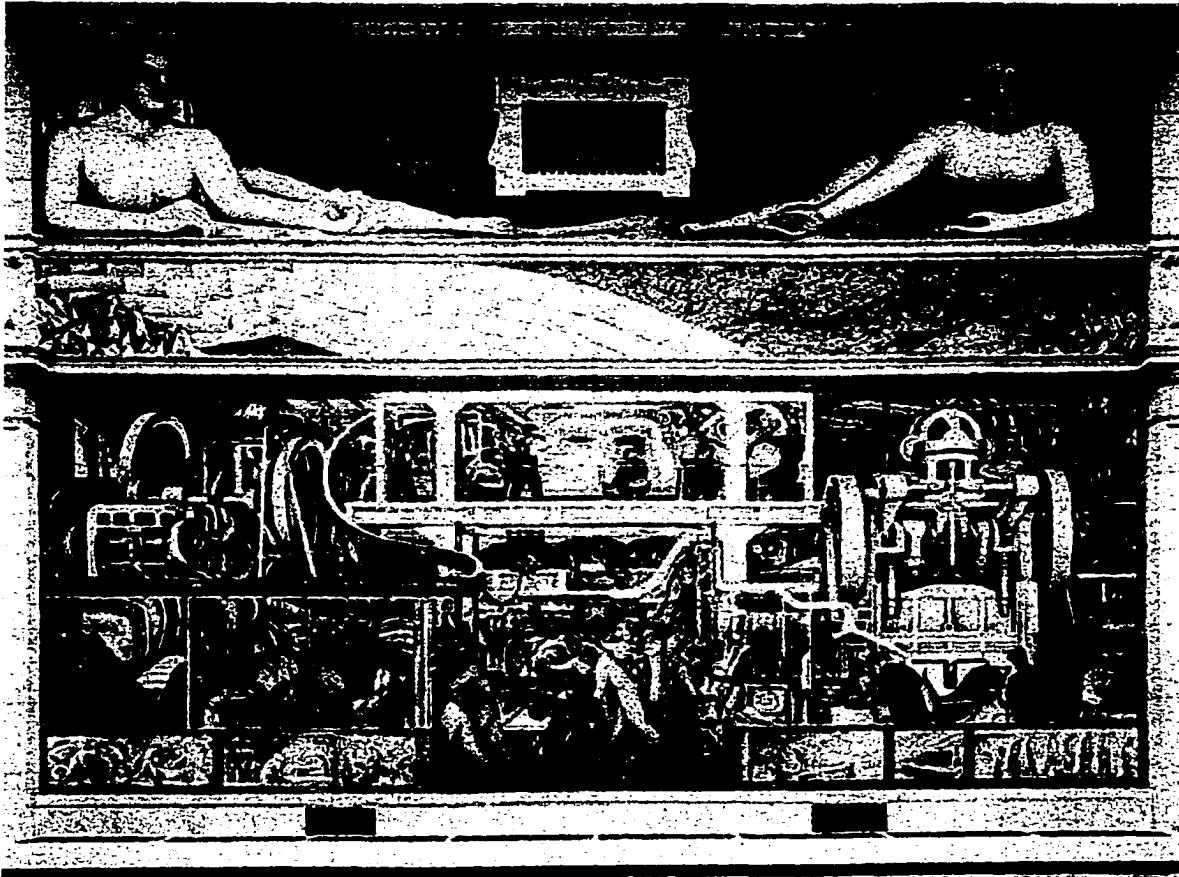


Figure 6. A panel of Diego Rivera's mural "Detroit Industry or Man and Machine," covering the south wall of the Detroit Institute of Art (*Virtual Web Museum*).

critique of this interpretation, stating that

from a distance the frescoes were a miracle of design that left me breathless. As the weeks passed I began to discover why [Rivera's] images were not helping me with my poetry. As I drew closer I found the bodies beautiful, their gestures like those of dancers as they moved in concert, and although their faces were often averted, turned away from the eye of the beholder as though shamed by peonage, those I could see were calm, dignified, and concentrated upon their tasks. The

bodies tended to be elongated, the limbs long and slender, turning on their narrow waists as they lifted in unison. And the tones, dominated by warm earth colors, were wrong, far brighter and more vivid than those of the actual world I knew. When I closed my eyes I saw it all in black and white, black men and white men and white fire. And the actual bodies I knew were otherwise, so heavily muscled they seemed earthbound like Blake's Newton, perhaps made of earth, certainly thickened with earth and the metals of the earth (*Bread* 143).⁶¹

Yet Rivera's mural can also be seen as a glorification of the working man—that beating heart of the proletariat.⁶² The panel above suggests that there is a quiet glory to work that is expressed in a community of men (you will notice), struggling stoically to create one of the defining machines of the twentieth century. However, notice that there is no completed automobile prominently displayed as a symbol of the worker's achievement; instead, it is the workers and their labor--those graceful gesturing men Levine mentions—that are memorialized in Rivera's mural. The camaraderie and communal relationships that arise out of constructing the automobile are key to Rivera's vision of work. Perhaps Rivera sees work as redemptive, thus explaining the use of "earth colors"--such as yellow, white, green, and red—and the bright and homogeneous portrayal of the factory's working environments.

⁶¹As Levine points out, Rivera's panels were frescos, meaning that he applied his paint onto wet plaster.

⁶²In 1938, Rivera collaborated with André Breton in the composition of "Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art," which was published in the *Partisan Review* and republished in 1967 in the first issue of *Guerrilla*. In this manifesto they state that "the opposition of writers and artists is one of the forces which can usefully contribute to the discrediting and overthrow of regimes which are destroying, along with the right of the proletariat to aspire to a better world, every sentiment of nobility and [. . .] human dignity" ("Manifesto" 6).

The other reason for Rivera's choice of color and composition is technical. In order to create contrasts and illuminate specific figures from the painting surface, Rivera needed to use complementary tones in order to emphasize the mural's different shapes. The color compliment of red, for instance, is green; the complement of the color yellow is violet. Rivera's use of contrasting tones directs the viewer's eye to the bottom center of the panel. Notice that the left and right sides of the panel are a blue-violet color while the center scene is yellow, directing the viewer's gaze. The activity in this section is unified, seemingly choreographed as it might be in a Ford promotional video, around the production of the automobile. In this scene raw materials, such as the iron and steel chassis and axles, are the bridge between man and machine, both bound to the shaping of a consumable and consuming product.⁶³ This section seems to support the contention that work can be redemptive: Labor is elevated above the black and white images Levine recalls, those "black men and white men and white fire." This apocalyptic vision recedes and light illuminates those men "made of" and "thickened with earth." This scene suggest a pastoral hopefulness, a faith in the consolation of the socialist muse, as it was with Lenin, Stalin, and Mao.

To gain a complete sense of the above panel and what it says about work, it is necessary to examine its darker margins, those drearier sections of the panel composed in cooler tones of blue, gray, and violet. These tones accentuate the dominance of the large machines that emerge in lighter colors from the margins like cumbersome skeletons, dead

⁶³In literature portraying industrial labor—most markedly that produced in the early years of America's industrial revolution, such as Rebecca Harding Davis's "Life in the Iron Mills"—raw material or by-products of the industrial process often take on human form while machines are often personified.

phantoms, from industry's noisy past. The labor represented in the panel revolves around these machines, the prominence of which suggests a kind of totalitarianism or religious fervor. Henry Adams describes this disconcerting relationship between religion and technology in *The Education of Henry Adams* when he writes about the "dynamo and the virgin": "As [Adams] grew accustomed to the great gallery of machines, he began to feel the forty-foot dynamos as a moral force, much as the early Christians felt the Cross" (380). Yet Rivera's machines are not dynamos turning for Adams's entertainment, but are central to capitalist production and, as such, are in collusion with the plant's management, who appear to be shaking hands in the lower right corner of the panel. This image suggests that both the workers and the machines are resources devoted to the same end, technological progress. As the title of the mural, "Detroit Industry or Man and Machine," suggests, the machine, its gears as large as the panel's human figures, is merging with the bodies around it to produce materials that the world can consume, to the apparent joy of management. Labor, the body's most conspicuous product, is consumed by the power of the machine and in this way the body becomes, in essence, another of the machine's gears.

Although overstating this aspect of Rivera's mural in *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, Georgakas and Surkin interpret Rivera's panels in pro-revolutionary terms, investing the static, mute images with barely submerged revolutionary emotions:

The main panels are montages in which machines hover like robot monsters, spewing forth flames and poisonous gases, as workers with glaring eyes, and curses under their breath, labor before hostile foremen and plant visitors. Sharp, almost cartoon-like insets ridicule Henry Ford, while small details such as red

stars on a glove and a handwritten WE WANT on a workman's paper cap emphasize Rivera's revolutionary perspective. (111)

Georgakas and Surkin are projecting their own ideas onto the characters Rivera created. Yet Rivera (I am sure) would not have objected too much, if at all, to this kind of appropriation. He was certainly sympathetic to the difficulties of Detroit's working class, as he was to the struggles of the working class in Mexico and around the world. The difference between Georgakas's and Surkin's dogmatically positive and Levine's negative response to Rivera's mural reveals that Levine was not devoted to radical or revolutionary change, but saw his role in writing about Detroit differently than one might expect given the years he spent as a factory worker in Detroit: "I became a factory worker at the age of fourteen during World War II when anybody in Detroit could get a job" (*Don't* 112).

Levine's memories of his work experiences lead him to define work differently from how Rivera did, even if upon closer analysis their representations seem to converge. The primary difference between his vision and that of Rivera's is that Levine does not tend to portray work as redemptive, as if it might save the working class from the economic and political exclusions that trouble the capitalist system. Yet, and this is a subtle but important distinction, Levine does find in the images of work people struggling to save themselves, their loved ones, and those they work with; he finds people trying to imagine a better life. As often as not their efforts are thwarted and work erases them from memory, but the effort, like an resonant afterimage, remains. Hard work alone, that enduring puritan ethic of deferment, is insufficient in itself to assure redemption.

These sentiments, as seen in Levine's poetry, are provided, or in some cases

denied, by the dynamic of the family: In “What Work Is” a worker is unable to offer his brother a simple gesture of love “because he does not know what work is”; in “Starlight” a father offers his boy “the promises / of autumn, until the boy slept / never to waken in that world again”; in “Listen Carefully” the narrator rubs “hand cream into the bruises” of his sister’s shoulders and imagines that the simple gesture might be enough (*Selected* 18, 161; *Simple* 59). But these acts of salvation are as often as not recognitions of salvation’s limitations. The gestures ultimately seem hollow; they seem to have little effect on the characters’ material realities. The pain, fear, and disillusionment remains; yet so does the will to continue, the desire to remain. As a self-proclaimed anarchist, Levine does not see revolution (or religion for that matter) as a means of reaching some glorious new age of equality and prosperity for the working class. Instead, he finds in the humanity of laborer images of salvation and of himself and those he has known. In Levine’s poetry no space acts as a refuge from the degradation and desperation sometimes associated with factory work. However, if there are any instances of salvation in his poems, then they are expressed in the act communicating one’s experience, creating art, writing poetry, painting, naming those who might otherwise disappear from our cultural memory.

However, he does not perceive his recovery of these voices to be all that political (although he does not deny the political potential of this act [*Don’t* 98]). In the preface to *Don’t Ask*, a collection of his interviews, he describes the politics that inform his writing as “unspeakably boring”:

I recall one question that went, “So you worked in automobile factories not to form cadres of the working class.” And I answered, “I did it for the money.” That

was a high point of the interview since for the most part in those sentences we were speaking English. Let me be clear. When I refer to myself as an anarchist I do not mean to invoke the image of a terrorist or even a man who would burn the deed to his house because “property is theft,” which I happen to believe is true. I don’t believe in the validity of governments, laws, charters, all that hide us from our essential oneness. “We are put on earth a little space,” Blake wrote, “that we may learn to bear the beams of love.” And so in my poems I memorialize those men and women who struggled to bear that love. I don’t believe in victory in my lifetime. I’m not sure I believe in victory at all, but I do believe in the struggle and preserving the names and natures of those who fought, for their sakes, for my sake, and for those who come after. (xi)

Salvation is achieved, again if at all, by claiming one’s identity, one’s name, out of history. This is an act, according to Levine, that cannot be mediated by the church or a government; it is a difficult, confusing, and personal act. He sums up this idea of salvation in terms of dissent at the end of the preface: “If what Gabriel Celaya wrote is true, that ‘*Poesia es un arma cargada de futuro*’ (Poetry is a weapon loaded with the future), then perhaps I too fought” (xii). Although I find it difficult to think of poetry as any kind of weapon, it nonetheless does provide a means of opposing those images that we feel deny our humanity, by which I mean our ability to appreciate ourselves, others, and the world.

What Work Is

Stylistically, Levine’s narrative form reveals his careful use of language and

choice of details, which are elements that give his poems their philosophical and emotional depth. Most of his poems about Detroit, similar to Carl Sandburg's poems about Chicago, can be read as vignettes of everyday working life in the city. Taken as a whole, this book delves into the silences left by Detroit's working-class inhabitants, who, for one reason or another, remained mutely reflected in the city's history; they appeared as images in old photographs of the shop floor or vaguely populating the background of the city's art. The literary "silences" caused by the "twelve-hour-day, six-day work week," as Tillie Olsen describes them, define those that worked among the city's drop forges, die presses, parking lots, slag heaps, and neighborhoods: those African Americans, Jews, Poles, Germans, and Chaldeans who found themselves employed in the "meanest and dirtiest jobs" (*Silences* 10; Sugrue 95). Because they worked too much or never learned to write, these laborers never told their stories and, therefore, needed Levine's *The Names of the Lost* or *What Work Is*, Sandburg's *Chicago Poems*, and Olsen's *Tell Me a Riddle* to give presence and persistence to their experiences. "Among these [kinds of silences]," Olsen states, are "the mute inglorious Miltons: those whose waking hours are all struggle for existence; the barely educated; the illiterate; women. Their silence the silence of centuries as to how life was, is, for most of humanity" (10).

Ironically, silence and inaction turn out to be products of work. The title poem of *What Work Is*, for instance, illustrates aspects of such silences, which are central to understanding the relationship between work and the social and emotional realities of Detroit's inner-city inhabitants.

We stand in the rain in a long line
 waiting at Ford Highland Park. For work.

You know what work is—if you're
 old enough to read this you know what
 work is, although you may not do it.
 Forget you. This is about *waiting*,
 shifting from one foot to another. (emphasis added) (*Work* 18)

This poem is framed by the story of two brothers living and working in Detroit. The theme woven through this narrative is that of “waiting”: waiting in line; waiting to get work, “shifting from one foot to the another”; waiting for the activities of daily life to take on some significance, some value; waiting to affect some change. (Levine states that one reason he wrote was to save the city: “One of the earliest motives in my writing [. . .] was an effort to slow down this voracious eating of time of everything that I cared for. I hope to preserve some image, a verbal image. I didn’t have the power to preserve any other kind of image” [*Don’t* 62]). Technically, Levine establishes this mood of waiting, which also suggests a kind of deferral on the part of those lined up outside the gate, through the use of complete sentences and enjambment. His nine-beat lines run on, and the stresses of the catalectic lines give the poem a stuttering rhythm.⁶⁴ This rhythm resembles the methodical movements of a machine and the clipped speech that has often been used, rightly and wrongly, to characterize the speech patterns of factory workers, who thump each syllable for emphasis as they breathlessly proceed (stress, stress, breath). Further illustrating the significance of this rhythm, I have heard Levine read this poem

⁶⁴Levine’s poem is not easy to scan. Each line seems to begin and end with a stressed syllable, suggesting a trochaic foot. The unstressed syllable in the fifth and final foot is dropped, thus suggesting a catalectic line.

and was surprised to find that he does pay close attention to its line breaks, which I had previously felt were incidental to the poem's meaning. Upon closer analysis, I can see the interplay between the poem's rhythm and the story it tells. Placing emphasis on the final syllable causes the narrative to feel disjointed in that the first and last words of each line tend to hold a disproportionate amount of the poem's meaning. As a result, the reader's attention is pulled to the margins, de-emphasizing the poem's interior. This perception is caused in part by the manner in which people read. As Joseph Williams points out in *Style*, people tend to expect old or "contextual" information in the first part of the sentence and new and important information at the end (74-76). The contextual information defines this new information. Because of this tendency, Levine's poetry reads more like prose than poetry, maintaining the logic of the sentence and the continuity of the complete thought, rather than relying on the relationships between the poetic line. Yet, given the subtleties to which poets are often accustomed, this quality might be one of Levine's strengths. Seemingly insignificant words (or details), such as "It" and "you're," provide a contrast to the repetition of "waiting" and "work," which recur in the poem's stress positions. The subjects and predicates of the sentence are juxtaposed to build a poetic structure. The partitioning of what is in effect a complete thought creates disjunction and a subdued quietness—a sense of waiting. The reader, proceeding from line to line, waits for the idea to be revealed. The eventual assertion, then, seems anti-climatic, and I find myself captivated by the small details that emerge in the process of reading the fractured sentence.

When listening closely to Levine read this poem, I noticed that "waiting" and "work," so prominent in these first seven lines, are established as the dominant subplot

(and subtext) of the poem, one idea seeming to inform the other (waiting is work and work is waiting). (Personally, I remember that while working for the Clare County Road Commission after high school a heavy machinery operator explained to me that most of the jobs around the “barn” required “hurrying up to wait.”)

Ironically, the dominance of “waiting” (of the tense silence and awkwardness inherent in it) in an otherwise productive city seems almost more than the brothers of Levine’s poem can bear. And the question is what does remaining in this state (of mind) cause? Stagnation, frustration, anxiety, all of which combine to create a sense of emptiness, a sense of absurdity or existentialism. The absurdity suggested by the act of “waiting” (the antithesis of production) seems to shape their lives:

Feeling the light rain falling like mist
 into your hair, blurring your vision
 until you think you see your own brother
 ahead of you, maybe ten places.

You rub your glasses with your fingers,
 and of course it’s someone else’s brother,
 narrower across the shoulders than
 yours but with the same sad slouch, the grin
 that does not hide the stubbornness,
 the sad refusal to give in to
 rain, to the hours wasted waiting,
 to the knowledge that somewhere ahead
 a man is waiting who will say, “No,

we're not hiring today," for any
reason he wants.[. . .] (18)

Levine casts the reader in the role of one of the brothers, which is the role of the poet, perhaps of Levine himself. "You" *know* this reader and are both the witness to and motivation for the emotions of the characters in Levine's morality play, the moral of which can be summed up by Levine's assertion that "you don't know what work is." Even though the use of the second person is sometimes an overused (by which I mean under-thought) rhetorical gimmick, I think it works in this instance. The personal nature of the poem makes the invitation to self-identification more valid and increases the likelihood that the poem will enact its moral message about the role of work in society. For an example of a typical reader's response I will use myself. When I read this poem, I often think of my own brother. Being six years older, he left town when I was still in middle school. For several years, I watched him struggle against bureaucracies, work, and the expectations of productivity. Sure, he was lazy or maybe just confused, trying to find someone who would assure him (by paying him) that he was good at something. Then, when faced with my own slide toward mediocrity, I decided to checkout, to leave my job at a bank in Detroit. My inability to conform, to write myself into the banking environment, left me certain that I was about to be fired or left in one of those gray cubicles writing mortgage brochures and procedures for the rest of my life.

Before we continue, a brief biographical note will help inform my interpretation of the next section of the poem. Levine has an older brother, who once studied German

and the operas of Richard Wagner (1813-1883).⁶⁵ Also, Levine's family is Jewish, and Wagner's music was a favorite of Adolf Hitler, who played it during some of the Nazi rallies that appear, for instance, in the propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*. These facts give depth to the emotions Levine is representing in the following section.

[. . .] You love your brother,
 now suddenly you can hardly stand
 the love flooding you for your brother,
 who's not beside you or behind or
 ahead because he's home trying to
 sleep off a miserable night shift
 at Cadillac so he can get up
 before noon to study his German.
 Works eight hours a night so he can sing
 Wagner, the opera you hate most,
 the worst music ever invented. (18)

It is important to realize that Wagner's writings about art were attempts to fashion German folklore into a basis for a nationalist aesthetic. Lili Elyon, for instance, points out in "The Controversy over Richard Wagner," written for the *Jewish Virtual Library*, that these writings were anti-Semitic. She states that

in a tractate, *Das Judenthum in der Musik*, first published in 1850 under a pseudonym in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Wagner wrote that Jewish music is

⁶⁵Levine mentions his older brother in an interview with Glover Davis and Dennis Saleh (*Don't* 7).

bereft of all expression, characterized by coldness and indifference, triviality and nonsense. The Jew, he claimed, has no true passion to impel him to artistic creation. The Jewish composer, according to Wagner, makes a confused heap of the forms and styles of all ages and masters. To admit a Jew into the world of art results in pernicious consequences. In *Deutsche Kunst und Deutsche Politik*, Wagner spoke of the “harmful influence of Jewry on the morality of the nation,” adding that the subversive power of Jewry stands in contrast to the German psyche.

Thus, the brother’s study of Wagner and his singing of that most hated opera, which might be a reference to *Der Ring Des Nibelungen*, seem to be a form of self-deprecation or self-denial. This question quickly follows: Is such self-dissolution a consequence of working within an economic system that misrepresents the cultural memory of its workers; that allows work to become, for the sake of efficiency and profit, grounds for cultural amnesia?

Throughout Detroit’s industrial history, Jews, blacks, Chaldeans and other minority racial groups found themselves turned down or passed over for the “best” jobs in Detroit’s automobile, brewing, building, and municipal service industries. Many minorities, primarily blacks, according to Jonathan Sugrue in *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, were consistently relegated to “the meanest and dirtiest jobs” within these industries, such as painting car bodies, picking up trash, or fueling the forge (95-105). The characters in Levine’s poetry, as we see with “your” brother in “What Work Is,” are often shaped by these institutionalized forms of control. Waiting for work at a plant gate can be seen, then, as a symptom of such mechanisms, whether discriminatory or

otherwise. For example, in his analysis of the variation in black employment in Detroit's auto plants during the 1950s and 60s, Sugrue provides the context for the narrator's (or "your") experience of waiting:

Why the variation? The answer can be found in large part in the discretion that company officials exercised at the hiring gate. Within the automobile companies, hiring practices were decentralized, leading to wide variations in black employment from plant to plant. Often the whim of a single plant manager or entrenched practice in a particular factory limited black opportunities in certain plants. [. . .] The lack of oversight in hiring practices meant that personnel managers in individual plants could establish arbitrary criteria for the hiring and upgrading of minorities. (97-8)⁶⁶

Waiting contains the emotional tension caused by these arbitrary criteria, by the lack of rationally or universally determined rules for many of the city's industrial employment practices, such as hiring.

The arbitrariness and discontinuity that seemed to rule Detroit after the 1967 riot caused anxiety, fear, and anger in many of the city's communities, making even the simplest gestures of community (of contentment) difficult. The simplest acts of love or friendship were made impossible by the individuals' and the companies' unwillingness or inability to define work, to make it a comfortable part of city life and, therefore, of the larger community:

How long has it been since you told him

⁶⁶Sugrue is interpreting statistics from the United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Hearings Held in Detroit, Michigan, December 14-15, 1960*. 63-65.

you loved him, held his wide shoulders,
 opened your eyes wide and said those words,
 and maybe kissed his cheek? You've never
 done something so simple, so obvious,
 not because you're too young or too dumb,
 not because you're jealous or even mean
 or incapable of crying in
 the presence of another man, no,
 just because you don't know what work is. (18-9)

The ability to define the boundaries of work is one essential to the continuity of a community. For example, rural farm communities had (and to some extent still have) rather specifically defined social roles that ensured and limited the number and kinds of social opportunities. Yet one's life was clearly contextualized from birth. Of course if someone opposed those roles that person might be ostracized. Today, in extreme cases, such people are defined as psychotic, sociopathic, or immature. While mindful of such drawbacks, we need to recognize that work can create bonds between different people, those with different culture backgrounds, by defining a common goal toward which they can work.

Sometimes this goal is war, in which victory against an identifiable aggressor-demon is hoisted as a communal destiny. The First and Second World Wars benefited Detroit both economically and socially (to some extent and for some people). During the Second World War, for example, Detroit was known as the "Arsenal of Democracy," a phrase which Sugrue explains:

Detroit's automobile manufacturers, led by Ford, quickly converted their assembly lines to the mass production of military hardware, airplanes, tanks, and other vehicles, making metropolitan Detroit one of the birthplaces of the military-industrial complex. Observers christened the city "Detroit the Dynamic," the "arsenal of democracy" for a war torn world (19).

Between the wars and during the depression, Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal led to work programs that provided these kinds of social roles and community-oriented goals. Work was, according to the logic of the New Deal, a social policy (as it is presented to be in the commercial produced by The Foundation for a Better Life) creating a physically committed America that might help move the country out of its economic problems while helping simultaneously helping Americans forget their hardships.

Yet what is this idea of work? Does a sense of waiting permeate it, turning people's everyday lives into a perpetual deferral of their "selves"? Is it "bad" to see work as that activity that one pursues to make life possible, to see it as other than, as outside of, or as incidental to a person's individual identity? I have often heard people refer to work as an unfortunate means to an end (you work and then you die, so goes the answer to the question "what is the meaning of life?"). Often, this activity is not seen as a form of self-expression nor is it considered to be integral in the formation of identity. I have wondered how this sense of work originated. Of course, this sense does not exist everywhere and in every type of work; however, it is prevalent enough to cause curiosity and concern.

In explaining the detached attitude toward hourly or industrial work, many might point to Taylorism, Fordism, automation, and "scientific management" as contributing

causes in that they turned skilled labor and one's sense of purpose in the creation of a product into a fragmented, monotonous task. In this context, labor is no longer an expression of (say) my skill, but is rather a repetitive activity that removes me from the means of production or an appreciation of my role in the final product. In such a case, I am reduced to a tool being used to create only a portion of what another person has envisioned, often in his or her leisure. And I might never really discover what work is. Work, in this instance, will not provide a sense of achievement and control (which is what most people mean when they talk about "power"); instead, it will force a submissive role upon the worker. This negativity, which is so often attributed to work in Detroit during the late 1960s, can also be attributed to the impact of automation and decentralization on the stability of life in the city.

Automation and Decentralization

In Detroit during the 1960s, the auto industry played a disproportionate role in the everyday lives of the city's inhabitants. Three elements of this industry directly impacted, and indeed determined, the daily lives of those living within the city: the 40- or 54-hour work week; the union and anti-union movements; and automation and decentralization. These elements combined to shape the psychic landscape of the city. They defined the boundaries of everyday life and also altered the way people perceived their relationship to history and the future. These elements functioned like pressures that pushed people toward a predetermined fate. We might consider them in relation to the structuring of major works of urban literature. Many of them, such as *Crime and Punishment*, *Manhattan Transfer*, *The Invisible Man*, and *Native Son*, are infused with a sense of

inevitability, as if the tragedies and struggles moving the plot are beyond the means of the characters to stop or control in any significant way. The underground presses published information to counter the pressures of these elements and attempted to provide workers with ways in which to control their own fates, to live the lives they desired. In other words, they sought to undermine the dominant image of the city through oppositional representations that promoted resistance to the status quo.

Of direct significance to those working in the auto industry in the 1960s was the de-industrialization that began with the economic recession of 1958. John Sugrue states that “the 1950s marked a decisive turning point in the development of the city—a systematic restructuring of the local economy from which the city never fully recovered. [. . .] Because the auto industry was tremendously sensitive to shifts in consumer demand it weathered recessions badly. The unpredictability of demand for automobiles, especially in times of economic uncertainty, had serious ramifications for Detroit’s working class. A slight shift in interest rates or a small drop in car sales resulted in immediate layoffs. That the auto industry was especially vulnerable to economic vagaries was, however, nothing new. What was new in the 1950s was that the auto manufacturers and suppliers permanently reduced their Detroit-area work forces, closed plants, and relocated to other parts of the country” (126). The restructuring (or process of de-industrialization) Sugrue points to was characterized by two main forces: automation and decentralization.

Automation was seen as a progressive stage in the evolution of the auto industry. As Sugrue points out, “It was the most refined application of the Fordist system of production” (130). As such, it was a system partly founded on Frederick W. Taylor’s

idea of “scientific management” as detailed in his article “Scientific Management” published in 1911 and as practiced by late nineteenth and early twentieth century industrialists like Andrew Carnegie, who was famous for developing the modern steel industry. A central aim of Taylorism was the standardization of tasks. Taylor couched standardization, the foundational logic behind automation, in terms of science, which, he felt, would ease the workers’ efforts by making each task more efficient (or less skilled).

Sugrue does note that with automation the workers’ jobs did become less dangerous; however, Sugrue adds that “automation was primarily a weapon in the employers’ anti-labor arsenal.” The evolved model of task management was articulated by an automation advocate: “‘Changing times have raised the idea around Detroit’ that in the future, industrialists would look to ‘how to get the most out of machines rather than how to get the most out of people. Personnel men of the future, they say, may be automation experts’” (qtd. in Sugrue 131). This sense of automation as the salvation of an auto industry drowning under labor and production costs promised two major benefits to manufacturers: “it promised both to increase output and reduce labor costs. Chrysler executive Harry R. Bentley described the purpose of automation as the ‘optimum use of machines to produce high-volume, high-quality products at the lowest possible costs’” (130).

The desire to increase output led to the widespread replacing of workers with new machines able to handle the more dangerous and repetitive tasks more efficiently than could humans. Because of the use of machines in this way, certain job descriptions were discontinued, and some plants were shut down as companies began to consolidate production. Henry Ford II described this condition, stating that “obsolescence is the very

Hallmark of progress” (qt in Sugrue 133). What Ford II is suggesting here, perhaps unwittingly, is that not only does technology become obsolete but so may the human body. The logic of automation and subsequent decentralization of the industry placed many workers, as Ford does, in a category with other kinds of outdated resources. The result of this instrumental reasoning was the creation of a worker who, it was reasonable to believe, was easier to use as a resource that could and indeed should be shifted or discarded along with the plant’s other obsolete tools.

Along with this consolidation was the increase in the use of overtime and production speedups (what Georgakas and Surkin refer to as the 54-hour week) in an attempt to restructure the cost base of the industry. Through these means, the auto industry avoided hiring new workers by requiring those already employed to work longer hours. “Beginning in the mid-1950s,” Sugrue states, “employers began to favor the use of overtime in lieu of hiring additional workers” (141). This use of overtime was often correlated to production speedups, which led to one of the major wildcat strikes of the 1960s. Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin describe this incident in *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*: “Nine months and five days after the Great Rebellion, the work of [labor activists] Baker, Hamlin, and March bore fruit when on May 2, 1968, 4,000 workers shut down Dodge Main in the first Wildcat strike to hit that factory in 14 years. The immediate cause of the strike was speed-up and both black and white workers took part, but the driving force was the *ICV* [*Inner City Voice*] group, which now named itself the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement–DRUM” (20). In this event, we can see that the tensions in Detroit during the late 1960s were rising and workers were beginning to intensify their resistance to management. The attempt to increase output without

increasing workers led to protests against the auto executives who proposed such solutions and also against the unions, which were by the 1960s working closely to fulfill the desires of management, as described in William Serrin's book *The Company and the Union*.⁶⁷

The goal of automation, to couple increased production with reduced labor costs, drove decentralization as auto companies moved their plants out of Detroit and to places where lower wage and tax rates existed. The result of decentralization, as Sugrue and others describe it, was an urban space increasingly characterized by unemployment and economic discontent: "The movement of firms out of the city, whether spurred by government subsidies [tax relief primarily] or by market considerations, created a spatial mismatch between urban African Americans and jobs. Persistent housing discrimination combined with job flight to worsen the plight of urban blacks" (141). The process of de-industrialization fractured Detroit along racial lines, creating a city held together by the merest social threads. In an interview with Studs Terkel, Levine mentions these racial tensions as one influences on the poems collected in *They Feed They Lion*, the book of Levine's that most directly comments on the riot of 1967. The title poem "They Feed They Lion" "responds," as Levine states, "to the insurrection of 1967," revealing the industrial and emotional refuse out of which the discontented were rose (*Don't* 65):

⁶⁷Serrin describes this alliance as follows: "What the companies desire—and receive—from the union is predictability in labor relations. Forced to deal with unions, they want to deal with one union, one set of leaders, and thus they have great interest in stability within the UAW and in a continuation of union leadership. They also want to have the limits of the bargaining clearly understood and subscribed to. 'GM's position has always been, give the union the money, the least possible, but give them what it takes,' says a former negotiator. 'But don't let them take the business away from us.' The union has come to accept this philosophy as the basis of its relationship with the companies: it will get money, some changes in work procedures, usually nothing more. 'We make collective bargaining agreements,' Reuther once declared, 'not revolutions.' Both the union and the companies, a mediator says, have one major goal: 'They want to make cars at a profit'" (qt. in Sugrue 26).

Out of burlap sacks, out of bearing butter,
 Out of black bean and wet slate bread,
 Out of the acids of rage, the candor of tar,
 Out of creosote, gasoline, drive shafts, wooden dollies,
 They Lion grow.

Out of the gray hills
 Of industrial barns, out of rain, out of bus ride,
 West Virginia to Kiss My Ass, out of buried aunties,
 Mothers hardening like pounded stumps, out of stumps,
 Out of the bones' need to sharpen and the muscles' to stretch,
 They Lion grow.

Earth is eating trees, fence posts,
 Gutted cars, earth is calling in her little ones,
 "Come home, Come home!" From pig balls,
 From the ferocity of pig driven to holiness,
 From the furred ear and the full jowl come
 the repose of the hung belly, from the purpose
 They Lion grow.

From the sweet glues of the trotters
 Come the sweet kinks of the fist, from the full flower
 Of the hams the thorax of caves,
 From "Bow Down" come "Rise Up,"
 Come they Lion from the reeds of shovels,

The grained arm that pulls the hands,
 They Lion grow.

From my five arms and all my hands,
 From all my white sins forgiven, they feed,
 From my car passing under the stars,
 They Lion, from my children inherit,
 From the oak turned to a wall, they Lion,
 From they sack and they belly opened
 And all that was hidden burning on the oil-stained earth
 They feed they Lion and he comes. (*Selected* 81)

In an interview with Glover Davis and Dennis Saleh, Levine describes this poem as “a celebration of anger, which I love” (11). This poem has never seemed very angry to me, however; instead, it reveals the locally rooted nature of dissent. Many activists in late-1960s Detroit, for instance, claimed that their anger emerged from the dilapidated state of their neighborhoods. In *Violence in the Model City*, Sydney Fine describes the discontent that must have led to the 1967 riot: “Black complaints centered about the segregated existence of the city’s nonwhite population, mistreatment by merchants, the shortage of recreational facilities, the quality of education and housing available to blacks, the way the war on poverty operated in Detroit, and, most important of all, jobs and the behavior of the police” (39). So Levine writes, “Out of burlap sacks, and bearing butter/ . . . / Come the sweet kinks of the fist, from the full flower.” Whether or not Levine is celebrating the anger these conditions generated is unclear. It seems to me, however, to be more of a cautionary tale than a celebratory one, one that says, “Watch what

you discard for it might come back to eat you and 'your trees.'"

Rivera's mural and Levine's poetry present the major issues inherent in the representation of work and its role in the emotional and physical lives of Detroit's inhabitants. Consider the relationship between Wagner, Nazi socialism, and Rivera's socialist images in the panel discussed above. In many communist/socialist countries, such as Russia and China in the 1960s, the worker's body is idealized as a form of national pride. This body becomes the symbol of national purity, of working for the good of the people (or more specifically, of the people as symbolized by the proletariat or the vanguard party). Levine's inability to find in Rivera's vision a model for the expression of his own experiences is due to Levine's inability to idealize work as revolutionary or as a means to some vaguely greater good. Levine finds redemption in the everyday lives of Detroit's workers, in their struggle to define, not so much themselves, but their purpose or role in the creation of their city. "Waiting" does not represent a lack of "personality," but rather a lost sense of "purpose." Purpose, in the context of work, can be defined as that desire expressed by the actions of one's body. The absence of such a clear purpose leads to a loss of identity, which is tied to a person's sense of place, time, and community. The simple gestures of community become incidental and inconsequential. The body's actions are isolated from the expression of the intellect: work no longer requires the collaboration of the intellect and the body, and individual desire becomes deferred as the industrialized body struggles to achieve some other person's goals. This theme of fragmentation arises again and again: the intellect divided from the working body, the body isolated from the spiritual. What is the result? Harvey, as I have noted, argues that the result is the creation of a laborer who is nothing but the "'appendage' of the machine"

(105). Can the result be discussed in such terms, or does it simply describe work as a force that defines social relations?

The importance of the machine in the labor process creates an endlessly deferred sense of gratification: Workers never experience the completion of the product upon which they have labored. Langston

Hughes's well-known poem "Harlem" from *Montage of a Dream Deferred* is perhaps the most poignant expression of the relationship between "waiting," work, and the separation of the intellect from the public, working body:

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore--

and then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over--

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.



Figure 7: African-American children playing in inner-city neighborhoods during the late 1960s (Bailey 10).

Or does it explode? (268)⁶⁸

The obvious interpretation of this poem is that once dreams of equality are deferred they become a source of potential violence to both the dreamer and the oppressor (or bystander).⁶⁹ However, exploring the implications of this poem within Detroit's late-1960s industrial context—in which blacks tended to be offered only the “meanest and dirtiest jobs,” as Sugrue points out—suggests that work and the inequalities revolving around it were perhaps the most significant causes of deferred dreams.

A deferred dream is that conscious want that is stifled when someone is committed to doing the will of others and fulfilling their desires. This situation is often represented by the lone or emotionally isolated figure who is forced to deny his or her ambitions and vision of the “American dream.” Two examples of these figures in literature include Bigger Thomas and the Invisible Man, appearing in *Native Son* and *Invisible Man*, respectively. The relationship between waiting and desire illustrates the separation between the intellect (one's rational understanding of the world) and what the body (the fleshy mechanism of industrial work) does to realize that desire.

As the dualism debate suggests, this split does not only involve the individual, but also the social, as with Henry Adam's description of the relationship between the dynamo and the virgin or Thomas Friedman's more recent (but similar) distinction between the

⁶⁸In *Dancing in the Street*, Suzanne Smith describes the importance of Langston Hughes to Detroit's poetic community, especially to Margaret Danner, whose Boone House played a prominent role in encouraging black poetry within the city. She also recorded *Poets of the Revolution* with Hughes on the Motown label. This was a recording that both poets, along with the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), hoped would “bring ‘Negro Life’ to the American public, whose cultural institutions traditionally had excluded, appropriated, or ignored the contributions of black people” (95-6).

⁶⁹As Suzanne Smith notes in *Dancing in the Streets*, Hughes, who died in 1967, was an important artistic figure in Detroit during the early and mid-1960s (230).

Lexus and the Olive Tree. In these articulations of dualism, technology, such as automation, appears to be opposed to the more natural—pristine and spiritual—human body. This opposition is woven into the logic of the city’s physical space, which Harvey, in his 1990 *The Postmodern Condition*, argues has “in the last two decades” experienced a “time-space compression that has had a disorienting and disruptive impact upon political-economic practices, the balance of class power, as well as upon cultural and social life” (284). For instance, In Detroit the expressways (many of which were constructed in the 1950s and 60s) destroyed and divided the city’s traditional neighborhoods, diverting business from the downtown to the suburbs, to which many of the larger corporations and their employees had moved during the decentralization of the auto industry.

The Dividing Freeway (see Figure 8)

In the afterword to *Detroit Images*, Levine refers to John Bukowczyk and Douglas Aikenhead’s collection as “in fact a book of ruins” (257). Levine is making a subtle statement about the nature of the city and the photographs of it. He suggests that Detroit

itself is a ruin. Indeed, travelling north from Jefferson Avenue along Gratiot or Woodward Avenues reveals a city that appears to be more of a ruin than a city of trees and churches, as Bukowczyk and Aikenhead claim in the poem that introduces the collection. However, these ruins have a deeper significance, as Levine suggests in his apocalyptic interpretation of the city's images: "A war was fought here. American capitalism, armed with greed, racism, and the design for the world's gaudiest fish-tailed Cadillac, took on the land, the air, and the people, and we all lost. . . . I suppose we



Figure 8. "I-75 (Fisher Freeway) from Cass Avenue overpass facing east, Detroit, June 18, 1985" (Bukowczyk and Aikenhead 217). I-75 was built over Hastings Avenue, which was once a cultural center of Detroit's black community.

should be thankful we have no aerial photographs, for they might very well remind us of Dresden after the firebombing or the dental X-rays of a Depression kid like myself" (257). As Levine points out, the city seems empty, even devastated, because many of its

once distinct ethnic communities have relocated to the suburbs, been destroyed by urban renewal projects, or been condemned to suffer in an abyss of economic hardship year after year. The inability of Detroit's inner-city neighborhoods to reform is in part due to the expressways that in many cases destroyed them. These freeways, as Mike Davis describes them in "Fortress Los Angeles: the Militarization of Urban Space," fragmented traditional black and other inner-city communities by destroying the businesses and cultural districts that had once helped hold them together (*Variations* 154-60).

As with most large cities, Detroit is a place transected and divided by freeways and the needs of mass transit and commuters. Over the years, it has been segmented into four major sections by I-75 (the Chrysler Freeway), US-10 (The John Lodge Freeway) and I-96 (the Jeffries Freeway), all of which destroyed several traditional neighborhoods and pulled commerce from the remaining neighborhoods out to the suburban malls. Marsha L. Mickens, the daughter of Aretha Franklin's record producer, Joe Von Battle, articulates this sense of emptiness in her recollection about the loss of Hastings Street, which had been the cultural focal point of the Paradise Valley and Black Bottom neighborhoods.⁷⁰

[My father] walked me across the street . . . to this gigantic pit that was in the ground. It looked like a canyon to me. He looked at me and said, . . . " This is where Hastings used to be." All my life, as a little girl, I didn't know what that was. I just had this memory of this pit. As I got older, I realized that it was the

⁷⁰According to Jonathan Sugrue, many southern blacks moved into these neighborhoods during the Great Migration, which continued with breaks from after the civil war until the end of the second world war.

initial diggings for the I-75 Freeway. What my father so graphically understood and expressed with that sentence was that a way of life had been totally destroyed by the Chrysler Freeway. The street of Hastings just no longer existed . . . people talk about how Hastings was destroyed purposeful. That has always been scuttlebutt within the community. The white man decided to get rid of Hastings because the community was becoming too strong . . . It was very purposeful and destroyed the infrastructure of the people in that area. (qtd. in Smith 46)

As Aikenhead states in the introductory comments to his photographs, Detroit's "freeways," such as I-75, were part of the urban "ecosystem that undercut the vitality of the core city, changed the definition and organization of urban space, and reshaped people's culture and day-to-day lives. An avenue to the suburbs, the freeway gave access to the posturban world" (213). How did these freeways reshape day-to-day cultural experience? Since many of these freeways destroyed or divided neighborhoods and became a symbol of the city's deindustrialization, the sense of the city changed from a location of being-in-place to one of being-in-motion. Jonathan Sugrue suggest the significance of this movement away from the core city:

The process of industrial decline had other far-reaching consequences. It imperiled Detroit's fiscal base. As jobs left the city, so too did white workers with the means to move to suburbs or small towns where factories relocated. Wealthier whites also followed investments outward. As a result, Detroit's population began an unbroken downward fall in the 1950s. As Detroit's population shrank, it also grew poorer and blacker. Increasingly, the city became the home for the dispossessed, those marginalized in the housing market, in

greater peril of unemployment, most subject to the vagaries of a troubled economy. (149)

No doubt, the impact of this situation on the culture was to create feelings of anger isolation. These feelings, then, led to self-destructive impulses, as revealed in the 1967 riot when black protesters burned their neighborhoods and looted several black-owned business, as Suzanne Smith points out: "Looting [. . .] soon spiraled out of control and did not discriminate between the outsider 'whitey' establishments and the familiar, community-based 'Soul Brother' businesses and nightclubs" (199).

Unlike Mickens is, I am not convinced that these freeways represented a white conspiracy intended to divide and, thereby, conquer Detroit's black community. However, many of the urban-development projects begun as part of Mayor Cobo's "Detroit Plan" and continued by Mayor Cavanagh seemed insensitive to the community and cultural realities of the city's black inhabitants. And Cavanagh did argue, as Smith summarizes, that "one possible solution to the current problems facing blacks in the cities [. . .] was that 'more emphasis should be placed on making rural life more attractive' to Negroes--'even if it requires a back-to-the-land movement'" (204).

The photograph of I-75 reveals the kinds of separations experienced from within a modern city: we look out toward the four lanes of asphalt streaming ahead, one experiences the noise reduction walls, the diesels guiding products to distant markets and raw materials to distant producers; one is unnerved by the dilapidated symbols of industry peeking above the horizon while cranes swing wrecking balls meant to knock them down, and one finds little solace in the metal scaffolding that ties energy and its emission to all the activity meant to define progress. Progress? That is it, right?--the desire at which the

lines of vehicles are flowing. But the premise of Aikenhead's photograph is apocalyptic in the following sense: the city in ruins, a place of dilapidation and sin, is juxtaposed with the relatively clean-looking cars that are progressing toward some utopia of materialistic fulfillment.

The Social Body: Relationship and Redemption

The presence of this split on the landscape suggests a concurrent split between the public and private spheres. This separation is often revealed in fragmentation, which is perceived as a natural symptom of technological advancement or progress. The acceptance of a bifurcated day-to-day existence, in which we do our work and only afterward live our lives, creates a tension between the places of work and those of reflection or happiness. The desire to bridge this opposition and unify the mind and body of both the individual and society might be seen as the basis for much urban planning. Regardless of the efforts of urban planners, work often isolates the body from the intellect, and the result is the loss of the individual's relation to the means of production. It is at such instances that the body can become primarily an *instrument* of production. The idealized image of the artisan, who combined imagination and knowledge with physical production to create a complete work of art, is replaced by the mute worker. With automation and the minimalization and standardization of tasks, labor became mindless—no longer defined as skilled or intellectual (i.e., intelligent) work. If the body is primarily an instrument of production, what happens to the emotional community in which this “body” lives? Levine and the underground presses suggest that this fragmented state is unhealthy in that it destroys the continuity of the communities (those

intellectual and physical relationships) that make a productive, reflective, and engaging life possible.

The political implications of these fragmentations are described in terms of the cyborg by Donna Haraway in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*:

from one perspective, a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet, about the final abstraction embodied in a Star Wars apocalypse waged in the name of defense, about the final appropriation of women's bodies in a masculinist orgy of war.[. . .] From another perspective, a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints. The political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point (154).

Peter Oresick and Nicholas Coles's *For a Living*, a collection of poetry about industrial work, illustrates this complex perspective, this seemingly contradictory awareness, which appears to be a particular quality of urban environments. This perspective invests the city with an eerie and, as Christophe Den Tandt argues in the *Urban Sublime*, a simultaneously exciting dimension.⁷¹ The sensation is similar to that of the uncanny, as can be seen in Joyce Carol Oates's poem "Women whose Lives are Food, Men whose Lives are Money," which roughly corresponds to the categories Haraway suggests above: cyborg as a symptom of apocalypse, human exploitation, and moral decay; and cyborg as

⁷¹Den Tandt defines the "urban sublime" as a way to link urban writers to the traditions of naturalism and realism (4).

the realization of our technological potential, of the beauty in the fusion of human and tool, mind and computer, brawn and electricity. This representation of work as a corollary of a “cyborg consciousness” in this poem relates to Oresick and Coles’s statement regarding the significance of their collection:

These work poems, we believe, serve realism by puncturing the everywhere-dominant rhetoric of the “new” and of “progress” that drives and legitimizes the expansion of the service and information economies. They allow us to ask: What kinds of jobs are these, What are their effects on those who do them, What cultural value do they produce and circulate to their consumers? (xxii-xxiii)

In other words, Oresick and Coles suggest that work, the economic practices of everyday life, defines the larger cultural practices of a given environment.

Joyce Carol Oates’s poem subtly critiques the binaries that seem to characterize the logic of work—the context around which the dualist sense of the public and private, the mind and body, revolves.⁷² This poem, which echoes the popular self-help book *Women are from Venus, Men are from Mars*, details the different ways in which social practices intersect among “women whose lives *are* food” and “men whose lives *are* money”:

Mid-morning Monday she is staring
peaceful as rain in that shallow back yard
she wears flannel bedroom slippers
she is sipping coffee
she is thinking—

⁷²From 1962-1967, Oates taught English at the University of Detroit, an experience that informs much of her writing about work and the working class (*Them* 5).

—gazing at the weedy bumpy yard

at the faces beginning to take shape

in the wavy mud

in the linoleum

where floorboards assert themselves

Women whose lives are food

breaking eggs with care

scraping garbage from the plates

unpacking groceries hand over hand

Wednesday evening: he takes the cans out front

tough plastic with detachable lids

Thursday morning: the garbage truck whining at 7

Friday the shopping mall open till 9

bags of groceries unpacked

hand over certain hand

Men whose lives are money

time-and-a-half Saturdays

the lunchbag folded with care and brought back home

unfolded Monday morning

Women whose lives are food
 because they are not punch-carded
 because they are not unclocked
 sighing glad to be alone
 staring into the yard, mid-morning
 mid-week
 by mid-afternoon everything is forgotten
 There are long evenings
 panel discussions on abortions, fashions, meaningful work
 there are love scenes where people mouth passions
 sprightly, handsome, silly, manic
 in close-ups revealed ageless
 the women whose lives are food
 the men whose lives are money
 fidget as these strangers embrace and weep and mis-
 understand and forgive and die and weep and embrace
 and the viewers stare and fidget and sigh and
 begin yawning around 10:30
 never make it past midnight, even on Saturdays,
 watching their brazen selves perform

 by mid-morning the house is quiet

it is raining out back
 or not raining
 the relief of emptiness rains
 simple, terrible, routine
 at peace (Oresick 263-5)

Women's work is devoted to food and the "care" taken to gather and prepare it for consumption. These activities also suggest that women's lives are food, that their time is necessarily devoted to the nourishment and sustenance of others. Ideally, for instance, breast milk nourishes new-born children, maternal instincts create unity in the nuclear family, and beauty, both empirically and symbolically, elevates women onto a pedestal, in which they become the image of a vital and healthy society. For example, in American culture the Statue of Liberty is invested with this kind of significance—glorified as a symbol of nurturing goodness and social health: "Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free / The wretched refuse of your teeming shore / Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, / I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" For those entering New York harbor, the statue certainly suggested an end to some degree of the physical and emotional hunger that had driven them across the sea. For America, the statue can be interpreted as a symbol of the social intellect, its consciousness—the potential to imagine, however, not to necessarily produce a better life.

Yet American domestic experience deconstructs the nurturing impression of the statue. Much like one's domestic experience, the statue is riddled with the complex social, cultural, and political issues that were fracturing the integrity of the family and the nation during the late 1960s. The statue's enigmatic quality, the vagaries suggested by a

close analysis of it, reflect a similarly enigmatic quality in daily American life. For instance, the statue is devoid of a definite sexuality, treading the boundary between the masculine and feminine. It would seem profane, at the least, to think of the statue as the object of sexual desire. Thus, one might argue that such an androgynous figure is the perfect symbol of America's corporate democracy—seemingly flawless but without dimension or individuality. Its innocuous quality, overtly harmless, quiet, and placid, suggests the kind of porcelain facade that many radicals and counter-culturists sought to shatter or at least re-think. In place of this stoic, un-sexed image was the assertive woman and the effeminate man. The sexual deviant became a symbol of social potential, rather than a symbol of the diseased social body. This freedom of the body became associated with intellectual freedom, and was one way activists attempted to counter the dominant social structure (and its inherent frustrations) portrayed in Oates's poem.

In Detroit in the late 1960s, the idea that women's lives *were* food and that men's lives were money "grew directly out of the postwar domestic ideology," as Sugrue points out:

[Women] sought a secure home and healthy and safe neighborhood life for the benefit of their children. Even as norms about women working outside the home were changing, and a growing number of mothers supplemented the family income, several major institutions attempted to circumscribe women's role as homemaker and caregiver. One was the Catholic Church, whose theology of maternal sacrifice played an important role in shaping the beliefs and practices of men and women in the heavily Catholic city. In addition trade union rhetoric and policies reenforced women's domestic role. [. . .] Under union-negotiated

contracts, men would earn sufficient pay to support their families. Women could thus avoid paid labor and direct their energies toward child rearing and homemaking. (*Origin* 250-1)

As this passage suggests, in Detroit women's lives were quite literally equated with satiation and men's lives with money. David Harvey examines the idea of money as a means of valuing labor, and thus the laborer in *The Condition of Postmodernity*: "With money the mystery of the commodity takes on a new twist, because the use value of money is that it represents the world of social value" (100). "Men whose lives are money," then, are valued in society to a degree corresponding to their relevance as a form of exchange, wage labor, as Harvey discusses it in relation to Marx's critique of bourgeoisie capitalism:

The bourgeoisie "has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors,' and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than callous 'cash payment.' . . . [It] has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers" (105).

During economic difficulties their value, like that of paper currency, is reduced and they are either laid-off, fired, or redistributed. Harvey adds, "The advent of a money economy, Marx argues, dissolves the bonds and relations that make up 'traditional' communities so that 'money becomes the real community.' We move from a social condition, in which we depend directly on those we know personally, to one in which we depend on impersonal and objective relations with others." Purchasing men's labor with

money, as Harvey points out,

gives the capitalist certain rights to dispose of the labour of others without necessary regard for what the others might think, need, or feel. [. . .] Participation in market exchange presupposes a certain division of labour as well as a capacity to separate (alienate) oneself from one's own product. The result is an estrangement from the product of one's own experience, a fragmentation of social tasks and a separation of the subjective meaning of a process of production from the objective market valuation of the product (103).

The fetishization of men and women as commodities, over which they have little control, reduces them and ultimately their communities into an “‘appendage’ of the machine” (Harvey 105).

The premise underlying the enthymeme that women's lives are food because they are not part of industrial time either “punch-carded” or “unclocked” is that in order for your life to be ruled by the rhythms of food—which might entail shopping at a supermarket, cooking, or eating—you must not be monitored by the rhythms of machines. In this way, women and men are part of different social and political realities. The division of labor that defines their relationship to one another, one devoted to food and the other to money, “reduces,” as it does in the factory according to Harvey, “the labourer to a fragment of a person” (104). These fragmented realities drive the poem's meaning, which revolves around the mediocrity of domesticity, around the purgatory suggested in a life seen from the middle: “mid-morning,” “mid-week,” and “mid-afternoon.” Middle-class economics is related to middling experiences that are limited by time and its categorizations. What comes before is forgotten by evening, which is a moment defined

by prescribed perceptions, ready-made political food that reduces lived experience to soundbites and depthless representations. From this liminal social space, one disconnected from its cultural context, a person's sense of "self" becomes dislodged in the resulting hybridization. Gender, nature's ur-category, is defined by its conflation with money and food; this hybrid economic self, then, is additionally fragmented by its relation to time, in which men are perceived as on-the-clock while women remain un-punched and "unclocked" and, thus, outside of productive social time; finally, these already fragmented selves, reduced to mere segments or parts of the consumer cycle, are reassembled and revised by the "brazen" television performances with which they identify. These performances satisfy their need for intimacy, their need to live through the soap operas or nighttime dramas that encapsulate experience into a consumable half hour, during which the viewing men and women vicariously "embrace and weep and mis-/understand and forgive and die and weep and embrace."

The Underground Presses' Response

The underground presses countered this sense of "waiting" that seems inherent in industrial work and the division between the mind and body to which it led by attempting to replace it with an alternative community. *The Fifth Estate*, *Inner City Voice (ICV)*, *Sun*, and *Guerrilla* published poetry, news articles, and visual art with the goal of re-unifying their readers' sense of "self."⁷³ The attempts to build a community that could

⁷³The managing editors of *The Fifth Estate* were Harvey Ovshinsky and Peter Werbe; the managing editor of the *Inner City Voice* was John Watson; the managing editor of the *Warren Forest Sun*, which was also known as the *Ann Arbor Sun* and the *Sun*, was The Trans-Love Energies group (later known as the White Panther Party and then Rainbow People's Party). This group included John Sinclair, Magdalena (Leni) Sinclair, Gary Grimshaw, and Jim Semark. The managing editors of *Guerilla* were John

function as an alternative to a society centered around work had two general forms. One was characterized by the idea of dropping out of this society altogether. This idea was often expressed in terms of individualism, as opposed to what many felt were the repressive practices of Detroit's political and economic leaders. The other involved the support of the city's Revolutionary Union Movements (RUMs), which were part of the city's movement for both black labor and civil rights. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers tried to organize these different RUMs into a force for change, but leaned too far toward vague ideas of revolution that tended to make change difficult to manage (or even to imagine in practical terms). The underground presses were linked to such movements and often published biased information about them. The papers published the ideas and demands of the RUMs and the League along with reports regarding unfair employment practices, and they attempted to tie the struggle of Detroit's working class to larger revolutionary developments around the world, especially those taking place in Cuba and China. However, despite their sincerity, many of these efforts were misguided and led to self-destruction rather than self-discovery or self-reliance. And it was this self-destruction that became a third and perhaps more enduring characteristic of these activists' attempts at creating an alternative community.

Dropping Out

In the September 1-15, 1967 issue of *The Fifth Estate*, John Sinclair attempts to describe in what "The Coatpuller," a recurring column he contributed, the change he

believes was expressed in the riot that had ended less than two months before. The change he describes might be thought of as the counter-cultural theory of “dropping out”:

There is a revolution going on, and a lot of people have been getting ready for it for a long time, though not as obviously as some others. The “riots” are only the most obvious and most superficially violent manifestation of the change that is taking place in American [sic] today. The real change, the change that will make the total change possible, has been going on inside people’s heads, and in their small communities of heads and bodies. It has been quiet—“underground” is a really precise name for it—but it is beginning to be felt all over, and has to make itself even more known, and in a really pure form, so the process of evolution–revolution can be speeded up in order to beat the death-merchants to the controls. I mean that bomb-power and death-power can be freed up and put to human uses, to make the world a paradise again.

Two major steps have to be taken and gained before the planet can be saved: (1) that the materials of the earth, and the potentials of human beings, have to be liberated from the control of money and greed and made available to all men: and (2), that men themselves, in the most personal and individual term, have to learn to live with themselves, first in a singular sense and then in the larger sense of “themselves,” have to learn to use their human equipment, all their senses and actions, or first their own pleasure and utility, and consequently for the pleasure and utility of all their fellows.

What I want to say is that every man has to be an artist. From the end of the paleolithic era to the present, for obvious economic reasons, only a few men

were permitted the practice of art, in its fullest definition as both “techne,” or craft, and magic, or religion. (10)

Sinclair is describing a unified expression, a personal spiritualism, that might counter the fragmentation caused by work and the city’s logic of production. (It was this New Age rhetoric that earned Sinclair the reputation as a Svengali). Sinclair appears to believe that this art as craft, magic, and religion makes the individual more aware of his or her relationship to a collective consciousness (“themselves”), one that will supposedly liberate the “human being” from the “control of money and greed,” putting an end, perhaps, to a man’s life being about money. Of course, dropping out did not lead to the hippie ideal of “peace and love,” but, more often than not, to gratuitous violence, as the Belle Isle love-in on April 30, 1967 revealed. In “Sex, Drugs, Rock ‘n’ Roll and Plum Street,” a retrospective about Plum Street, which was an ultimately failed attempt to develop a self-sufficient hippie community in Detroit in 1966, July Moore and Jenny Nolan report that the love-in “was promoted as a self-policed gentle love-fest, a gathering of flower children, to which the public was invited. It ended in a drunken brawl, a melee in which several attendees and police officers were injured and 10 arrests were made” (1).

In “Turn-On, Tune-In, Drop-Out–To What?” published in an undated issue of the *Sun*, Jerry de Montfort echoes Sinclair’s rhetoric, stating that

[m]any people of all ages are beginning to see the realities of established society today and want out. [. . .] The public is no longer going to dutifully bend over while the politicians shove atrophied policies up their collective asses. The system cannot stand the fact that people are challenging its values, both temporal and spiritual, life-styles promulgated to be the ‘great American way’ and its

fucked-up approach to international problems and internal economics. [. . .] There are those who are lacking full self-realization (or haven't taken enough dope) to shake the Protestant ethic and therefore feel they must do something to contribute—that their being is not enough. (3-4)⁷⁴

This artistic consciousness was facilitated by drugs, such as marijuana, LSD, and speed. Drugs were central to the counter-culture's anti-establishment persona, a persona summed up in the masthead of the *Sun*: "Free Newspaper of Rock and Roll, Dope, and Fucking in the Streets." These juvenile blurbs by Sinclair and Montfort reveal the anti-work-ethic ethic, which implicitly claims that drugs offer the kind of escapist-spiritual experience that might unify mind, body, and spirit into that all-encompassing slogan, "self-realization." Interestingly, from a cultural standpoint, this unity suggests that the mind and body were previously out of synch. Olson's projective verse, which Sinclair and other counter-culturalists studied, had attempted, according to Olson, to rectify this state by unifying the poetic intellect with the body through the composition of a poem. As an activity for those desiring to "drop out," poetry, drugs, and sex were "agents" that some believed could "effect this change" in consciousness. Whether or not it changed anyone's consciousness in a beneficial way is beside the point, but what the use of drugs did seem to do is create a justification for irresponsibility, or an anti-intellectual intellectualism. Following Raymond Williams's genealogical analysis of "intellectual," this paradoxical anti-intellectual intellectualism would connote a knowledge based on

⁷⁴Although the *Sun* issues I discuss are undated, they must have been published some time after May 1968 when Sinclair and the other members of the Trans-Love Energies group moved to Ann Arbor, claiming police harassment as their motivation (*Guitar* 343).

knowing nothing, or, put differently, an awareness achieved through the limitation of one's interaction with sober reality. Sinclair, for instance, claimed, "LSD has brought many of us to our senses, and marijuana, healthy fucking, and good art help keep us open" (*Fifth*, 1-15 Sept., 10). Why I see this as a form of irresponsibility, and not just stupidity, is because for some it acquired validity as an approach to everyday life.

Poets within this anti-intellectual atmosphere used subjective associations to structure their poems, which seemed related to the counter-culture's use of drugs. As with hallucinogenic drugs, such as LSD, this poetry valued personal reverie over controlled poetic composition. We might compare it to the use of poetic association by the post-Symbolists, as described by Alan Velie:

According to the doctrine of association—originally promulgated by Hobbes and Locke—all ideas arise from the complex association of sense perceptions. Our train of thought is not logical in nature; instead, ideas are linked because they derive from the same experience. That is, if a man is hit by a car while standing in the rain, he may think of automobile accidents whenever it rains. What this means for poetry is that the tight logical organization that marked English Renaissance verse gives way, in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poetry, to an organization based on reverie. One thought leads to another in a pattern that makes sense to the thinker, but the pattern may be difficult to follow for anyone else. With the Symbolists, the process often leads to obscurity. Because the post-Symbolists carefully control association, their poetry is usually less obscure. Both Symbolists and post-Symbolists make heavy use of sensory perception and put a great deal of emphasis on natural detail. (226)

Of course, many underground poets did not carefully control their use of association and, as Yvor Winters claimed about the French Symbolists, their poetry tended to be obscure. Robert Glessing describes this type of writing in *The Underground Press in America*: “Much of the writing in the underground press is termed psychedelic and resounds with the ‘tripping out’ hallucinogenic experiences of drug users” (118). Lawrence Hosy’s poem “Belle Isle,” published in the January 1967 issue of *Guerilla*, illustrates these psychedelic associations:

The caramel cat Nijinsky bounds from the traveling
 grass McGraw-Hill Building past the half-nude lemon
 posters and marquees Detroit smokestacks genitals
 aren’t there enough Spics in New York do you have to go to
 Puerto Rico my editor said pot correspondence interrupted by
 realistic requirements grunts illuminating feeling the night
 dawns yellow grasses swept by street cleaners stale ecstasies October
 beautified Detroit Mother recovered from her nervous breakdown
 all the negroes were in drag the even life evenly lived the
 late afternoon field interviews when do you use the
 earth shovel I said took a bus to Windsor, Canada to
 get away from the Auto City & found myself in the 19th century kissing
 Jane Austen the years add up to nothing French food doctors who cared movie
 stubs mouths days on the zoo terrace crying why did you want to make yourself
 pregnant the
 seals snorting diving sleeping

I don't want to know how you are (13)

This poem reads like a “run-on drug experience,” dashing from image to image without providing much guidance for the reader to follow. Yet there some clarity can be gained if the poem is read backwards, starting with the jarring conclusion and tying it to the rest of the poem’s associations. The structure of the poem suggests a frantic or panicked narrator dealing with an unwanted pregnancy who is able to gather by the end of the poem the strength to make one assertion: “I don’t want to know how you are.” This assertion provides a brief glance at a logical structure behind the poem’s streaming associations, a structure in which obscurity enacts the narrator’s desire for ignorance.

Glessing claims that this style of writing was popular with the drug culture, stating that “the pattern-breaking effect of drugs created much of the new, turned-on verbiage, and the release from old verbal inhibitions[. . .]. Drugs [, such as pot, speed, and LSD] were considered a catalyst to self-awareness by the drug culture, which soon discovered its own mode of speaking” (118). Psychedelic



Figure 9: Cover design for the March 1968 issue of the *Warren Forest Sun* (Guitar 66).

writing also converged with the visual art that was often published in conjunction with these poems. For example, Sinclair states, in an editorial for the *Sun*, that this paper sought to provide readers with a multi-cultural experience: “The SUN will concentrate on

those aspects of the culture that are most important to us: the music scene, the dope scene, reports from inside people's heads, the writing scene, and of course artwork to cool out your eyes. We want to make each page a total experience, incorporating words, photos and artwork" (undated 4).

Exhibiting such a multi-cultural tendency was Gary Grimshaw, one of the more popular psychedelic artists in Detroit during the late 1960s, who was a member of Sinclair's Rainbow People's Party and designed many of the show posters for the MC5 and the Grande Ballroom. He also published his art in some of the area's underground presses, such as the *Warren Forest Sun*, *Guerilla*, and *The Fifth Estate*. A cover he did for the *Warren Forest Sun* illustrates a typical psychedelic design (see figure 9). The concentric circles and contrasting shapes draw the gaze inward, creating a nauseatingly



Figure 10: Show poster designed by Gary Grimshaw and published in the May 15-31, 1967 issue of *The Fifth Estate* (unpaginated).

hypnotic effect. As with much of this art, the motif of fire and a sense of surging inward is common. Another visual motif, common to Grimshaw's show posters and used by other psychedelic artists, is the wave in which a more or less realistic image is distorted through elongation and bending, as if the image is being viewed through a glass bottle (Figure 2 and 10). These mystical images are often surrounded by warped text, suggesting a kind of revery for the flow of script. This same visual appreciation of print is displayed

in the concrete poetry popular during the 1950s and 60s, in which a poem about a butterfly, for instance, would resemble the shape of a butterfly. As was typical for the time, poets and artist were trying to develop a discursive form that would approximate the diversity of real life experiences. Of course, these efforts often led to obfuscation and frustratingly nonsensical writing, but in some cases, as in the merging of text and images in psychedelic art, the efforts revealed an interesting visual dimension to the printed text. However, the self-destructive side of these drug-induced, drop-out experiences were discussed only reluctantly by counter-culturalists, but provide a dark subtext to the time and their efforts.

Even though “dropping out” of Detroit’s working society was supposed to have led to freedom and self-discovery, it as often led to self-destruction. Many of the young people who followed some anti-establishment philosophy ended up strung out on drugs, hungry and homeless, or dead. For example, in “Operation Jones” and “Poet is Priest,” published in *Ann Arbor Sun* during the Summer of 1971, Sinclair talks about the “plague,” which is a reference to the use of heroin (also known as “scag,” “jones,” or “smack”), that he found was “spreading across the rainbow colony” while he was serving his sentence for marijuana possession (*Guitar* 285-309). Of course, his earlier writings promoting drug use were complicit with this abuse. For instance, in a letter to Sinclair, published in the September 1-15 issue of the *Fifth Estate*, Dana Schindler calls the reader’s attention to Sinclair’s earlier writings and argues that he should be more responsible for the health of those he influences: “It’s turning into an obsession with you about the establishment being scared to death. How do you know that LSD doesn’t cause chromosome damage? [. . .] And when you can’t really know, and when you hold

so much influence, (it doesn't matter any more if you'd just like to be the guy who buys Dairy Queens everyday), it doesn't seem to me you should 'not recommend' by saying 'go on kiddies. It's all right. I know'" (10). In "Operation Jones," Sinclair claims, in what is his usual attempt to deflect blame from himself, that "the epidemic of heroin addiction has spread in direct proportion to the increased oppression of young people here in Babylon, that heroin has been used as a weapon of imperialism here in the rainbow colony just as it has been used in the black colony and among colonized peoples throughout the history of western imperialism" (*Guitar* 286). The direct relationship he draws between repression and drug use is too simplistic and functions primarily to deny his role in the drug abuse of his friends. Later, in "Poet is Priest" he takes the stance Schindler thought he should in a call for artists to act responsibly: "My problem is that I have this vision of the people's artists as the natural leaders of their people--'poet is priest,' Allen Ginsberg said that--and I keep waiting for them to step forward and lead the people to more freedom and more life, because they're in a position to do just that" (*Guitar* 306). This dark side of the drug culture has been, perhaps, the counter-culture's most enduring legacy.

Supporting the Unions

In the late 1960s, the *Inner City Voice* and the *South End* (the Wayne State University paper) supported the city's local Revolutionary Union Movements (RUMs). Each of the city's major factories, such as the Dodge Main plant (DRUM), Eldon Avenue Gear and Axle plant (ELRUM), Ford River Rouge plant (FRUM), Mack Avenue plant (MARUM), Jefferson Avenue plant (JRUM), and the United Parcel Service (UPRUM),

established a RUM group. The goal of these groups and the underground presses which supported them was to help organize and educate the workers, through the guidance of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and later the Black Workers Congress (BWC), to fight what these activists saw as the evils of capitalism. The groups were predominantly Marxist; however, black nationalists, who for the most part were members of the League, apparently had little use for this Marxist ideology. This lack of ideological and, therefore, programmatic continuity led to a split between the League and the BWC in 1972.

Initially, however, the publishers of the *Inner-City Voice (ICV)*, according to Georgakas and Surkin, formed the “core” of a “study/action” group of “some 30 black activists” who attempted to turn the unrest of the 1967 riot into revolutionary action. In *Violence in the Motor City*, Sydney Fine describes General Gordon Baker and the militant publishers of the *ICV*, who came together in 1969 to form the League, as dedicated to waging “a relentless struggle against racism, capitalism and imperialism” (381). As a way of addressing the city’s black working class and promoting both cultural and political action, the *ICV* published art, poetry, and reports that sought to unify Detroit’s working class to each other and to revolutionary groups around the world. In the October 1969 issue, for example, a picture of a black student reading a book uses the following quotes from Mao Tse-tung as a caption: “An army without culture is a dull witted army; and a dull witted army cannot defeat the enemy,” and “Everything reactionary is the same; if you don’t hit it, it won’t fall” (23). This ideal that the *ICV* and also the *South End* wielded like a sledge hammer would inspire only marginal success in both papers’ struggles against unfair hiring practices, long hours, and unsafe working conditions—even

though they made the claim that they had increased the number of black foreman hired in the auto factories (Fine 381).

The working conditions in these factories were a central concern to the editors and publishers of the *ICV* and drove the resistance to the unions and to capitalism. As Suzanne Smith illustrates, these formative conditions were described in the blues music written by some of Detroit's auto workers. These songs reveal the depth to which work defined the emotions of the city's inhabitants: "Blues songs could also speak more directly about and against the oppression of assembly-line work" (12-3). Take, for example, the comments of Bobo Jenkins and Little Junior: "Jenkins claimed, 'That whirlin' machinery gives me the beat. It's like hearin' a band playing all day long. Every song I ever wrote that's any good has come to me standin' on that line'.[. . .] Junior commented, 'When you're on that line, you're thinking of anything that will get you off it. You get this deep grieving, feeling way down inside somewheres. Then comes the music.' Several of the most famous Detroit blues songs emphasize this 'deep grieving' with unmitigated candor" (Smith 12-3). The *ICV*, aware of this situation, attempted to restore a militant and a pro-active agency to workers.

Shedding additional light on the condition of the shop floor and its potential for inspiring resistance, a front-page story in the June 1968 issue of *ICV* describes the situation of labor in late-1960s Detroit (the unconventional grammar is in the original):

Black workers are tied day in and day out, 8-12 hours a day, to a massive assembly line, an assembly line that one never sees the end or the beginning of but merely fits into a slot and stays there, swearing and bleeding, running and stumbling, trying to maintain a steadily increasing pace. Adding to the severity of

working conditions are the white racist and bigoted foremen, harassing, insulting, driving and snapping the whip over the backs of thousands of black workers, who have to work in these plants in order to eke out an existence. These conditions coupled also with the double-faced, back stabbing of the UAW have driven black workers to a near uprising state. The UAW with its bogus bureaucracy is unable, has been unable, and in many cases is unwilling to press forward the demands and aspirations of black workers. In the wildcat strikes the black workers on the lines do not even address themselves to the UAW's Grievance Procedure. They realize that their only method of pressing for their demands is to strike and to negotiate at the gates of industry. (Georgakas and Surkin 18)

In 1968, many in the city were still concerned about another riot, and the *ICV*'s publication of such stories, according to Georgakas and Surkin, caused reactions from socially conservative groups, such as the American Legion (18). Many felt that the riot of 1967 was just the beginning of a larger series of "insurrections," as Sinclair calls them in "The Lesson of July 23": "When the Detroit Uprising jumped off we thought the beginning of the end had arrived, and we were busy planning for the 'post-revolutionary construction' which would start with the victory of the insurrection" (*Guitar* 342). Of course this was not the case, but tensions continued to run high after the riot and the *ICV*, as did the city's other underground presses, used this tension to inspire interest and call attention to its specific agendas. They also used this tension to promote opposition to the prevailing idea that working is an obligation.

The general nature of the *ICV*'s radical agenda was articulated by John Williams in the November 1969 issue in his analysis of labor in "The Labor Question." In this

article he roughly traces the historical divergence of white and black labor experiences:

“It’s important to understand that the move by America to annex Santo Domingo, Philippines, and other places enhanced the polarization between black and white workers” (16). Williams is attempting to differentiate the “black” labor struggle from that of the whites, who, he claims, are “moving more and more to think of [themselves] as . . . middle class suburbanite(s) than as workers” (16).

The *ICV* attempted to use such stories to motivate real change by drawing on black anger, fear, and pride. However, the tendency to force changes when less dogmatism and more negotiation would have been better was a continuing problem with the *ICV* and underground presses in general. For instance, in the November 1969 issue, the *ICV* published an open letter to Walter Reuther, the president of the UAW. In this letter the League critiques the racist bureaucracy of the union, calling for specific changes:

As you already know, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers is planning to demonstrate in front of Cobo Hall, Sunday, November 9, during the special U.A.W. Convention. So as to avoid any confusion as to the purpose for this action, we are stating our objectives to you via this open letter.

Our specific goals for Sunday are:

- 1) To expose U.A.W. racist practices.
- 2) To expose U.A.W sweetheart union practices.
- 3) To expose totalitarian control of the U.A.W. by the Reuther machine.
- 4) To present a list of demands for the redress of grievances.
- 5) To unite all black workers in the struggle to dispose of you and your henchmen,

and to win workers' control over the union and the shops. (18)

As was often the case with the city's activists, the demands did not seem entirely sincere. Instead, they appear to be aimed more at intimidation than remediation and a negotiated change. It is as if the League and the *ICV* had become enamored with the atmosphere of tension and fear and sought to perpetuate it rather than remedy it. Yet it may be that the League could conceive of change only on its terms. Also, after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968, many black civil rights groups turned, if they had not already, to the ideals of black nationalism to address and redress their concerns. In *The Sixties: Years of Hope Days of Rage*, Todd Gitlin states that "when [King] was murdered, it seemed that non-violence went to the grave with him, and the movement was 'free at last' from restraint" (305-6). This nationalism, which grew out of the working conditions described below in *ICV*'s open letter, echoed the way in which dissent rose "Out of burlap sacks, out of bearing butter" in Levine's "They Feed They Lion":

Because its [sic] been so long since you have been inside of a plant, you seem to have forgotten what its like to work long hours on a production line. The hatred that builds up hour after hour, day after day, year after year. If you can remember, just a little of what factory work was like thirty years ago, then you may have some conception of how things are today only today conditions have actually deteriorated because you haven't had the guts to fight for minimal work standards which can allow a man to work all day and have the energy to stay awake when he comes home and talk to his wife or play with his children. We are angry because of what happens to us every day. (18)

Passages like this one were published alongside reports of "glorious" workers'

revolutions in China, Vietnam, Cuba, Guatemala, Thailand, and Africa. The *South End* did the same thing publishing articles not only on “DRUM” and “the local Black Panthers,” but also on “third-world guerrilla movements, women’s liberation, and anti-war activities” (Georgakas and Surkin 47). They also published articles on the Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity and socialist groups in France (49). Such juxtapositions provided Detroit revolutionaries with information, albeit propagandistic and often factually inaccurate, to support their call for a workers’ revolt. For example, in a translation of “Ho’s Will to the People,” published in the October 1969 issue of *ICV*, Ho Chi Minh states, under the heading “Black People Listen,” that “unity is an extremely precious tradition of our party and people. All comrades, from the central committee down to the cell, must preserve the union and unity of mind in the party as the apple of their eyes” (11). Adopting a similar attitude, the Central Organization of Cuban Trade Unions (CTC) published the following article in support of the black workers’ struggle after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

The belated and demagogic reaction of President Johnson and his government, promising laws and other measures to guarantee the rights and aspirations of the black people of the United States, cannot deceive them or thwart the determination of millions of blacks who are forced to live in sub-human conditions, concentrated in ghettos and bearing the two fold [sic] burden of exploitation as workers and as blacks.

The Cuban workers, faithful to the principles of proletarian internationalism and the worldwide struggle of the people oppressed by imperialism, hereby express their most resolute support of the struggle of their

black brothers in the United States and feel as though it were their own loss of black fighters in Washington, Chicago, Baltimore, Kansas City, and many other cities, who died fighting for rights which have been denied them for centuries (June 1968, 10).

This article reveals the unity that was being sought between Detroit's workers and the larger revolutionary community. However, though, few listened seriously to these arguments, deciding instead to stay with the UAW. Through negotiations with the auto companies, and as the *ICV* maintained by betraying the individual worker, the UAW was able to win Detroit's auto workers some important concessions. However, the difficulties of the plant closings during the economic recession of the 1980s, documented so tellingly by Michael Moore in *Roger and Me*, revealed that the auto companies might still treat workers as expendable resources.⁷⁵

In "A New Left Balance Sheet," the afterword to *Second Thoughts: Former Radicals Look Back at the Sixties*, K. L. Billingsley includes the following quote from Milan Kundera: "The struggle against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting" (239). When taken as a whole, Philip Levine's poetry could be summed up with this same equation. In fact, if I had thought about it, I could have used it as an epigraph for this chapter. Levine's narrative poetry tells the story of memories, which reside in the small details of his poems. He gathers the knickknacks and the episodes of the city, and places them among the "names of the lost"—those who are waiting in line for work. In "What Work Is" reside the "foot," the "finger," Wagner's opera, a brother, a "grin that

⁷⁵The shutdown of the GM factories in Flint and elsewhere led to the loss of 40,000 jobs. The social impact, as one might expect, was enormous.

does not hide the stubbornness, / the sad refusal to give in to / rain, to the hours wasted waiting[. . .].” These moments that merge into a poem are the pieces that remain after years have been spent waiting for work, waiting to start one’s own life. These are the fragmented images that dust the inner-city landscape. They remain after labor has numbed the intellect—the imagination—leaving only the brutalized synecdoche of a person behind. Marx provides one interpretation of the social consequences of this kind of fragmentation:

All means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of, the producers; they mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into a hated toil; they estrange from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour-process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they distort the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labour-process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his life-time into working-time, and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the Juggernaut of capital. (qtd. in Harvey 106)

In Marx’s apocalyptic schema, the mind and the body no longer correspond, the intellect can no longer completely reconcile itself to the working body. To complete their task, workers must become “appendages” of their machines.

Of course, binaries between the mind and body and the public and private are not physical realities, but are tropes writers use, as painters use colors, to create contrasts and provide a point through which a text can be entered and its message understood.

However, the representation has some mimetic relevance. Readers perceive, at least in part, what people show them, and Levine's poetry defines work as a form of waiting: "This is about waiting." Waiting denies the relevance of a person's body. In times of economic recession, such as Detroit experienced in the late 1950s and 1960s, the city is riddled with images of waiting, a term that might be defined as the emotional stress produced while in anticipation of a redemptive act that may or may not ever occur. The more momentous or important the anticipated act, the more excruciating the waiting becomes. One way to counter this malaise, then, was to provide, as the underground presses attempted to do, an alternative to waiting, a way of acting from within this otherwise intellectually and physically stagnant place. However, the efforts of the underground presses often led to dogmatism, disillusion, and a critical blindness. These presses attempted to turn political ideas into a collective identity, but, as Julius Lester states in "Beyond Ideology," this use of radicalism does not tend to work:

Radicalism and conservatism are merely two ways that one attempts to make sense of the world. We delude ourselves when we use them to seek our identities, when we wear them and think we know who we are. Identity cannot be resolved so easily.

Ultimately, the task is to be utterly human. Only to the extent that I know and accept my humanity will I be able to see others as they are, as nothing more and nothing less than utterly human. When we are able to do this, we will have moved beyond ideology [. . .] and then, only then, will we be free" (225).

Conclusion:

Why Write?

In this dissertation I have been telling a story about Detroit. It is a narrative structured around moments, constellations of remembrances, that have converged in history and place (time and space). I have attempted to unravel some of the marginal texts that emerged alongside and in reaction to the civil unrest in Detroit during the late 1960s. In some cases, these voices arise, muddled and nonsensical, from the ephemeral texts through which I have thumbed. They speak of revolution, anger, fear, love, peace, and joy; they vacillate between brashness and humility, calling upon honored traditions and absurdist fads in an effort to say something, to communicate a bit of their experience to others. And it is this desire to speak, to express, to demand, to believe self-righteously, and to imagine carefully or sloppily which continues to reverberate for me now. In *Silence*, Tillie Olsen describes her own struggle to express and imagine: “I had said: always roused by the writing, always denied” (20). The question to ask is why does Tillie Olsen wish to compose stories when, as she describes, it is so difficult to do so:

In the twenty years I bore and reared my children, usually had to work on a paid job as well, the simplest circumstances for creation did not exist. Nevertheless writing, the hope of it, was “the air I breathed, so long as I shall breathe at all.” In that hope, there was conscious storing, snatched reading, beginnings of writing, and always “the secret rootlets of reconnaissance.” (19).

Then why do it? Certainly, enough aspiring writers have given up, one day forgetting that they ever cared about language. Therefore, why pine away for years for

the opportunity to write one good sentence (which, fortunately for Olsen, led to several others)? Randall Jarrell answers this imagined question, stating, “for whom do you do good? Are you kind to your daughter because in the end someone will pay you for being? . . . The poet,” Jarrell continues, “writes his poem for its own sake, for the sake of that order of things in which the poem takes the place that has awaited it” (24). Was this the case for Olsen who wrote prose, and whose first (“publishable”) sentence evolved into “I Stand here Ironing,” the first story of her collection *Tell Me a Riddle*? This line reads, “I stand here ironing, and what you asked me moves tormented back and forth with the iron” (19). To whom is Olsen’s narrator talking if not to me, me her imagined audience? The line pulls me in, and is that not its intention? Maybe Olsen wrote this line and story and book for her own sake, to satisfy her need to intersect with another intellect, to mingle with the imagination of another mind even if only imagined. Yet I would argue that no writer has ever slaved to write for writing’s sake alone. Even Emily Dickinson, holed up in her bedroom, scribbled those beautiful lines to someone, even if it that person was an image of herself reading what she had once stuffed carefully into a worn trunk. Nothing remains nothing if no one reads what one has written, as Levine says in reference to his own poetry when he was asked if he was “writing political poetry now”: “I began writing poetry to do something with it, to effect some kind of moral change; but without readers I knew I couldn’t do that” (*Don’t* 99).

The answer to “Why write?” is frustratingly more obscure than Jarrell implies because it has little to do with Why we read or do not read. Of course, not all writers read, but we suppose all good writers read a great deal (a creative writing teacher once proclaimed, as creative writing teachers often do, that “no one” could be a good poet

without having read Shakespeare. Period. This might be true, but is it always true?). I have never heard a writer claim otherwise. Certainly, we read to find models, for information and pleasure, but we also write, as Olsen suggests, to manifest a version of our intellect; we write in order “to be,” since we really cannot be sure we have thought anything if we fail to communicate it in some way to someone. So writing is a way to ensure that we hang onto “ourselves”—that glimmer of identity that gets twisted by our tongues, pens, and mind’s eye into words on paper with commas and semicolons and periods all, more or less, in the right place. Talking about her struggle to find time to write, Olsen claims that her “work died. What demanded to be written did not” (20). Thoughts need to breathe, and if they fail to do so then they die, just like so much caviar dumped into a fish tank. So writing is a form of transgression, by which I mean a way to step outside of our mortal shell.

Levine states, as many writers commonly do, that he writes as an “act of discovery” (144), or might it be an act of dissent? No, for him writing is not dissent, except that to be a poet he had to drop out of productive society, which, he recounts, was easy to do in the 1950s since he had no desire to “take part in what America was doing” (111). But Levine does not say that writing is a form of “self-discovery.” The exclusion of this prefix is no oversight. He, as do many writers, seems to perceive of writing as detached from the experiences he is describing. However, and this is an important distinction, the poetry published in Detroit’s underground presses—following Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, and Allen Ginsberg, for instance—was seen as a method of “self-discovery”; it was supposed to function as a type of post-religious confession, a means of dissent, transgressing conventions of objectivity, reason, and decorum. This poetry was

not, in most cases, an attempt to go beyond the moment of spontaneous composition—what Jack Kerouac called “automatic writing.” It was instead ephemeral, as was the *Sun*’s exclamation that “Poetry is Revolution,” John Sinclair’s desire to conduct a “Total Assault on the Culture,” the *Inner City Voice*’s rants against the “white power structure,” and the Rainbow People’s Party injunction to “fuck in the streets.”

Often, self-discovery quickly becomes self-delusion, confusion, and then silence—a profound, mind-numbing silence. In “Silent in America,” Levine provides one implication of such silences:

Since I no longer speak I
 go unnoticed among men;
 in the far corners of rooms,
 greeted occasionally
 with a stiff wave, I am seen
 aslant as one sees a pane

 of clear glass, reflecting both
 what lies before and behind
 in a dazzle of splendid
 approximations. (*Selected* 22)

If no one speaks, such as the poet, then all that will remain of art, of human expression (“greeted occasionally / with a stiff wave”), will be its simulacrum. Human feeling will be digested and reduced to a “dazzle” and to “splendid” notions of the original, but the original will disappear from our cultural memory.

The underground presses, even if generally obtuse, broadened the number of poets who were speaking and therein fighting against the silences that were threatening the city. And if anything should be learned from this analysis, it is that writing should always be encouraged, even in bad poets, as Jarrell describes them:

In this universe of bad poetry everyone is compelled by the decrees of an unarguable Necessity to murder his mother and marry his father, to turn somersaults and widdershins around his own funeral, to do everything that his worst and most imaginative enemy could wish. It would be a hard heart and a dull head that could condemn, except with a sort of sacred awe, such poets for anything that they have done. (161).

Another implication of such silences, and the simulations they allow, is seen in the photographs of Detroit's urban spaces.

Photographing Urban Space

John Bukowczyk and Douglas Aikenhead's collection *Detroit Images: Photographs of the Renaissance City*, along with J. Edward Bailey III's collection *The City Within* and Kevin Boyle and Victoria Getis's collection *Muddy Boots and Ragged Aprons*, documents the condition of Detroit's various neighborhoods, revealing the stories that lay beneath the complex relationships between homes and streets, renewal and renaissance, black and white, industry and production, life and death, past and future. These are the complexities to which the city's underground presses were responding.

Bukowczyk and Aikenhead begin their collection with a poem that acts as the book's preface. The poem sums up Detroit's history and suggest the complexities

inherent in their collection of photographs.

To the people of

the City of the Strait,

the City of Churches,

the City of Trees,

the City of Progress,

the Motor City,

the Arsensal [sic] of Democracy,

Motown,

the Murder City

the Renaissance City,

the City of Destiny (7)

This poem traces the history of Detroit from its founding by Jesuit Missionaries in the seventeenth century through its transition to the British, its growth as an urban center in the nineteenth century, its relationship with the automobile, its role in the creation of Motown music and the popularization and commodification of black culture, its alteration after deindustrialization and the city's continuing urban renewal projects, and finally its identification as a place of destiny. Destiny seems, in this case, to be more of an indictment rather than a recognition of Detroit's role as the "model city." This is a city torn by different interpretations of its "fundamental" character, as illustrated by the different names used in the poem to describe it. Note the juxtapositions embedded within the different representations of the city. The "City of Trees" is also "Murder City," and "Renaissance City" is also the "City of Progress." As often seems to be the case with

large industrial cities, one reality is often perceived as antithetical to another and so on.

Whether or not this is the case is one of the difficulties of understanding this city. America's cities represent the nation's destiny: they provide the images of progress and, at the same time, the nation's fear of its own demise; they are the origins of the modern intellect and the spaces defining that intellect's impotence. The poem's comparison is faulty, suggesting a duality that fails to commit to any useful distinctions or categorizations and presenting a linear sense of progress that seems more ominous than hopeful. Perhaps Detroit is a city of Destiny, but that destiny is ever uncertain except that it will most certainly involve issues of race, class, and power. A large city is a collection of histories, cultures, and personalities, which when they mix do so imperfectly. The social tensions between race, class, and gender have to be mediated and held in a dialogue that might allow each to be negotiated within the city's social context. Disenfranchisement represents a breakdown in this negotiation—a breakdown in which a group's right to speak frankly about its experience is denied.

Detroit, like any industrial city, is more of a collection of parts, of discarded bodies and ruins, than a contiguous whole. The basis for this observation is revealed in a photograph by Carlos Diaz collected in *Detroit Images* (see figure 11). About his photography, Diaz states that his “influences continue to be those photographers who have, through the camera's lens, revealed a concern for the human condition. People—their lives and the places they live—are the subject matter from which I choose to extract. My most recent body of work,” from which this photograph comes, “is collectively titled ‘Unknown Landmarks.’ As a visual interpretation of the urban environment, each image makes reference to our future. . . . Within each piece, words

form a vital component used to suggest or provoke [viewers] to search for their own meaning by pondering their relationship to what they see in the image and, finally, understanding what that meaning signifies [to them] as part of man/womankind” (qtd. in

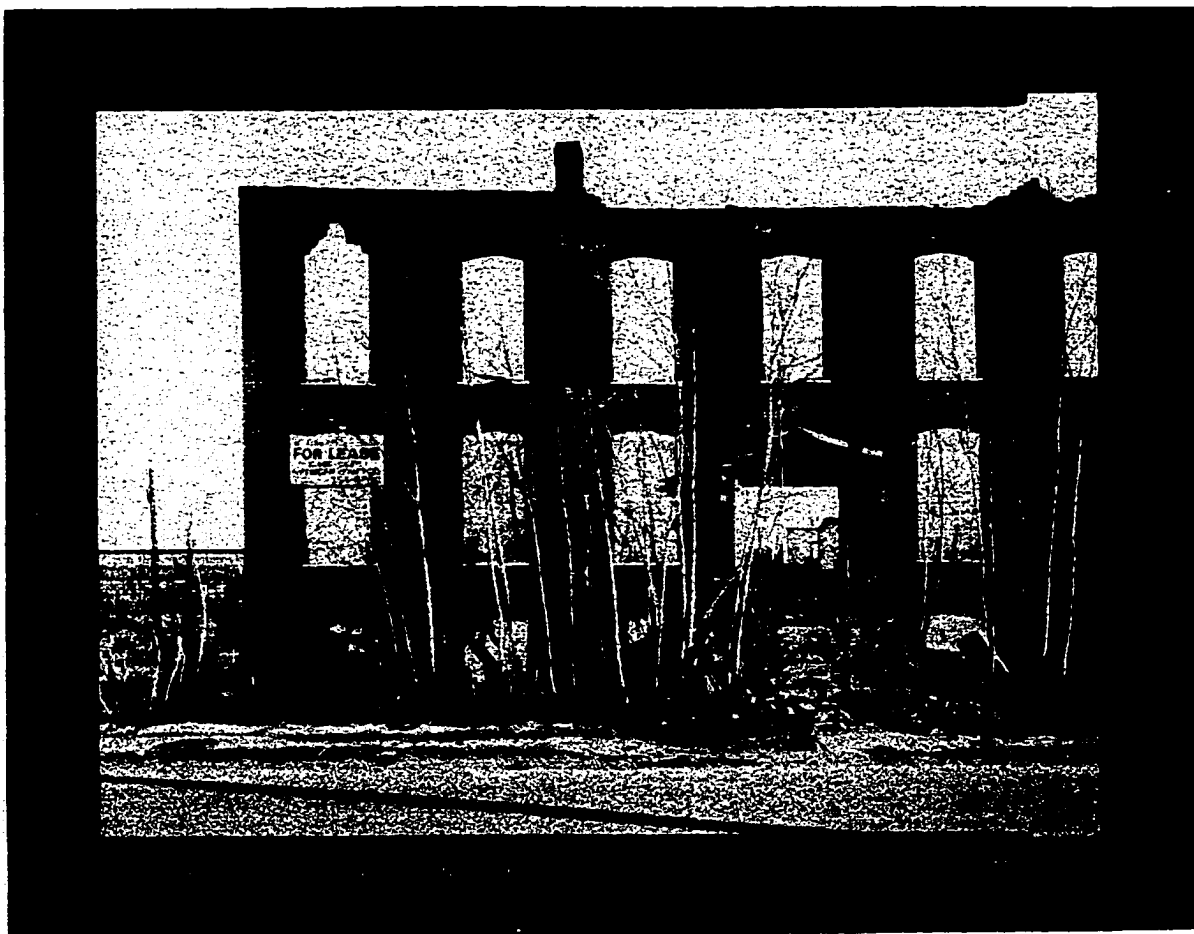


Figure 11: “East corner of Tombly and Orleans, looking northwest, 1986” (Bukowczyk 252)

Bukowczyk 241).

Examining this photograph requires the kind of perspective that Roland Barthes enacts in *Camera Lucida*. In this book, Barthes describes how one might analyze and interpret photographic images. He defines two elements that he uses to articulate a photograph’s meaning; these are the *studium* and the *punctum*. Recognizing the *studium*,

he explains, is “to encounter the photographer’s intentions, to enter into harmony with them, to approve or disapprove of them, but always to understand them, to argue them within myself, for culture (from which *studium* derives) is a contract arrived at between creators and consumers” (28). The *punctum* is a disturbance that punctures the *studium* and emerges from the photograph in a surprising or disconcerting way. Barthes states, “The second element which will disturb the *studium* I shall [. . .] call *punctum*; for *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of the dice. A photograph’s *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (27). Barthes suggests that the chance visual anomaly provides a way to personally interact with a photograph. These elements of seeing a photograph, of appreciating its “meaning,” create for Barthes the framework for a “history of looking” (12).

Barthes’s “history of looking” is an associative method of interpretation, in which details in the poem spark spontaneous remembrances. Barthes’s sense of seeing draws much of its validity, perhaps all of it, from his personal experiences and his perception of how they relate to the photographs he has chosen to study. In this way, his efforts recall the “associationistic doctrines” of the French Symbolists Yvor Winters describes in *Forms of Discovery*. Winters states that these “doctrines taught that all ideas arise from sensory perceptions,” which, he claims, “is very often a situation in which the poet offers us, or seems to offer us, sense-perceptions for their own sake, and for the sake of whatever vague feelings they may evoke” (251). At times, Barthes seems to fall into such reverie for its own sake, which is only a problem if we expect him to provide more universal and dispassionate theoretical pronouncements. However, Barthes’s strength, I would argue, is in what Winters might claim to be his weakness, and that is his ability to

give theoretical models individualistic applications. Barthes, as was the case with Proust, was not afraid of combining his personal experiences with his theoretical ideas, allowing them to inform how he perceived his day-to-day perceptions. He did not only interpret texts external to himself; he was quite often his own subject. Indeed, this aspect of Barthes's thought makes reading his criticism more like reading a novel than a formal philosophical treatise.

The kind of analysis Barthes conducts answers the apparently simple question, what does a photograph mean? However, meaning is not immediately evident in a photograph itself. Rather, it emerges from the viewer's interaction with the photographer's representation of history—that moment captured on film. Therefore, any analysis of a photograph is necessarily poetic in nature, an abstraction, a meta-discourse, remaking what has already been made, revealing how a historical moment that has been captured in a film relies upon a contemporary interpretation for the creation of its meaning. This leads me to the following question: how do we recognize and explain what a photograph is telling us? Barthes's *studium* and *punctum* provide a reasonable method for reading the codes of a photograph.

If we return to Diaz's photograph, and apply Barthes's method to it, what can the image tell us about Detroit? I am struck by two aspects of this photograph, both having to do with incongruity. Notice the "for lease" sign on the facade of this ruined building, which appears to have once housed apartments. I am sure this irony was at least part of Diaz's motivation for taking this picture, for irony has the ability to capture our attention and imagination. The notion that this building could be leased engenders a couple of clear reactions. One is humorous. The suggestion of leasing this building is obviously

absurd. The other is skepticism. Many recall how Detroit's inner-city neighborhoods were often left to decay or destroyed in the name of urban renewal (Sugrue). Others might recall the Niagara Apartments located in the Cass Corridor, which Bruce Harkness photographed in the 1970s. The photographs reveal a group of the very poor living in absolute squalor within these apartments. Bukowczyk and Aikenhead state that "despite the squalor and despair they may depict, [Harkness's photographs] show men and women with dignity and humanity" (107). I am not sure much dignity or humanity is revealed in these photographs. It might be more accurate to say that they reveal the thin line to which dignity and humanity are made to cling when the extremely poor are forgotten, and "urban public policy" and "social justice" do little to help (107).

The other aspect of the Diaz photograph that strikes me is the young beech (or perhaps birch) trees in front of the facade. It is the trees that I find most disturbing about the photograph. They generate feelings of nostalgia, as if phantoms of past presences. Their haphazard growth adds a sense of chaos and confusion to the otherwise mute image. Without the trees the facade would indeed seem lifeless, just another urban ruin. And the trees—which Diaz uses and makes note of in the titles of several of his photographs, such as "Young Maple and Playground Swings" and "Newly Planted Trees and Automotive Foundry"—are a "reference to the future," as Diaz claims his photographs themselves are. The fact that the trees will continue to grow adds an element of warmth and hope to the otherwise dreary photograph. Perhaps the phantoms these trees seem to have replaced may themselves be replaced; perhaps the city will endure in the same way these trees seem to endure. And in the end, is that not the idealism we embrace when we write; is that not the reason we return to the city for some sense of our futures?

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