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BUDDHIST POETICS, BEAT "COSMO-POLITICS," AND THE MAKER ETHOS: ASIAN AMERICANIST CRITIQUES OF WHITENESS IN MIDCENTURY AMERICAN BEAT WRITING

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BUDDHIST POETICS, BEAT "COSMO-POLITICS," AND THE MAKER ETHOS:

ASIAN AMERICANIST CRITIQUES OF WHITENESS IN MIDCENTURY AMERICAN BEAT WRITING

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
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BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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ABSTRACT

Buddhist Poetics, Beat "Cosmo-Politics," and the Maker Ethos: Asian Americanist Critiques of Whiteness in Midcentury American Beat Writing employs Walter Benjamin's notion of the "ruin"—which is not just a noun or notion, but also a verb, a mode of criticism—to intervene in the ostensibly well-trodden ground of what is known as "Beat literature." The project broadly argues for the "ruination" of Beat literature, where ruination means not destruction or annihilation, but a return to an unkempt state (as in the image of a ruined building) that more accurately reflects this literature's many layers of cultural, interpersonal, and transpacific exchange and extraction. Though many have rightly suggested that Beat literature is broadly Orientalist and transpacific in nature, I reveal the specific cultural appropriations, adaptations, and translations that occurred in this period and in these literary texts: the broadly East Asian cultural materials (like Zen Buddhism) so valued in Beat literature and its social communities were derived not solely from "the East" nor from translated Chinese and Japanese texts, but also from the Asians in America with whom Euro Americans were friends and worked alongside. My chapters on Asian diasporic poetry, letters, and autobiographical writing highlight Beat literature's connections to ethnic studies, settler colonial studies, gender studies, and critical race theory, applying an interdisciplinary approach to text and culture and bringing forward the cultural productions and expertise of Asian/Americans during this midcentury period. Because I am suggesting the work of Asian/Americans be read alongside other canonical Beat texts, their work destabilizes or "ruins" Beat literature, which has been seen as a body of texts that articulate a political, anticapitalist critique of post-WWII and Cold War-era America, but which I show to be reflective of a specific, European American identity grounded in a politics that does not accommodate the effects of settler colonialism and imperialism. The seeming stability and coherence of the category of "Beat" has only been possible because the work of Asian/Americans in this period was erased, unacknowledged. My project's major intervention may be found in its combination of critique—where I show how whiteness influenced Euro Americans' artistic choices and cultural appropriations—and recovery, where I reveal *from whom* and *how* these appropriations occurred. Further, I suggest that we begin to analyze American Buddhist writing beyond the limited rubrics formerly available to us in "Beat" and avant-garde literatures and in their communities of reception.

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Introduction:

Buddhist Poetics, Beat "Cosmo-Politics," and the Maker Ethos: Asian Americanist Critiques of Whiteness in Midcentury American Beat Writing

This dissertation intervenes in the ostensibly well-trodden ground of what is known as "Beat literature." It engages with this area of study to reveal the specific ways by which East Asian and Asian American cultural materials were appropriated, adapted, and translated into American poetry. Though scholars tend to suggest that the cultural appropriations of Beat literature were Orientalist, I show that these processes of appropriation and translation were *influenced* by whiteness and *generated* by an approach to culture that I call the Maker ethos. I therefore offer what I view as the most precise theorization so far of how cultural appropriation occurred in this pivotal period of transpacific poetics.

Whiteness shaped and consolidated certain images and aesthetics of Buddhism in the Western imaginary. This has meant that there are many other inscriptions of Buddhism in American literature heretofore illegible to us because of the dominant reading and critical practices that were an outgrowth of Beat literature and its avant-garde lineages. My study of Buddhism in Beat literature therefore becomes a broader study of Buddhist American writing, since the category "Beat" is itself circumscribed by whiteness. The limitations of the "Beat" category, and the ways these limitations have shaped our understanding of what Buddhism looks like in American literature, has made the Buddhist writing of Asian Americans generally illegible, the nature of their Buddhist poetics misunderstood. Meanwhile, the formation of Asian American literature as an identity-based canon in the late 1960s and 1970s has, in part, meant

that Asian American midcentury writing is not brought into conversation with nor analyzed alongside other midcentury writers like Gary Snyder, Joanne Kyger, or Philip Whalen.

My critique is also, therefore, buttressed by a project of recovery: the lesser-known poet Albert Saijo is part of this period's Beat communities, but is generally absent from the scholarship on Beat literature and from the scholarship on American Buddhist writing. I highlight his work, alongside the work of Hoa Nguyen, Shin Yu Pai, and Garrett Hongo, to show that the inscriptions of Buddhism in American poetry are not uniform. The Asian American texts I examine in this project show the interarticulation of settler colonialism, gender and sexuality, diaspora and displacement, and indigenization and racialization. Because I am suggesting they be read alongside other canonical Beat texts, their work destabilizes Beat literature, which has been seen as a body of texts that articulate a political, anticapitalist critique of post-WWII and Cold War-era America, but which I show to be reflective of a specific, European American identity grounded in a politics that does not accommodate the effects of settler colonialism and imperialism.

The illegibility of Asian American writers and cultural producers from this period, as I am suggesting, is a side effect of the impact of whiteness on the category of "Beat literature." By "whiteness" I mean the subject position that articulates itself as universality in the United States (this is a subject position, therefore, that manifests not just as an ethnicity, but also as the ideologies following from the liberal humanist conception of "Man"). When whiteness comes into contact with the cultural materials of Zen Buddhism, as I show in chapter three, Buddhism in a sense becomes white-enabling; the characteristics of Buddhism that serve to support whiteness (here, think of ideas like emptiness and non-essence) simply contribute to the special kind of ignorances that whiteness tends to perpetuate. I discuss whiteness as a phenomenon that

interacts with Buddhism in its adaptations to American society and as a factor that affects the choices of Euro American artists: whiteness does not know itself or see itself in this period, and white cultural producers were therefore unable to bring that knowledge into the calculations of their art, even though I suggest that we can now see whiteness's presence in their work. In this dissertation, therefore, I reveal the specific Buddhisms that intrigued Euro Americans of this midcentury period to be particularly conducive to affirming the occlusions, invisibilities, and (perhaps willful) ignorances of whiteness. I show this interaction of Buddhism and whiteness in the writing of Asian Americans and Euro Americans; in the particular "cosmo-politics" that Beat writers espoused; and in the collegial and friendly relationships between Asians in America and the Euro Americans who are already well-known as Beat writers.

My project began as an attempt demonstrate how some Beat-era poetry addresses the fact that the ostensibly poststructuralist philosophical orientations of Buddhism had been absorbed into neoliberal conceptions of the subject and into neoliberal capitalism, its radical potentialities rendered largely inert. I hoped to return to mid-twentieth century Buddhist writing to explain how some Buddhist concepts and some texts' "translations" of Buddhism are easily commodified. In turn, I hoped to delineate a *still more* liberatory poetics that could shed light on and criticize the dominance of one particular *kind of* Buddhism, which has been so aestheticized and commodifiable. I still find this attempt an important one, since mainstream Buddhist phenomena largely remains outside the purview of literary criticism. As I show in chapter two, three midcentury Euro-American poets provide a "prehistory" to such mainstream phenomena like "mindfulness." Readers may hear echoes of this earlier vision of the project in chapter two.

Yet that inquiry needed to take a step further: rather than delineating one liberatory, but understudied, strand of American Buddhist writing, my project now examines how Buddhism is

implicated in larger twentieth-century philosophical shifts, how Buddhism is part of modernity in the U.S., and how race is inseparable from the ways that Buddhism is translated and popularized in the U.S. In examining whiteness in Beat-era cultural productions, this project clarifies: 1) Beat politics, heretofore generally understood as anticapitalist; 2) Asian American erasures and exclusions from "Beat" literature and counterculture; 3) the specific ways by which East Asian and Asian American cultural materials were appropriated into Beat literature and, by extension, into the American poetic avant-garde; and 4) multiple inscriptions of Buddhism in Asian/American writing, thereby broadening our ability to analyze how Buddhism is "brought into" American writing beyond the limited rubrics formerly available to us in "Beat" literature.

The dissertation takes a few turns: first, in chapter one, it demonstrates how Euro-American cultural producers brought the philosophies and practices of Buddhism—that is, a version of Zen Buddhism that had been curated for Western audiences by multiple Asian and American writers and thinkers—into their writing, and in so doing, generated a poetics of "timely uncertainty," which is to say, generated, through poetry, claims about the nature of "truths." In these claims, rendered in and through poetry, they join a broader postwar critique of logical positivism found in the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Walter Benjamin and in the field of quantum physics. The next turn this project takes is to show in chapter two how Buddhist meditative practices became poetic matter, informing the writing of Gary Snyder, Joanne Kyger, and Philip Whalen's innovative poetry. I delineate between the telos of Kyger and Whalen's poetry on the one hand, and Snyder's poetry on the other hand, showing that the aesthetics of contemporary mindfulness can be seen in Snyder's poems, which register a transcendent sublimity in their inscriptions of Buddhism. In my reading of Kyger and Whalen's poems, I show a mundane sense of Buddhist awareness that has heretofore been difficult to register as

such because of the dominance of mindfulness aesthetics. Many have commented upon the broadly transpacific nature of Beat writing, but I demonstrate how "Buddhism" is specifically brought into American poetry and show which, or what kinds of, "Buddhisms" that Euro-Americans had access to in this historical context.

In chapter three, the project brings that idea that poets "use" Buddhism in their work into its articulation of the "Maker ethos," my term for an approach to cultural materials that takes and uses materials for specific ends. Though not all Makerly appropriations, uses, or incorporations of cultural material are *extractive,* chapter three discusses extractive appropriations in some Beat figures' uses of East Asian and Asian American cultural materials. I make this turn toward the "Maker ethos" to demonstrate the ethics of using cultural materials that are not one's own and to demonstrate the side-effects of the interactions between whiteness and Buddhism in American society. From my articulation of this term of the "Maker," I then turn toward those side effects, two of which are: 1) the illegibility of Asian American cultural producers in this period; and 2) the disqualification of Asian American Buddhisms in the U.S. I use the word "disqualification" to describe Alan Watts's argument that Japanese American Buddhist communities practiced an "inauthentic" Buddhism. This argument, too, follows from the occlusions of whiteness. It is when my project takes this turn that the "ruinous" theoretical trappings of my project may become clearer (I explain this theoretical grounding of the "ruin" more below), as we see, through the Japanese American poet Albert Saijo's poetics of MAJOR feelings, that the ostensibly liberatory Buddhism so valued by Euro-Americans is one of the violent forces that has gone to form what we now call the Anthropocene. This analysis of Saijo's work may be found in chapter four.

In later sections of chapter four, the project then turns from Saijo's work to examine multiple Asian/American inscriptions of Buddhism, showing how the category of "Beat" itself is overly informed by whiteness and further showing that Asian/American writers are also "Making" poetry, bringing Buddhism into their work in a similarly Makerly fashion—only, their uses for Buddhism tend not to be extractive or harmfully appropriative. Thus, I argue that the adaptations, appropriations, and translations of Buddhism in American writing are *not* uniform, as many had formerly thought because of the tidiness of "Beat literature" and how that category, combined with the celebrity of white Beat figures, have shaped our appreciation of what Buddhism "looks like" in American writing. The dissertation's final turn is to return in chapter five to the ground of lived experience—*not* to the novels and poems, i.e., the timeless artifacts of Beat literature, but rather, to the personal letters of the Chinese American translator Charles Leong. Leong's letters, which praise Snyder's Makerly approach to his study of East Asian cultures, reveals that the Maker ethos is a distinctive point in Sinology, its orientation a major improvement upon the field of study that was known as Far East or Oriental Studies in the American academy of the 1940s and 50s. From my examination of whiteness in Beat literature, Leong is a conduit for us to ruminate on how whiteness manifests in the self-definitions of the late-twentieth century avant-garde, which tends to class itself as part of the lineages coming out of the Beat moment.

My interest in examining the telos of these Beat-era cultural productions (as seen, for example, in my question: who is using Buddhism in their work, and to what end?) is not solely a Marxist literary critique of Beat literature. I believe the project's stakes are higher now than in its earlier iteration, which sought to hold forth a body of literature that is anti-teleological and therefore (because it resists wholeness, completion, or transcendence) less commodifiable. In

addition, I am at present not interested in studying Buddhism as a set of ideas that parallel postmodern, poststructuralist thought, though I believe it is possible to see it that way. In sharp contrast, I want to show the exclusionary *harms* and ideological *inertias* of Buddhism when it interacts with whiteness in this pivotal moment of transpacific translation. The project's goal is to "ruin" Beat literature—not to "cancel" it, deem it racist, or call into question specific writers' legacies (though there is room for this kind of critique), but to settle American Buddhist writing into a place of immanence. I aim to show Buddhism in a more creaturely light, which is to say, to show that its transcendental trappings have side effects that have been harmful and exclusive—and to provide literary critics with a better means of analyzing and assessing American Buddhist writing beyond the rubrics formerly available to us within "Beat literature" and Beat Studies.

I draw from Walter Benjamin's idea of the "ruin" as a methodological underpinning of the project. For Benjamin, "criticism means the mortification of the works": not, "as the romantics have it…awakening of the consciousness in living works, but the settlement of knowledge in dead ones" (Benjamin 182). Within his larger argument about how his contemporaries, postwar philosophers and art critics, should adapt their methodologies to a more inter-disciplinary approach, Benjamin argues that criticism involves returning to the "ruins" of a genre like the allegory, a move that returns knowledge to its "immanent-material-empirical given" rather than cutting it off from this in order "to ground that knowledge in a transcendent-idea-hallucinated supplement" (hence Benjamin's frustration with critics' application of Aristotelian aesthetics to 17th-century genres) (Wallis 20). Benjamin explains how the baroque genre of the *Trauerspiel* reduces history itself (which, with its redemptive telos, tends to dominate other genres) to nature, even to the status of a stage prop. In the allegorical construction of the baroque *Trauerspiel,* therefore, one can see how, as "the attraction of earlier

charms diminishes decade by decade…all ephemeral beauty is completely stripped off, and the work stands as a ruin" (Benjamin 182). With the passing of time, the allegory's "outer form has died away because of its extreme crudity"; yet what survives is "an object of knowledge which has settled in the consciously constructed ruins" (182). It is this "ruined" object of knowledge I am most interested in. When used in Glenn Wallis' work, this mode of critique is intended "not to annihilate the finely wrought edifice of Western Buddhism, but to view that edifice in the glow of a stranger, more creaturely, light" (Wallis 20). Wallis' argument in *A Critique of Western Buddhism* (2019) is therefore that "Western Buddhism must be ruined," where ruin does not refer to destruction or annihilation but rather *a return to an unkempt state* (Wallis viii).

Wallis, alongside many others, have directly and implicitly sought to achieve this "ruination" by pointing to the ways Buddhism has been absorbed into the logic of multinational capital, into the discourses of self-help, and into twenty-first-century marketing copy. Buddhism's absorption into these discourses suggests an evasion of the consequences of Buddhist thought, present in concepts such as vanishing, nihility, extinction, contingency, and no-self. This evasion frustrates scholars who believe in Buddhism's liberatory and radical potentialities, its theoretical parallels to poststructuralist thought. But rather than achieving this "ruination" through Marxist critical approaches, I believe the far stronger ruinous force must merge Marxist thought with the Asian American critiques of this project. It is this merging that makes this project both an intervention in Beat literature and a rightful recovery of Asian American writers, whose critiques, along with the project's critical reading of the work of their Euro American counterparts, return the symbols, romanticism, and transcendence of Buddhism in American literature to immanence, showing the cracks in the edifice of Western Buddhism.

Chapter One:

The Politics of Certitude and A Poetics of "Timely" Uncertainty in the American Midcentury

Introduction

This chapter examines cultural contexts of the early-to-mid-twentieth century to illustrate how three schools of poetics—the New Critics, the Zen lineage of American poetry, and the Romantic lineage of American poetry (both lineages coming out of the San Francisco Renaissance zeitgeist)—pursue the *timely experience* of the world rather than the transcendental truths of positive science. In pursuing *timeliness*, which I explain further below, these three schools articulate a vision of reality that is inherently uncertain, one that is based in an understanding that "truths" are not for all time, but arise out of human tastes, desires, and habits. Their work comes up against a postwar impulse, in philosophy and poetry, to return to established "certainties" of truth grounded in transcendence or empiricism. This impulse toward certitude is most clearly illustrated in the "self-evident" truths of the logical positivists, whose work assumes the empirical discernability of truths. The positivists' postwar "return" to certitude is both celebratory—a sign of postwar victory—and also an evasion of the ruinous timeliness that becomes ever-present during times of crisis. The scope of this chapter will therefore outline the play between the positivists' return to certitude and the responses of those three schools of poetics, who in pursuing timeliness, further the idea that reality is contingent, uncertain.[1]

Similar to these schools of poetics, the later work of Ludwig Wittgenstein; Walter Benjamin's examination of the *Trauerspiel;* J.L. Austin's speech-act theory; and Thorstein

[1] For further analysis of positivism and its significance in Enlightenment Modernity, see Wang and Schleifer, Chapter 1 (*Chinese Literary Modernism: Modernity, Corporate Capitalism, and Chinese Literature since 1978* (2021)), and Schleifer's forthcoming collection of lectures, *Structures of Experience: The Discipline of Literary Studies,* especially Lecture Two (2021).

Veblen's theory of value want to *temporalize* truth, making it subject to the "ruinations of time."[2] Here, and throughout this project, I draw on Benjamin's understanding of the ruin, articulated in his examination of allegory in the Baroque period. Though Benjamin's work *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* is about the cultural crisis of the Thirty Years' War of the sixteenth century, he wrote *Origin* during the early twentieth century, a comparable moment of cultural crisis with its own "thirty years' war" from 1914-1945 (Wittgenstein also wrote at this time, though his work culminates in the postwar *Philosophical Investigations*). The traumatic wartime contexts of this twentieth-century thirty years' war contributed to what Michael P. Hodges and John Lachs call the "twentieth century's painful discovery of contingency" (1). Alongside other Western disciplines and institutions that seemed to lay in rubble at the end of World War II, "the intellectual, moral, and religious practices that philosophers had attempted to justify by showing their ground in some transcending certainty came to seem arbitrary or suspended in thin air" (Hodges and Lachs 1-2).[3]

The "search for certainty" that had defined the philosophical project since at least Descartes appeared to have been "leveled" (Hodges and Lachs 2). In response, there was an impulse to return to those certainties of fact and transcendence. Yet the theorists I list above (Wittgenstein, Benjamin, Austin, and Veblen) "appreciate the integrity of human practices" as

[2] Though the idea of "ruination" is part of Benjamin's complex thought, this particular grouping of theorists, as well as the idea that they "temporalize truth," comes from my time in Dr. Ronald Schleifer's classes, particularly "Literature and Economics" and "Speech-Act Theory." *Modernism and Time* (2000), *A Political Economy of Modernism* (2018), and his forthcoming manuscript titled *Structures of Experience: The Discipline of Literary Studies* elegantly expand upon each author's unique contribution and synthesize their work's relevance within the larger "abundances" of Modernism and the ongoing crises of the twentieth century.

[3] Hodges and Lachs qualify that they do not mean to suggest that thinkers in other ages "had not been aware of the contingency of events, of the historical situatedness of our values, and of the happenstance character of some of our most dearly held beliefs" (3-4). Rather, "the upheavals of the twentieth century made it difficult even for ordinary people to believe in the privileged status of their own ways," as people recognized "that our values and practices are thoroughly contingent, that they lack the certainty, rightness, or absolute justification prior generations insisted they could attain" (4, 3).

opposed to "a mistaken philosophical tradition that demands foundations" (Hodges and Lachs 3). Taken together, their work's broad impact is to return our understanding of "fact" and truth" to living human knowledge—the social and linguistic practices that exist *in time* and in communities, outside the context of the search for certainty. In other words, their work temporalizes truths, returning it to the fields of human behavior and institutions while also making it "subject to the ruinations of time." Strikingly, alongside these theorists' push to return positive ideas of truth and fact to the realm of human practice, the development of capitalist consumer culture also relegated value *away* from positive facts (like "need," which in some economic theories is still taken to be the major motivator of consumer decisions) and *toward* "facts" of taste and desire. In this consumer culture, "taste" and the uncertainties of desire are generators of value and can lead to perplexities like an engagement with "attractive" truths like fascism. It is against this consumer culture that the writers and artists now classed as part of "Beat literature" reacted and in turn produced new poetries and new countercultural identities. I discuss those poetries and identities in chapters two and three.

The idea of "ruinously" temporalizing truths, which I expand upon below, is a major theoretical pillar of my argument throughout this project: it is central in chapter two, where I argue that some poetries of the Zen lineage hold a "ruinous" latent potentiality; then, this ruinousness is loudly present in the work of Albert Saijo, whose poetics of "MAJOR feelings" I discuss in chapter four; and it is Charles Leong's unpublished personal letters that take the larger-than-life, celebrity nature of much of Beat literature and render it "ruined," returned to the ground of lived experience. I discuss his letters in chapter five.

Of the three schools of poetics that I discuss in this present chapter (the New Critics, the Zen lineage, and the Romantic lineage), the Zen lineage's mode of temporalizing truth—the

unique midcentury Zen poetics that subjected certitude "to the ruinations of time"—is later seen as valuable within late-twentieth century contexts, in which it is accepted that reality is inherently contingent and uncertain. Within this later cultural understanding of uncertainty, including a late-twentieth century valuing of "the present moment," the tools of this Zen poetics become recognized *as* tools, since they are valuable, consumable, and commodifiable in such uncertain contexts. In this later period of the twentieth century, the influence of the Zen poetry lineage is in part usurped by the medicalization and psychologization of mindfulness practices, as some of the tools of the Zen lineage's poetics are increasingly valued and translated into the fields of self-help and behavioral psychology. The work of this major lineage of American poetry is in some sense subordinated to the logic of the market.

Though the Zen lineage's work is not *causal* to the later scaling of what we now call "mindfulness," I am suggesting that this lineage's influence and impact are "usurped" because even within literary criticism, Buddhist American poetry is now generally understood as those poems that most reflect this shift into mindfulness—poems with a similar aesthetic as the vaguely Buddhist, therapeutic mindfulness now marketed in a widespread manner. Yet perhaps the far greater factor behind this travel of certain Buddhist ideas into the consumable marketplace is, as I argue in chapter three, the factor of whiteness. Because whiteness is such an indelible part of Beat Buddhist poetry, and because of the occlusions that whiteness produced—an effect of which was the downplaying of the work and influence of Asians in America on Beat writing and counterculture—the work of these Euro American cultural producers was enabled to easily travel into the American mainstream at the same time that it was adopted as part of the lineages of the American poetic avant-garde.

Making Western Buddhism "Subject to Time"

As I will show in chapter two, within the Zen poetics of Joanne Kyger and Philip Whalen, there may exist a latent potentiality to radically criticize—or to use Benjamin's notion, "ruin"—the commodified Buddhism that is so ubiquitous today. Meanwhile, Albert Saijo's poetics—heretofore unrecognized as part of midcentury "Beat" cultural productions—voices the most radically critical poetics of "ruinousness." By the "radical critical potentiality" of Kyger, Whalen, and Saijo's work, I mean not something that criticizes and offers alternatives to hegemony, but rather, a potentiality that is simply critical of *the way things are,* to no end in particular (indeed, avoiding the telos of "ends" altogether). Charles Leong's letters, in turn, allow us to gaze at the painfully intimate "ruinousness" of a life's work that remains unpublished, *not* arising into the timeless authorial fame of the book-as-artifact.

Why this focus on the "ruin"? Like ghost towns of the American West, areas of the city of Detroit, or even the romanticized Gothic ruins one finds in a Brontë novel, such decaying structures reveal the frail humanity behind edifices that once symbolized wealth or progress. As ruins, they hold a mode of seeing that is critical of teleology and totality. Consider a ghost town like St. Elmo, Colorado: in experiencing such a place, one can vividly, physically see the specificity of human habits and practices *in time*. A ghost town reveals, almost too intimately, how grounded in time one community's idiosyncrasies (or "institutional facts") were. Like other ruins, St. Elmo is critical of, but does not offer alternatives to, the status quos and systems that used to function there: a formerly-thriving mining community that housed miners and prospectors working over 50 mines in the area, St. Elmo is now completely obsolete (as are its community's mining technologies)—and its decaying existence now inherently criticizes the telos of progress, of Westward Expansion, subjecting these to time.

If the three schools of poetics, alongside the theorists I have described, sought to return truths and "facts" to temporality, to the lived, performed ground of human experience, I want to suggest, alongside Glenn Wallis, that a similar "ruining" of the ostensibly transcendental truths of Western Buddhism is needed.[4] Scholarship and literary anthologies on Buddhism in American literature still tend to be celebratory of Buddhism's so-called radical potential within late-capitalist societies, despite newer work that illustrates the embeddedness of Buddhist ideas within late capitalism (including the work of R. John Williams and more popular voices like Slavoj Žižek).[5] Meanwhile, a number of scholars have been critical of the hagiographic, uncritical nature of much discourse surrounding Buddhism in contemporary Western societies (the work of James Najarian, Thanissaro Bhikku, Bernard Faure, and David McMahan are some of the most vocal contemporary writers on the hagiographies surrounding "Buddhism" and figures associated with it). For Wallis, Western Buddhism is so powerful today that it has become a towering cultural form, an edifice; and he calls for work that treats Buddhism as raw human cultural material (Harvard Divinity School). Wallis suggests we must dismantle or "ruin" this cultural form in order to "see it in a more creaturely light" (Harvard Divinity School). The

[4] Glenn Wallis has argued that it is crucial to wrest potentiality from Western Buddhism, as it has now become a form that subjugates humans. Though Wallis writes from a religious studies perspective, such a call applies also to literary studies of Buddhism in American literature and poetry.

[5] Today Buddhism's most vocal critic Slavoj Žižek argues that the *usefulness* of Buddhism as religion or spiritual attitude in American society arises from its ability to make workers feel more focused and creative (Žižek 2001). Ronald Purser makes a similar critique in his June 2019 article "The Mindfulness Conspiracy," published in *The Guardian:* "teachers of mindfulness need to acknowledge that personal stress also has societal causes. By failing to address collective suffering, and systemic change that might remove it, they rob mindfulness of its real revolutionary potential, reducing it to something banal that keeps people focused on themselves" (Purser). Purser expands this critique in *McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality* (2019), where he expresses concern for the consequences of marketing mindfulness as an individualized tool of mental health instead of asking practitioners to embrace more difficult Buddhist concepts that can cause them to locate and address systemic societal problems as part of a community. By focusing on how twentieth-century theorists of technology and labor refashioned corporate culture and technologies to reflect Zen values, R. John Williams—confirming Slavoj Žižek's argument that "a form of Eastern mysticism has become the new 'ethos' of global capitalism"—reveals the ways in which Zen Buddhism in particular now directly informs the organization, ethos, and logic of multinational capital (Williams "Techne-Zen" 53).

work of Wittgenstein and Benjamin, alongside thinkers in the field of quantum physics, the work of the New Critics, and the work of two lineages of the San Francisco Renaissance, are discourses that work toward the "ruining" of a midcentury politics of certitude (a "ruining" in which the work of Veblen and J.L. Austin also take part, though this chapter cannot adequately address their own pathbreaking responses to positivism). Wallis' call to "ruin" Buddhism, therefore, is answered in part before Wallis' own time, in the poetics of uncertainty that chapters one and two discuss; in Saijo's poetics of "MAJOR feelings"; and in Charles Leong's life, which "ruins" the celebrity nature of what Najarian calls "the Buddhist Poet."

This chapter turns our focus to a period in which Buddhism truly was "raw human cultural material" within the United States. In this midcentury period, East Asian cultural materials were more available to white cultural producers than ever before. The Zen lineage's midcentury poetics of uncertainty is articulated within a wider set of social and cultural conditions that later gave rise to the "edifice" that is Western Buddhism. And yet, at the same time, this midcentury poetics also (still) holds the potential to "ruin" Western Buddhism in our present moment—which is to say, to subject it to time and thus dismantle its ontological and transcendental trappings in order to see it in a more creaturely light. Within the larger scope of this project, such a ruining must occur so that we as scholars and teachers can arrive at a more precise understanding of American Buddhist poetry. Western Buddhism's major contemporary phenomenon, the mindfulness movement, has so impacted our understanding of transpacific American poetry that we cannot "see" Buddhism in poetry except for when it replicates the aesthetics of mindfulness. This inability to "see" Buddhism in poetry as anything other than Romantic and transcendental arises in part from the ubiquity of mindfulness today: I discuss this argument in chapter two. But this occlusion also arises from the fact that Asian American

Buddhists were "disqualified" from being agents in forming Buddhism in America and were therefore disallowed from being acknowledged as cultural producers who themselves fashioned Buddhist poetries and poetics. I discuss this disqualification in chapter three.

Walter Benjamin's notion of the ruin, which I take to mean not simply a theoretical concept but a mode of making things "subject to time," can be found in his examination of the Baroque allegorical genre of the *Trauerspiel* in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928). Again, it is perhaps helpful to keep in mind that German Tragic Drama is itself the literature of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), which transformed (by means of ruination) the set ideas of Europe. Such a "ruination" is not unlike the decay that the two World Wars wrought in Benjamin's own time. Benjamin's championing of allegory should be discussed alongside these contexts, as allegory is a mode expressing an experience of a world in fragments, where the passing of time does not mean progress, but rather, disintegration (Buck-Morrs 18). At the time of Benjamin's writing, allegory had been demoted by the early twentieth century's "hegemony of beauty within aesthetics, an ascendancy exemplified in the aesthetic symbol" (Stead 54). The romantic symbol, "itself a corruption of 'real' mystical and sacred symbolism," had marginalized the allegory's standing in studies of the Baroque period (Stead). Responding to his contemporaries, who argued that allegory as a genre failed to stabilize meaning, Benjamin "resurrect[s] allegory" by showing how its closeness to human frailty and contingency *exceeds* the aesthetic valuing of "meaning" or "beauty."

The problem with the romantic symbol is its "presentation of a falsely affirmative, mythifying image of a classical ideal," its aspiration to "aesthetic autonomy, completion, and transcendental unity" (Stead 54). The symbol, "wrapped in a harmonious trinity with truth, beauty, and moral good since the time of Aristotle…invokes totality and closure"; indeed,

"classical symbolism seeks to transcend time and history, thereby displacing the anguish of life with images of stabilized harmony and eternal perfection"—hence early twentieth century critics' preference for genres that stabilized meaning (Stead 54, Koepnick 68). In contrast, however:

> In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting. And in this guise history does not assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay. Allegory thereby declares itself to be beyond beauty. (Benjamin *Origin* 178)

The allegory subverts the transcendent trappings of symbology like "eternal life" and instead offers "irresistible decay." This "irresistible decay" is a "focal point from which to look on things" (Cowan 112). Allegory is not, therefore, too mechanical, as Benjamin's contemporaries had argued; instead, it is "beyond beauty" due to its anti-ontological, anti-teleological forces of decay:

> In allegory the *facies hippocratica* of history lies before the eyes of the observer as a petrified, primordial landscape. Everything about history which, from the beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful expresses itself in a countenance - no, in a death's head … in this, the figure of man's most extreme subjection to nature, is pronounced the enigmatic question not only of the nature of human existence as such but of the biographical historicity of the individual. This is the core of the allegorical way of seeing, of the baroque, secular account of history as the passion of the world, a world that is meaningful only in the stations of its decay. The greater the significance, the greater the subjection to death, because death digs most deeply the jagged line of demarcation between physical being and significance. (Benjamin *Origin* 166)

As Bainard Cowan writes, Benjamin "repeatedly stresses…'the allegorical way of seeing' or of 'looking at things': 'the allegorical attitude,' 'the allegorical intention' as well as 'allegorical intuition'" (Cowan 112). The "allegorical way of seeing" is to see a world "that is meaningful only in the stations of its decay"—and to "see" this decay is to consider not just *ontology* ("the enigmatic question…of the nature of human existence as such,") but also to see the "biographical historicity of the individual"—to subject ontology to time (Benjamin *Origin* 166). The allegory's emphases on transience—most arrestingly illustrated here in the image of the *facies hippocratica,* the changes visible in a human face that is close to death—enabled it to "represent the frailty and finitude of human life" (Stead 55). Symbolism's totalizing nature disallows viewers from seeing history as "a petrified, primordial landscape," but allegory is a *mode* (not just a genre) in which things are laid bare to uncover truths "buried beneath layers of false romantic aesthetics" (Stead 64). (Strikingly, Saijo's critique, which returns history to "a petrified, primordial landscape," partly achieves this simply by pointing to climate change—the devastations that capital, expansion, and colonialism have wrought upon the Earth. His own "mode" of poetics, then, does indeed uncover truths buried beneath layers of false aesthetics.)

Another way of viewing these "forces of decay" is to consider how the later work of Wittgenstein subjects philosophical transcendences to time. In his *Philosophical Investigations* (published posthumously in 1953), he "locates language within the matrix of human practices in a universe of contingencies," as opposed to examining language within "the grand philosophical tradition's tendency to overlook the situated, that is, the worldly, character of our practices" (Hodges and Lachs 90). Like Benjamin's move to demonstrate the value of the allegory as "temporal, specific, situational, transient" as opposed to the "idealized, atemporal, and total" symbol, *Philosophical Investigations* dismantles his earlier work's "attempt to think through the

ontological project" of philosophy, with its "distinctions between 'objects and facts' and between 'language and world'" (Hodges and Lachs 91). Instead, his later work "avoids all attempts to enter into the project of traditional ontology," showing "over and over again that, if we begin where we live, that is, in our situated practices, uncontextualized questions of vast generality cannot legitimately arise" (91). Allegory, as John McCole notes, "has the discontinuous structure of a series of moments, of transitory, failed attempts to capture meaning," and I want to suggest that Wittgenstein's later work holds within it a similar "ruinous" methodology in that it lays bare the temporal, human situatedness buried beneath philosophy's layers of ontology (McCole 133, qtd. in Stead 56). Wittgenstein works to make philosophy as a discipline subject to time by pointing to the words philosophers use, showing how strange it is that they separate words from their "original homes," from their language-games:

> When philosophers use a word—'knowledge,' 'being,' 'object,' 'I,' 'proposition,' 'name'—and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home?—What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use. (*Philosophical Investigations* 117)

To bring words back from the metaphysical to the everyday is to "ruin" philosophy by grounding formerly abstract, essentialized words like "knowledge" or "doubt" in timely "language-games."

Wittgenstein's later work also partly dismantles the strength of logical positivism in the American academy. The logical positivists' view—that language can and should be factually or empirically verifiable—reaches for totality in much the same way as the romantic symbol of Benjamin's study, mimicking the preference of Benjamin's contemporaries for stable, certain meaning. As Ronald Schleifer notes, "facts, in the common-sense popular understandings found

in *Wikipedia*, are *transcendentally* true," meaning that "the truth (or falseness) of a factual proposition or a statistical tendency is true for all time, once and for all" (Schleifer *Literary Studies* Chapter Four).[6] "Facts" in this Enlightenment understanding are "a version of the positive facts of philosophical positivism," which "was developed in the early nineteenth century by Auguste Comte…but is implicit in the mathematical physics of Descartes and Newton, the mechanics of Galileo, and the analysis of political economy in Adam Smith and its critique in Karl Marx" (*Literary Studies* Chapter Four). Three major assumptions inform positivism:

> that the phenomena of the world are ultimately *simple*, such that the whole of any phenomenon is made up of the sum of its parts; that phenomena of the world are basically value-free, such that whoever seeks knowledge encounters, *accurately*, phenomena that are not affected by the attitudes, presuppositions, or even the sensory apparatus of the knower; and that the phenomena of the world behave in a law-like way and such laws are universal and, *generalizing*, and because of this can predict the future. (*Literary Studies* Chapter Four)

Yet as Thorstein Veblen argued in the early twentieth century, against such a positivist vision of "facts," "we should understand that most (if not all) phenomena we experience are 'institutional' facts"—those "based on institutions, which [Veblen] defines as governed by 'habits of thought' held by members of a community"—rather than positive 'brute' facts" of the Enlightenment kind (*Literary Studies* Chapter Four, Veblen *Modern Civilization* 239). (As Schleifer has shown, capitalist consumer culture confirms this point in its location of value not in positive "need" but

[6] Here I quote from a forthcoming book by Ronald Schleifer: *Literary Studies and Well-Being: Structures of Experience in the Worldly Work of Literature and Healthcare* (forthcoming Fall 2022). In citing this book, I will refer to chapters rather than page numbers (the page numbers of the manuscript I have been using are not, and never will be, available to readers).

in institutional facts like "taste.")[7] Like Benjamin and like Wittgenstein, Veblen also seeks to return our understanding of ontology, "facts," and transcendent symbols to the humble ground of actual human existence in time, to "institutions" based in "habits of thought."

A Politics of Certitude: Logical Positivism at Midcentury

When I was a recent college graduate, I read Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* in the cold capital city of Mongolia. My interest in Wittgenstein related to a desire for an unraveling of some of the implied teleologies of Western literature, philosophy, and history. I had moved to Mongolia because of my frustration with grand narratives, particularly with teleological narratives of international development that suggested that countries "grew up": that they had their industrial revolutions and growing pains, and then gradually became wealthier and more progressive with time. The orderliness and Westernness of my liberal arts education frustrated me so that I felt it necessary to escape "the West" and take in another view of historical progress. It seemed likely that the expansive geographic features of Mongolia and its own history of empire would be a generous space in which to re-examine Western ideologies. How do contemporary Mongolians view themselves in light of Mongolia's incomparable imperial history? I wondered whether Mongolia's sense of history was backward-looking: Mongolia ruled the world hundreds of years ago, and yet the figure of Chinggis Khan is still crucial to Mongolian national identity. The ignorance and Orientalism of wanting to "escape" the "West" and landing in what I considered the oppositional "East" is now obvious, as is the irony of wanting to learn more about non-Western thought and immediately turning to Wittgenstein.

Yet my sense that Wittgenstein was part of my engagement with "the East" made it all the more interesting when I learned that poet Joanne Kyger's "involvement with Buddhism" also

[7] Schleifer, *Literary Studies* Chapter Four.

began with Wittgenstein (Meltzer 126). In a 2001 interview, Kyger is asked where Buddhism "started" for her. It started, she says, early on:

> while I was in school. I was studying Wittgenstein and Western thought, and that led me to D.T. Suzuki. I had intellectual, metaphysical interests in Buddhism. I did think at one point that Zen Buddhism--there was a spark of notoriety that came with it in the late fifties--was a real answer. I thought, "I'll find out what the meaning of life is all about! Whew, thank goodness!" And at that time, in the late fifties, there were maybe four books on Buddhism. (Meltzer 126)

Of great interest in the fifties, she notes, was "meditation—Zen. It directed you to be aware of what goes on in the mind. As a practice, meditation showed this key to this enormous, buried energy, images," Kyger said, adding: "I think that's why it's still of interest" (126). Though the religion of Buddhism, Kyger suggests, "isn't very different from any other religion," it was meditation that "caught the fancy of Americans in the fifties" (126). Kyger is registering the "scene" quality of Buddhism's attractiveness in the 1950s—its "spark of notoriety" that many presumably felt and tapped into—but it is also clear that Wittgenstein's work lent a certain "intellectual, metaphysical" rigor to her study of Buddhism (Meltzer 126). If for Kyger, "religion" calls forth ideas of right behavior and axiomatic knowledge—what Alan Watts called "Square Zen"—meditation led one to "enormous, buried energy, images" (these are Kyger's words)—and perhaps also to what Wittgenstein seemed to view as the job of philosophy, i.e., "to let the fly out of the fly-bottle, to lead us back to our piecemeal, sensible, ordinary practices, and thereby to allay even the desire for something grander or more" (Hodges and Lachs 105). Wittgenstein's work, for all its importance within Western epistemology generally, unravels Western philosophy's ontological project and pushes axiomatic *knowledge* that can be found

within religions, for example, into *situations* that must be examined, even down to the language used to philosophize (this is of course especially true of his later work, the *Philosophical Investigations*).

In contrast, the so-called "early Wittgenstein" of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) more closely reflects the ideas of the school of logical positivism, which I introduced above but wish to expand upon here. Coming out of a tradition of Enlightenment positivism, logical positivism was a field of analytic philosophy that generally argued for the view that language is verifiable either logically or empirically.[8] As a response to the increasing realization, in the field of quantum physics, that uncertainty is the nature of reality, positivists appear to have recognized that this realization would mean a crisis for their scholarship. In a triumphal postwar return to certitude, they worked to get beyond the slipperiness of language and experience. Positivists generated an almost antithetical set of axioms—or perhaps it is a strangely logical conclusion to Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle—that decouple observation and understanding, dividing language into categories of *synthetic* and *analytic*.[9]

This synthetic vs. analytic understanding of language goes back to David Hume, who in the eighteenth century divided truths into two types: relations of ideas versus matters of fact and

[8] Despite the limitations to positivism that I am outlining in this chapter, Enlightenment positivism has of course had some great successes, given that it has informed major advances in science, including biomedical and public health advances; civil engineering's achievements; and the positivism of liberal individualism, which has contributed to goals of equality and the democratization of education and educated work.

[9] Heisenberg's uncertainty principle broadly demonstrates how the very fact of observation means one cannot precisely measure the position and momentum of a particle. Schleifer explains that Heisenberg's "principle asserts the impossibility of measuring (or knowing with certainty) both the position and the momentum of subatomic particles at the same time" (Schleifer *Modernism* 187). His principle revealed a universe "in which subatomic energy and matter behaved in ways wholly unfamiliar to everyday observation," and the metaphysical implications of this new body of theory "troubled even its own early pioneers" (Byers 119). Heisenberg explains a version of this principle in *Physics and Philosophy* (1958): he describes "Bohr's contention that wave and particle descriptions of subatomic entities 'complement' one another. The 'two pictures,' Heisenberg writes, 'are of course mutually exclusive, because a certain thing cannot at the same time be a particle (i.e., substance confined to a very small volume) and a wave (i.e., a field spread out over a large space), but the two complement each other'" (Heisenberg *Physics* 49, qtd. in Schleifer *Modernism* 187).

"real" existence (Flew 156). For Hume, all truths were either one type or the other. In this framework, truths that are relations among ideas are *analytic,* i.e., necessary, *a priori.* Whereas, truths of fact or those based in existence (and are empirically observable) align to the other side of the framework: these are *synthetic* facts, conditional, *a posteriori.* As for those statements or treatises that do not align with either side of Hume's so-called "fork," Hume apparently ordered, "commit it then to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion" (Flew 156). Immanuel Kant later identified another sort of truth that pointed to the mind's role in constructing phenomena, what is known as his "synthetic *a priori*" that joined Hume's forkéd truths together. Yet logical positivists rejected Kant's work and espoused Hume's fork, arguing that statements are either analytic (verifiable logically) or synthetic (verifiable empirically), while all other linguistic constructions qualify as "meaningless" statements.

Though philosophical positivism goes back at least to the early nineteenth century and is implicit in Cartesian and Newtonian thought, the school of logical positivism is best understood when contextualized within turn of the twentieth century dynamics (Schleifer *Literary Studies* Chapter Four). Since the second Industrial Revolution and into the early twentieth century (decades before the rise of logical positivism in American philosophy), "logics of abundance," as Schleifer argues in *Modernism and Time*, recovered the "meaningless" not only as part of reality, but as part of rigorous scientific inquiry. From the second Industrial Revolution into the early twentieth century, these "logics of abundance" generated ways of "deal[ing] with irreducible complexities" and, in the early years of the twentieth century, "seemed to inhabit understanding, economic and political realities, and the experience of everyday life" (Schleifer *Modernism* 198). Such early twentieth century "logics" herald midcentury currents of thought long before Kyger studied Wittgenstein.

If the early century generated ways of dealing with "*irreducible* complexities," there was later a postwar impulse to *reduce* those complexities to logical, verifiable principles—this is that return to "certitude" I described earlier. Nicholas Birns explains that, following the World Wars, there was "a sense of the manipulation of language by malevolent people such as totalitarian dictators and by the systems supporting or even opposing them" (Birns 297). Indeed, the impacts of total war, the atom bomb, totalitarianism, and the Holocaust "promoted an already incipient pessimism about language as liable to distortion or abuse and favored avoidance of language that was loaded or ideologically torqued" (Birns 297).[10] Benjamin was also part of this conversation, albeit in a different vein. Both his writing on the *Trauerspiel* and his epilogue to "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" can be seen as part of this moment's observations on the rhetorical manipulations of the World Wars. He identifies as a key characteristic of fascism the "aestheticization of politics," seen in F.T. Marinetti's "ecstatic vision of the beauty of war" (Stead). The strength of allegory for Benjamin was both its "counteraesthetic" nature and its ability to counter aesthetics, which made it strongly oppositional to this aestheticization of politics "present in every aspect of civic life under the Nazi regime" (Stead).[11]

Yet alongside these pessimisms, these fears, about language's manipulability, quantum physics held new implications for the relationship between language and reality. Werner Heisenberg illustrated the revelations of quantum physics by emphasizing that language is part of

[10] The intellectual impact of this response, Birns notes, comes "later," in the period of the New Critics and San Francisco Renaissance (even if it originated closer to what Birns calls the "first phrase" of the linguistic turn back at the turn of the century, in which it was flowery romanticism, which emphasized abstract signification and emotions, that was on the chopping block) (Birns 293-297).

[11] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, London: Fontana, 1973 (1955), p. 235. "The celebration of war was not confined to Italian Fascist circles, Germany had its own proponent in Ernst Junger, of whom Benjamin wrote a scathing critique as early as 1930" (Stead). See Benjamin, 'Theories of German Fascism: On the Collection of Essays War and Warrior, edited by Ernst Junger', New German Critique 17, 1979, pp. 120-128, which is accompanied by a commentary by Ansgar Hillach, 'The Aesthetics of Politics: Walter Benjamin's "Theories of German Fascism"', pp. 99-119.

the experiment itself. Narrating the findings of modern physics by analogy, Heisenberg explains shifts in classical vs. modern ideas about the relationship between language and reality, and in so doing, illustrates for a lay audience the inevitable shifts in philosophy signaled by quantum physics. It is this then-new view of the relationship between language and reality that I find so associable with Kyger's linking of Wittgenstein and Buddhism—and indeed, so crucial to understanding the specific responses of the three schools of poetics I am discussing in this chapter.

Heisenberg shows two modes of linguistic interpretation that greatly impact the findings of a given experiment. One mode of interpretation ascribes to classical logic, while another mode arises in the period of the Modernist "logics of abundance" of Schleifer's study. In the first, classical mode, Heisenberg explains:

> the relation between the different levels of language is a one-to-one correspondence. The two statements, "The atom is in the left half [of the box]" and "It is true that the atom is in the left half," belong logically to different levels. In classical logic these statements are completely equivalent, i.e., they are either both true or both false. It is not possible that the one is true and the other false. (Heisenberg *Physics* 184, qtd. in Schleifer *Modernism* 199)

In this framework, which dictates the "classical" logic of "the mathematical forms of atomic theory," (Heisenberg *Philosophic* 120) interpretation of language follows after an abstract formalism. Here, "an interpretation is always an example of more general preexisting truths, an exemplary part for the whole of truth" (Schleifer *Modernism* 201). In this understanding, "interpretation consists of *finding a language which conforms to preexisting forms*" (Schleifer *Modernism* 201, my emphasis). Here, "every system of signs may be described in a formal way

that does not take into account the content and is independent of possible 'interpretations' of these signs" (Greimas 159, qtd. in Schleifer *Modernism* 201). That is to say, the content of a sentence and the possibility that a given sentence may be interpreted in alternative ways are not part of the inquiry.

But the relation between the two above sentences ("The atom is in the left half [of the box]" and "It is true that the atom is in the left half") is more complicated:

> The correctness or incorrectness of the first statement still implies the correctness or incorrectness of the second statement. But the incorrectness of the second statement does not imply the incorrectness of the first statement. If the second statement is incorrect, it may be undecided whether the atom is in the left half; the atom need not necessarily be in the right half. There is still complete equivalence between the two levels of language with respect to the correctness of a statement, but not with respect to the incorrectness. (Heisenberg *Physics* 184, qtd. in Schleifer *Modernism* 199)

This second mode of interpretation arises from "intellectual movements contemporaneous with quantum theory" which, as Schleifer suggests, "participated in and responded to the abundances of the second Industrial Revolution" (*Modernism* 201).[12] This form of interpretation considers that form is also "content," is itself a "signifying form" (Schleifer *Modernism* 201). Strangely, positivism can be seen as the midcentury's echo of the divorce described above in classical theory: as Heisenberg writes, these "difficult definitions and distinctions can be avoided if one confines the language to the description of facts, i.e., experimental results" (Heisenberg *Physics* 185, qtd. in Schleifer *Modernism* 202). Logical positivism assumed "facts" to be simple positive

[12] Some of these "intellectual movements" were Saussurian linguistics, Husserlian phenomenology, and Freudian psychoanalysis.

entities, and therefore "did not admit negation," nor these "serious questions about referential truth" (202, 201).

Once one differentiates between analytic and synthetic statements, as did the logical positivists, one is locked into a dualistic interpretation of reality in which the category of the "meaningless" holds anything that is not a positive entity. Strangely, therefore, the "meaningless" is not *negation,* but signifies nothing at all. Schleifer explains:

> Heisenberg is suggesting that as soon as one interprets "facts"—and elsewhere he defines the "facts" of quantum mechanics positivistically as "the black spots on a photographic plate or the water droplets in a cloud chamber" (Heisenberg *Physics* 179)—one enters the realm of the "dualism" of alternation and paraphrase. Positivism—in which "facts" are assumed to be simple positive entities like the water droplets in a cloud chamber—does not admit negation. The droplets are either present or absent, there or not there, and when they are not there nothing signifies. (Schleifer *Modernism* 202)

Comparing his points here to the Lacanian real—in which the real, "unlike symbolic systems (to which Lacan opposes the 'real'), does not admit negation"—Schleifer illustrates that absences *do not signify* when there is the assumption that signification must be "for all times" (Schleifer 202-203). "The absence of droplets," he writes, "only signifies in the logic of semantics in which absence takes on complex positive meaning within a symbolic system" (203).[13] This is to say,

> Absences signify only when the given moment is not for all times but is one moment within temporal contexts. Those contexts are always the result of a process that takes

[13] As another, perhaps more vivid, example, Schleifer offers that "the absence of droplets only signifies in the logic of semantics in which absence takes on complex positive meaning within a symbolic system just as the unmarked absence of the engagement of vocal chords takes on positive meaning in the phonological system of English in which the absence of voicing distinguishes the phoneme /t/ from /d/" (*Modernism* 203).

> time and, for this reason, they can only be discerned retrospectively. (Schleifer *Modernism* 203)

Grounding one's analysis in "one moment within temporal contexts"—subjecting data to time—allows one to discern absences, even if only retrospectively. This point, that absences only signify when contextualized in time and when discerned retrospectively, brings an inherent uncertainty into the realm of quantum physics—and it also demonstrates why poets' pursuit of *timeliness* is also a pursuit of uncertainty, contingency. The "logics of abundance," of which Heisenberg's explanation of quantum physics is a part, open up ideas of signification to the nondual, the meaningless, to absences or uncertainty—even the uncertainty that is a necessary side effect of discerning something "retrospectively," the uncertainty of not-knowing beforehand, which one might suggest is elsewhere described by John Keats as "negative capability."

Not only is the data of quantum physics subject to time—the "nature of the data of physics" is such that it cannot be defined, *a priori,* by its "nature"—it is also connected to phenomena outside of that data. To put this another way, quantum physics wants to note that being is itself a quality or attribute rather than a "positive physical substance to which other qualities can be attributed" (as in classical physics) (Schleifer *Modernism* 204). Similarly, even seemingly "purely" informative statements "can always also be taken to be a figure or an analogue for something metonymically outside of them (such as the 'being' behind doing, the 'force' behind events") (Schleifer *Modernism* 203). To make being itself a quality is to revise the notion of "facts" themselves. In an Enlightenment framework, "facts" are measured as true or false independent of the observer, and from this follow two categories of "qualities" (Descartes, Galileo, and John Locke made these distinctions between "primary" and "secondary" qualities).

There are "primary qualities" of objects independent of any observer: solidity, extension, motion, number, and figure. Then there are "secondary qualities" thought to produce sensations in observers: color, taste, smell, sound. Such "secondary qualities" are facts of experience, whereas, "the primary quality of 'extension,' for example, can be seen to be simply a 'matter of fact'" (Schleifer *Literary Studies* Chapter Four). Such an approach to "fact" assumes that the primary qualities are unaffected by an observer, that they are always-already "true."

Yet in Heisenberg's explication, ontology/being is not assumed to be a positive physical substance with "primary" and "secondary" qualities. Heisenberg reverses the assumed "'ontological superiority' of fact over interpretation," instead revealing how the data of physics is subject to "ontological correction," which is to say, it is subject to temporality, opinion, and interpretation (Schleifer *Literary Studies* Chapter Four):

> the data of quantum physics also can always be taken to be connected to something else outside that data: the subject of (modally inflected) knowledge, the quality of spatial and temporal position, the semiotic system that governs interpretation. (Schleifer *Modernism* 203)

In Heisenberg's writing, he criticizes Democritus' theory of the atom because he "deprived the atom of the qualities of color, smell and taste," making the atom an abstraction (Schleifer *Modernism* 204). Yet he notes that Democritus' instincts were correct in granting the atom "the quality of 'being,' of extension in space, of shape and motion," and of existence within time (204, Heisenberg *Physics* 69-70). To pull the atom outside of or away from these dimensions and qualities would make it very difficult "to speak about the atom at all" (Heisenberg *Physics* 69-70). This means that quantum theory "erases the opposition between…part and whole—without erasing difference, multiplicity, plurality; without ignoring abundance or time. It presents a *non-*

reductive logic of comprehension" (Schleifer *Modernism* 204-05, my emphasis). When the atom's "geometrical extensions of shape and motion" can be conceived as properties, those properties "become unthinkably—unvisualizably—complex. In this complexity, the outside and inside of matter and being are alternatively…opposed and nonopposed" (205). To be quite clear, when negation is *part* of the analysis rather than cast aside as "meaningless," a certain anti-duality is activated as something innate to the data of quantum physics.

I borrow from Schleifer's explication—of how Heisenberg himself analogizes the revelations of quantum physics—in order to demonstrate still another area of midcentury thought that worked to subject the ostensible totalities of fact to "ruinous" timeliness. The work of these theorists, poets, and scientists is part of a great shift: the relevance of Heisenberg's analogy, and quantum theory generally, becomes clearer when situated "within the wider cultural phenomenon of post-Enlightenment Modernism" (present in economics, linguistics, rhetoric, art, and "even unreflective experience itself"), a central aspect of which is a "new method of thought" (Heisenberg *Philosophic* 53) that supplants older methods of "causal explanation" (Schleifer *Modernism* 206). Post-Enlightenment Modernism's logics of abundance:

> transform *causal explanations* (understanding phenomena, both in a given moment and for all time, in terms of their causes) to *functional explanations* (understanding phenomena in terms of the ends they serve within a matrix of beginning, middle, and end). Such logics…are pragmatic and operational, answering particular needs for explanation…answer[ing] the situation rather than an abstract grammatical question—a

> situation that, like Wittgenstein's "family resemblances," can only be discerned retrospectively. (Schleifer *Modernism* 206)[14]

What makes logical positivism, therefore, so arresting—coming on the heels of these Modernist logics of abundance—is that, as a school of thought, it raises the stakes and remains stubbornly in favor of Hume's fork, responding to these elegant revelations of quantum physics by making duality the very backbone of its philosophical inquiry.

What accounts for the rise of the logical positivists, even after such a period of abundances? John McCumber sees their domination as a side effect of the ideological pressures of the McCarthy era, arguing that American philosophers were largely passive to the command of logical positivism (which dominated American philosophy from about 1949-1960) because "they had been told what, in the climate of the times, they needed to avoid: anything unscientific or subjective" (McCumber 50, 45-46). Logical positivism provided "a philosophical framework" for "finding respectability for their political prudence by claiming to deal with timeless truths" (McCumber 45–46). Birns sees the positivists as another example of postwar thinkers who saw linguistic excesses as problematic, even dangerous. For Birns, positivism is closely related to the work of Polish-American independent scholar Count Alfred Korzybski, who developed the field of general semantics. His arguments for general semantics, first articulated in print in 1933, were throughout the 1930s and 40s "seen as a theory of language that could prevent the misuse of words and meanings by totalitarianism" (Birns 298). The recognition of linguistic "clarity," Korzybski argued with a "zeal to counter Nazi abuses of language," was "more urgent than ever" (Garcia 73, qtd. in Birns 298). It was possible, in Korzybski's view, to "reach a 'disinfected'

[14] This problem of "abstract grammar" is also present in John Yau's essay "Between the Forest and Its Trees," where he is frustrated with the position of "I" within sentences in English grammar.

language through rigorous vigilance" (Birns 298). His "wariness about linguistic excess" is clear in the title of his tour de force, *Science and Sanity* (1933) (Birns 298).

Yet poetry instead draws out the "abundances" and "negations" of both the Modernist period and quantum physics. The poetics of the New Critics and the romantic and Zen lineages coming out of the San Francisco Renaissance contradict that postwar "return" to certitude. The New Critics present close reading tools that are meant to demonstrate poetry's value in the face of its classification as "meaningless" within the positivist framework. The romantics challenge the reading and critical conventions of the New Critics, which in many ways affirm positivist assumptions by continually looking for a poem's unity. Instead, the romantic lineage seeks still another way of engaging uncertainty and reaches back into the poetic past for a patrilineage and romantic influences. Then there is the Zen lineage's response, which provides a completely different set of tools by which to fashion poetics. In describing the poetic responses of the New Critics and the romantic lineage, which largely fashion their work from Western cultural material, I hope to clarify that the Zen lineage drew upon then-new East Asian and Asian/American cultural resources that, while readily available to Western cultural producers, were appropriated from Other cultures and from the Asians in America with whom they worked and collaborated.

This chapter emphasizes that these three poetic responses seek out poetries of ambiguity and uncertainty in the face of Cold War ideological strictures and the dominance of logical positivism. But more than the other two poetic responses I have listed, the Zen lineage mirrors quantum physics in its activation of an anti-dualist principle, which in Joanne Kyger and Philip Whalen's work appears as a certain uselessness that makes this midcentury Zen poetics a means

of "ruining" Buddhism in our own present. Meanwhile, the far greater "ruination," as I have suggested, is present in chapters four and five, where I discuss Saijo and Leong.

The New Criticism and Poetry's Unique Truths

The New Critics mount one poetic response to the midcentury politics of certitude, but they are also part of this chapter because the two San Francisco poetry lineages see them as the literary gatekeepers of the period, a group of ivory-tower critics with power over the period's literary institutions and publications. Taking its name from John Crowe Ransom's 1941 book *The New Criticism*, New Criticism was a literary movement emphasizing formalism and modes of close reading (of poetry in particular) that treated the text as a self-contained, self-referential object of study whose author and contexts were not part of the inquiry. It partly aimed to rescue literature from the implications of positivist thought for poetry, which perhaps only in rare occasions could be classed within those categories of "synthetic" and "analytic." Michael Davidson, writing that the midcentury's reigning literary orthodoxy was the "New Critical version of Eliot's tradition," suggests that the New Critics consciously attempted to "cleanse" modernism "of its more avant-garde features" and redefine it through "a selective application of T.S. Eliot's criticism" (Davidson "San Francisco" 67). Birns writes that "the major New Critics, who often opposed what they saw as the reductivism of modern technology, became tacit allies of Korzybski's principles of science and sanity" (Birns 299). For him, the minutiae of Korzybski's vision for general semantics, as well as its problems, "can be found in the practices of New Criticism," which "highlighted poetic texture and the nuance of particular words but rejected extravagance; it valorized literary autonomy and held linguistic excess in suspicion" (Birns 298). Though the New Critics perhaps "accepted just enough linguistic power to give

literature independence," Birns argues, their practices of reading "stopped short of granting literary language the ability to export itself to more general paradigms" (298-99).

Yet the New Critics were simply articulating a broad argument for poetry's value outside of, though certainly beholden to, "science and sanity." They argued that if one approached the poem with the proper views of language so as to be able to identify the poem's unities, then poetry would exude a special kind of knowledge. Generally, New Critics held an appreciation for ambiguity and complexity within poems—it is just that this very ambiguity is often put to work within the critic's search for a poem's unity or thematic wholeness.[15] For key New Critic I.A. Richards, "poetry can save us by demonstrating that we need not and ought not base our responses on truth or knowledge—that we can base them on themselves, experience being its own justification" (Graff 236). Though Richard Strier is right to note that New Critical poetics holds a pressing problem of "distinguishing 'complexity' from 'confusion' on rational grounds," the point remains that there *is* this interest in retaining and understanding the complexity of language and the poem: New Critics spoke to the value of poetry as that which can communicate unresolvable paradoxes, and in their criticism, they did not always resolve that tension (Strier 178).[16] Even if New Critics failed to perceive the positivist implications in their "own

[15] In a 1940 essay, New Critic Cleanth Brooks wrote that words should not be conceived as "sharply isolated entities, like beads on a string, each opaque and impervious to the others"; rather, he says, "we have to think of them not as beads, but as burrs—predisposed to hang together in any fashion whatever" (Brooks, "The Poem as Organism," *English Institute Annual* (New York, 1941) 29, 32). This analogy is meant to illustrate key tenets of New Criticism poetics: firstly, "the relative autonomy of verbal configurations from conscious intentions in a thinker, speaker, or writer"; second, the implied proposition that "the combination of words which seem to emerge into the thinking consciousness 'of themselves' are…ultimately intelligible—they are, that is, new *meanings,* not simply random phonetic patterns (Strier 172). This is in other words a "belief in the ultimate intelligibility and potential cognitive content of (what seem to be) nonlogical connections between words"—which Strier states is "perhaps the fundamental premise of the New Criticism" (173). Words are therefore autonomous—"words have 'lives of their own' independent to a certain extent of logical and syntactical relations because they have had a history and development of their own"—but are ultimately intelligible "because they are based on and include (coherent) relations between the meanings of the words involved" (Strier 173).

[16] When a poem's relations among the words or images are not immediately intelligible, "the New Critic seeks for connecting connotations. He will, therefore, attempt to screen out as far as possible his own personal associations …and to respond to what might be termed the 'connotative flow' of the language of the text he is reading" (Strier

dogmatically posited dichotomies" and in Gerald Graff's words, end up as "prisoners of the theory they oppose," their work as a whole should be seen as a school of poetics that worked to articulate poetry's value in response to the implications of logical positivism (Graff 241).

Putting "a man in" the Poem: The Romantic Lineage's Response to Positivism

The romantic and Zen lineages converge socially and textually as part of the shared artistic and cultural zeitgeist of the San Francisco Renaissance, in which both lineages tend to be grouped without differentiation. They also converge in Donald Allen's 1960 anthology, *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960* (1960). Yet despite the convergence of romantic mysticism and transpacific Zen formulations of American poetry in the bohemian poetic communities of midcentury San Francisco; in anthologies; and in scholarly work like Davidson's *The San Francisco Renaissance* (1989), the two lineages should not be conflated.

The work of this romantic lineage was less a new direction in poetry "than a recuperation of certain aspects of romanticism that could be found in Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Whitman" (Davidson *San Francisco* 80). In their attempt to "provide an alternative to the rhetorically dense metaphysical lyric advocated by the New Critics," they opened up a poem to ambiguities, energies on the page, and to the specific contexts in which it was written, including the elements that went into a specific poet's act of writing. Thus, in this manner, they are part of that larger resistance to the positivists' de-valuing of poetry. Though loudly critical of the New

175). For Strier, therefore, New Criticism's reading practices "might be said to demand of the critic something very similar to what Keats meant by 'negative capability' and 'the poetical character'—a capacity to suspend the judging and 'irritable' ego and 'enter into' the 'life' of other entities" (Strier 175). This is why I'm suggesting that New Criticism should be seen as one of the forces against logical positivism—for its language of approaching the poem with a practice of negative capability. Brooks and Warren in their Preface to *Understanding Poetry* write that "the knowledge poetry yields is available only if we submit ourselves to the massive, and subtle, impact of the poem as a whole," and that the reader "must fully surrender as fully as possible to the impact of the whole" (Cleanth Brooks and Robert P. Warren, *Understanding Poetry*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1961), xiii-xiv.

Critics, this romantic lineage worked along the same cultural front as the New Critics, grappling with a reality that seemed less and less observable. Those writing in this romantic lineage saw themselves as the heirs of the western romantic tradition and worked to pull that tradition into the then-present, looking to mysticism, esotericism, the occult, and Romantic writers.

Incorporating the work of Romantic precursors helped these poets claim a certain legitimacy in the face of the New Critics' dominance over the period's literary economy. It also helped them generate unique poetry under the burden of the seemingly incomparable, unmatched work of the major Modernist poets.[17] In the work of Robinson Jeffers and Allen Ginsberg, we find the apocalyptic and bardic resonances of William Blake and Walt Whitman (Davidson *San Francisco* 17). Kenneth Rexroth, Gary Snyder, Lew Welch, and Philip Whalen write nature poetry modeled on Chinese and Japanese poets as well as the British romantics (though, as I will clarify, we should see Snyder and Whalen as part of the Zen lineage) (17). Many poets, but notably Michael McClure, Whalen, and Robert Duncan, write a personalist lyric of introspection like Coleridge's "Dejection" ode or "Fears in Solitude" (Davidson *San Francisco* 17). A "medieval" mode of Keatsian or Blakean ballad is present in the poetries of Helen Adam, James Broughton, Madeline Gleason, and Duncan (17). The "rolling blank verse cadences, mannerist rhetoric, and oracular tone" of Dylan Thomas and George Barker can be seen in the work of Duncan, William Everson, and Rexroth (17). Indeed, the oratorial style of Dylan Thomas's own readings is a cornerstone of this lineage's romanticism: one of its "unifying threads" is this performative attitude toward language, where poetry is "expected to 'do' as much as 'represent,'

[17] I follow Birns and some of Whalen's thoughts, from an interview, when I say it's a "revival" of romanticism. Both Whalen and Birns point out how, following from modernism's own critique of the late Victorian poetries, there appeared to be no way of fashioning a new poetics after Pound and Eliot's perfect poems. Romanticism was a way of pushing past the seeming dead-end of modernist poetries. Birns, "The Three Phases of the Linguistic Turn and their Literary Manifestations" (*Partial Answers* 15/2): 291-313, 2017.

to act on the reader as co-participant in the evolving form" (Davidson "San Francisco" 70). Thomas's influence has thus "inspired a tradition of poetry readings that has continued to the present day," a tradition that attempts "to create poetry that performs what it describes…that uses language to go beyond language" (Davidson *San Francisco* 17, 21).[18]

More broadly, the work of the romantic lineage is marked by immanence, a characteristic that suggests that the divine is manifested within the material world (as opposed to transcendence, in which the divine is external to or separate from the material world). Theirs is a poetics in which form is "discovered in the act of writing, not imposed from without"—an attribute that comes up against the positivist category of the analytic (Davidson *San Francisco* 18). Language does not imitate nor represent the world; it rather "becomes transparent before the numinous potential it discovers *in* the world" (18). The poetic value of such a text does not, as the New Critics had it, synthesize "local texture and transcendental values"; it "does not depend on the synthetic imagination's ability to *unite* oppositions," but instead lies in "the poet's ability to remain *open* to a world of immanent value" (Davidson 18, my emphasis).

The "New" Cultural Resources of the Zen Lineage

Where the romantic lineage drew from the occult and from romantic precursors as cultural resources, by the 1950s, there were new (to American contexts) cultural resources available for writers interested in Zen Buddhism. And if we can see the romantic lineage as gathering cultural resources from Romantic forebears in order to "make new," we can also see

[18] Admitting that he is taking J.L. Austin's term "performative" a bit out of context, Davidson explains that Austin uses the term to describe speech acts in which a statement "performs" an event, like promises, oaths of office, marriage vows—these "do not describe or represent anything so much as they inaugurate events" (Davidson 21). Though Austin "speaks of more conventionalized utterances whose linguistic structure is not in question, the literary application of the performative uses a heightened linguistic context, notation, or oral delivery to accomplish its ends" (21). Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance,* 20-21. See J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962.

that Buddhism provided similarly gatherable resources useful for the making of a new poetics.[19] These resources within Buddhism were what we can call "operationalizable"—available for use—by the late 1950s and provided a cultural and philosophical vocabulary by which some San Francisco writers fashioned still another iteration of a "poetics of uncertainty." Because these writers of the Zen lineage utilize (which is to say, appropriate) East Asian and Asian/American cultural resources, they should be seen as distinct from the romantic lineage, even though both converged in the bohemian communities of the San Francisco Renaissance. And because the Zen lineage's work incorporated the experience of seated meditation into their poetry, more than the other two poetic schools discussed here, their poetics subjects transcendental truths to time, in a sense combining Wittgenstein's attentiveness to the phenomenology of language—which is to say, the role of language in mediating experience and thought to us—with East Asian practices of meditation.

By midcentury, Buddhism had been domesticated for American contexts and audiences, and thus when Whalen, Snyder, and Welch arrived in San Francisco in 1958, Buddhism was simply *there, available* in much more tangible ways than an imagined poetic patrilineage.[20]

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[19] Though I refer to "Buddhism" throughout this chapter, of course the specific kinds of Buddhisms that Euro Americans encountered in this period were unique to the historical and cultural contexts of the 1940s and 50s. I discuss these very specific "Buddhisms" in chapters two, three, and four. There is no single "Buddhism," of course, and the Buddhist religions and religiosities that Euro Americans grew interested in were historically specific.

[20] More broadly, in the 1950s, "Asia" was more visible to Americans than ever before. The U.S. occupation of Japan from 1945 to 1952 provided many Americans with the ability to travel, work, and live in Japan as part of those occupying forces; meanwhile, for those at home, U.S. presence abroad "produced new opportunities for…learning about Japanese culture" (Masatsugu "Beyond" 436). See John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999). Postwar popular texts also "sought to develop an interest and a sense of connection between Americans and Asia," as seen in the period's films, magazines, novels, and plays (Masatsugu "Beyond" 436). For a discussion of American Orientalist middlebrow cultural production on Asia, see Christina Klein's *Cold War Orientalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) and Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006). Then, too, attention given to Japan and Asia during World War II "grew steadily during the Cold War, leading to the growth of Asian studies as one component of area studies in the American academy" (Masatsugu "Beyond" 436). See Bruce Cummings, "Boundary Displacement: Area Studies and International Studies During and After the Cold War," in Christopher Simpson, ed., *Universities and Empire: Money and Politics in the Social Sciences During the Cold War* (New York, 1998), and Vicente L. Rafael, "The Cultures of Area Studies in the United States," *Social Text*, 41 (Winter 1994), 91–111.

Upon arriving in San Francisco, they found that Buddhism had been translated for American audiences. As a result of earlier Zen proselytizers, and due to the work of Asian experts and Western thinkers, Buddhism had already been rhetorically framed as something available and useful to Americans. The Euro American poets were able to become part of a listening public who took in Alan Watts' radio broadcasts about the fundamentals of Buddhism, among other related topics. In addition, Asian American diasporic communities, in particular Japanese American Shin Buddhists, opened many of their physical doors to Americans interested in studying Buddhist texts and in practicing the meditative discipline of sitting *zazen*.

The idea of Buddhism being "available" to interested Euro Americans is present in a 1953 letter to Neal Cassady, in which Allen Ginsberg describes China as "a bleak great blank in our intimate knowledge" and looks to San Francisco as the opportune space to fill this "blank" (Tonkinson 93). While still living in New York, Ginsberg excitedly tells Cassady (who was then in the Bay Area) that "I am on a kick 2 weeks old, a very beautiful kick which I invite you to share, as you are in a city where you have access to the kick" (Tonkinson 92). This new "kick" was spurred by Ginsberg's encounter of D.T. Suzuki's lecture "Introduction to Zen Buddhism" and by his discovery of "Chink" and "Jap" paintings at the New York Public Library and the Metropolitan Museum, which, as he put it, "opened my eyes to the sublimity and sophistication…of the East" (Tonkinson 92). Ginsberg traveled to the West coast within the year, bringing with him a letter of introduction to Kenneth Rexroth written by William Carlos Williams, "in order to experience the kick firsthand" (Gray 25).

Masatsugu writes that "the first Buddhist studies program in the United States was established in 1962 at the University of Wisconsin" (Masatsugu "Beyond" 436 n38). Masatsugu points us to: "Buddhist Studies at the University of Wisconsin," *American Buddhist*, 5 (Jan. 1961), 3; and also Douglas Dunsmore Daye, "Memorial Tribute to Richard Hugh Robinson, 1926–1970," *Philosophy East and West*, 22 (1972), 291.

Ginsberg's implicit contrast between accessing "China" or "the East" via a *textual* "cornucopia" in New York versus the *experiential* draw of San Francisco is often emphasized in interviews with midcentury poets (who underscore a distaste for what "New York" symbolizes and a partiality for the heterotopian space of San Francisco).[21] While New York is where Ginsberg encounters "a cornucopia of pix—pictures…in good libraries and museums," San Francisco is the "city where [Cassady has] access to this kick"—it is the place where Ginsberg seems to think holds access to the "real" East, rather than an East accessed only through texts (Tonkinson 93). As Timothy Gray notes, "Ginsberg imagines that a better access to the Orientalist kick exists in San Francisco, not because of that city's museums and libraries, presumably, but because of its social demographics and its geographic location on the Pacific Rim" (Gray 25). For Ginsberg, San Francisco is a "live" space, as opposed to the dusty, static space of the museum. In San Francisco, "Eastern" cultural material is even more available to him than those materials at the Met because they can be *experienced*—in San Francisco, these materials are 3D. It is all cultural material, but he can experience the "Asian" cultural material even more fully in San Francisco.

[21] For Timothy Gray, San Francisco at midcentury was a "heterotopic" space, a term from Michel Foucault that describes "a new utopia built on difference and alienation" (Gray 35). "Like the image of Jacques Lacan's 'mirror stage,'" he continues, "the identity of the heterotopian space is fundamentally split" (Gray 35). Foucault states that such a space is "at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is *over there*" (Foucault 1-7, qtd. in Gray 35, my emphasis). Both the identities forged within heterotopian spaces and the spaces themselves "are real sites that are at the same time radically contingent upon fantastical space outside their circumscribed domain. To visit a heterotopian site, therefore, is to subject one's prescribed role in society to a semiotic crucible within which individual identity and local place undergo a process of estrangement, dissolution, and rearticulation" (35). Here, "Asia" or "the East" is its fantastical space, the "virtual point which is over there," upon which San Francisco is contingent (Foucault 1-7). Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 24. An important psychoanalytic critique of specular identity formation in human individuals can be found in Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" (1949), in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 1–7. Gray, Timothy. *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim: Creating Countercultural Community*, University of Iowa Press, 2006.

Within the public-facing libraries and curated galleries like the Met, both Ginsberg and Gary Snyder were thrilled to encounter a genre of Chinese visual art referred to as "Chinese mountains and rivers painting," which comes from a tradition of poetry and visual art in which there appears to be no separation between subject and object, viewer and viewed. The two poets saw in this genre a different version of mimesis than what they had found in Western arts, and its aesthetic became important to their own respective "discoveries" of Zen Buddhism. At nine or ten years of age, Snyder "saw Chinese landscape paintings that struck an immediate chord: To him," having grown up in the Pacific Northwest, "they looked like 'real mountains,' like the Cascades" (Tonkinson 171). In a 1999 interview, Snyder recalled this genre of painting as central to the moment he "came on Zen": it was "from looking at landscape paintings," paired with reading translations of the Daoist masters Laozi and Zhuangzi, among other texts, that brought him to Zen (a moment when, he notes, "I said, ah, this is where it all comes together") (Meltzer 280). Meanwhile, Ginsberg describes his encounter with this genre of visual art in that 1953 letter to Cassady:

> I rushed over (3 blocks) to the Public Library Vast branch 42 St and went to the fine arts room and took out a dozen volumes of Chink painting, which I had never hardly laid eyes on before in m'life. True, I had attended the Met Museum of Art show of Jap paintings, which opened my eyes to the sublimity and sophistication (meaning learning and experience, not snideness) of East…tho China is a great blank in our intimate knowledge, there is actually at hand a veritable feast, a free treasury, a plethora, a cornucopia of pix--pictures, like children love to see--in good libraries and museum. So this gets me on a project and I am now spending all my free time in Columbia Fine Arts library and NY Public leafing through immense albums of asiatic imagery. (Tonkinson 92-93)

Ginsberg's and Snyder's interest in these paintings illustrates the attractiveness, uniqueness, and (to them) newness of Chinese and Japanese cultural materials—an attractiveness also palpable in Ginsberg's delight in the "irrational and beguiling" Zen koans he read in Manhattan before moving out to San Francisco—koans that, in his words, are "made up as they go along sometimes, until the [listener] is completely baffled intellectually and stops thinking" (Tonkinson 93-94).[22] These textual materials had been curated for the American public, made available to interested Americans—to New Yorkers like Ginsberg at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and to Snyder in the libraries and galleries of the Pacific Northwest. Yet for Ginsberg, traveling to San Francisco meant experiencing *extra*-textual cultural materials firsthand. For Whalen, as I illustrate below, working with the materials of Zen Buddhism allowed him to fashion a new poetics that did not owe its construction or theory to the modernists or New Critics. Ginsberg, Snyder, and Whalen thus illustrate the magnetism of this "new" set of cultural tools.

Whalen echoes Ginsberg's thrill when he describes the "state of freedom" in writing a poetry that was not predetermined by the "whole imagist kind of idea that I had been into for years, that whole thing about a poem should be short, exact, with not very many words and that it should have one complete feel or smell to it" (Allen and Whalen *Off the Wall* 46, 22). This is a frustration with Modernist poetics and Ezra Pound's imagist manifesto in particular, but also reflects his resistance to the New Critics' precise, unified conception of poetry (Allen and Whalen *Off the Wall* 46, 22). In another interview, Whalen explains the difficulty of writing in the shadow of Eliot and Pound: "it was hard to get around Eliot and Pound, to say there really is something else to write…they've got it written down, it's all beautiful and perfect, and there it

[22] Koans are seemingly irresolvable riddles presented to a practitioner by a Zen master and are designed to jar recipients from conventional frames of reference and understanding, ultimately developing a new awareness (Masatsugu 438 n46).

sits; and alas, I can hardly write home for money" (Allen and Whalen *Off the Wall* 72). What allows Whalen to "come to grips with Mr. Eliot" was to write "a long poem that was a combination of Christian theology and Buddhist philosophy and argumentations of all kinds" (Allen and Whalen *Off the Wall* 72). In his well-known poem "If you're so smart why ain't you rich?", Whalen explains, he "could suddenly see that [the poem] could be what I was going to be or what it was going to be itself"; he saw it was "possible for a poem to be its own shape and size" (in this anecdote, one might hear echoes of quantum physics' revelation that "truths" can be discerned retrospectively) (Allen and Whalen *Off the Wall* 23). After a year or so, Whalen says, "I knew where Eliot was at and I was able to get rid of him; he was no longer hiding in the closet everytime I opened it, telling me that 'April is the cruelest month'" (Allen and Whalen *Off the Wall* 72). In Whalen's telling, therefore, Buddhist philosophy provides tools with which to "get past" the great modernists.

Of course, Whalen's new poetic process also reflects that broad impulse toward *timeliness* rather than certitude. Rather than writing with a specific conception of what poetic language should or can do, Whalen places himself within the uncertainty of not-knowing beforehand what the poem would "be": "[the poem] could be what I was going to be or what it was going to be itself" (Allen and Whalen *Off the Wall* 23). He therefore writes with an attentiveness to the "institutional" facts of poetry. In recognizing, for example, the "traditional idea of skill" in poetry as an institutional fact arising from habits of thought that are specific to time and place, he is able to write a poem without deciding its ontology beforehand:

> the traditional idea of skill is something like reading [Cleanth] Brooks and [Robert Penn] Warren about the theory of literature and then setting out to create work that will satisfy those categories, those curious recipes that they have abstracted out of Wordsworth,

> Coleridge, Shakespeare, or someplace. Sometimes it works—you can sell it to the *New Yorker* and get a lot of money. Mr. Auden did it all the time. You eventually end up dissatisfied with that kind of stuff. (Allen and Whalen *Off the Wall* 77)

For Whalen, to write a poem within the same poetic economy as the New Critics, whose work implicitly acknowledged the assumptions of the positivists, is to "cause the creation of a lot of stuff that doesn't need to be created in the first place. Who needs it?" Whalen asks (Whalen and Allen 74). "The thing is," he continues in the same interview, "is that we're taught that sonnets are a value—that creating objects of this kind is an esthetic act and is of total value" (74). What happens, however, in creating such objects, is:

> You end up with a lot of production. We Americans are producers. We figure the business of being a poet is getting technique. You learn to produce poems, learn to produce sonnets and sestinas. You do marvelous narrative verses—at one point, Alan Tate announced he was going to do this long poem in terza rima in the pages of a big-name review. The poem was called the "Severed Head"; he lifted this head out of Dante, but it was all going to be modern and in English with careful and beautiful rhyming. I don't know how far he got with it, but it was dull. Nothing very interesting happened. (Whalen and Allen *Off the Wall* 74)

Whalen takes his frustration with the "total value" of such "productive" poetic texts and translates it into a poetics that instead lives in the uncertainty of what a poem is. In contrast to the "dull," efficient productivity of poetry like Alan Tate's, the uselessness of a poem influenced by Buddhist philosophy and practice, as I show in chapter two, is "very interesting," even if it is not *productive*—even if its very *uselessness* is the interesting part (74).

The experience of Ginsberg and Snyder in encountering a tradition of Chinese visual art and Whalen's narrative of how he wrote himself into a new poetics vividly demonstrate how the Zen Buddhist lineage draws upon broadly "Asian" cultural materials—not just drawing from Buddhist texts and the wisdom of spiritual practitioners like D.T. Suzuki, but also from their perception and understanding of Chinese and Japanese aesthetics; their newfound meditative practices, which they often learned from Asian/American teachers; and from their relationships and friendships with Asians in America. Such broadly nonwestern materials allow the Zen lineage to produce a poetics of uncertainty that is uniquely new in its transpacific formulations. Ginsberg's excitement at mountains and rivers painting comes about because major cultural institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art have made this aesthetics accessible to interested museumgoers. Yet in this period, it is not just broadly "Chinese" aesthetics that are available: by this decade, Buddhism had been domesticated for American contexts and audiences, and thus when Whalen, Snyder, and Welch arrive in San Francisco in 1958, Buddhism is simply there, available, *operationalizable* as poetic matter (even if, in some of these operationalizations, ethical problems of appropriation arise: I discuss these problems in chapter three).

As a result of earlier Zen proselytizers, including 19th-century Zen missionaries, Buddhism had by this time already been framed rhetorically as something available and useful to Americans.[23] Summarizing the writing of D.T. Suzuki (Zen's "foremost philosopher to the

[23] Michael K. Masatsugu points us to Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West,* for a discussion of Buddhism in late nineteenth-century U.S. popular, academic, and missionary discourse: "Snodgrass has discussed the staging of Buddhism at the World's Parliament of Religions held in conjunction with the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. See, in particular, the introduction, and chapters 1 and 4" (Masatsugu "Beyond" 430n13). But Even before the 50s, general interest in Buddhism had been growing. *The Light of Asia* (1879), a book on the life and teaching of the historical Buddha Siddhartha Gautama, "was estimated to have sold over 500,000 copies in the United States" (Masatsugu "Beyond" 435). In addition, the World's Parliament of Religions, which was part of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893—received national press coverage (435). See Richard

West"), Brown explains that Suzuki's specific argument focused attention away from actual "outward forms" of Zen practice and emphasized "the unique, transcultural experience of Buddhist awakening in language that his American audiences could understand" (Brown "Zen of Anarchy" 214, 215). He accentuated the ability of Zen to "save the West," a competence emerging in part "from…its ability to evolve over time and space" (Brown "Zen of Anarchy" 218). Suzuki emphasized the "universality of the enlightenment experience, unencumbered by cultural particulars, at the core of Buddhist practice" (218). Buddhism could therefore produce a "revolutionary experience…undimmed by the intellect or the imagination" (Suzuki *Essays* 32, qtd. in Brown 218). Contemporary writers therefore found in his framing of Buddhism both a timely "critique of Western materialism" and a new idea of "transcultural individual liberation" that appeared to owe nothing to the Judeo-Christian, materialist, Enlightenment thought that had contributed to the ills of cold war culture and failed to "present life as it really was" (Brown "Zen of Anarchy" 215). Perhaps more importantly, Suzuki pointed readers toward a contemplative practice. In addition to Suzuki's rhetorical framing, there were, simply, more English-language reading materials on Buddhism than ever before; meanwhile, San Francisco-area radio broadcasts were disseminating and popularizing the ideas of D.T. Suzuki for a wide, lay audience.[24]

Hughes Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions: The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995); Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West.* While Buddhism didn't take hold among non-Asians in the U.S. until the 1950s, this 1893 event is significant due to its careful framing of Buddhism's value for American culture. Indeed, most scholars point to this Parliament as the official debut of Buddhism in American culture because of the way Soyen Shaku, the first Zen Buddhist master to teach in the United States, framed Buddhism for western audiences (Gray 25). This framing involved emphases on Zen's inherent universality and its sharp critique of Western culture.

[24] Alan Watts arrived in San Francisco in 1951 and is a foundational early figure who introduces Buddhist ideas to a large audience through his radio show that discussed eastern religion, contemporary philosophy, psychoanalysis, fundamentals of eastern philosophy, and fundamentals of Buddhism, among other related topics. The Berkeley-based KPFA radio show, a "Sunday sermon," was broadcast back-to-back with Kenneth Rexroth's show under the banner "Pacifica Views," and ran from 1953-1962 (Gray 26). From 1959-1973, Watts also appeared numerous times on television, whether through his own KQED show *Eastern Wisdom & Modern Life* or in interviews and films. A

The "availability" of Buddhism in this period is also illustrated by the generosity of diasporic Asian American communities in inviting Euro Americans into their study groups and in teaching Americans the meditative discipline of sitting *zazen*. This aspect, however, rarely shows up in Beat accounts of their work and their poetry communities. Its absence even from the scholarship on this period, on these cultural producers, suggests that this period is a precursor to the ongoing absence of Asian American persons within avant-garde American poetry generally. I analyze this absence in chapters four and five.

Much of the writing on Beat Buddhism frames it as a primarily literary phenomenon, and though Whalen has mentioned his participation in Buddhist diasporic communities, his reflections on finding his way into Buddhism demonstrate a common emphasis on textuality that seems to ignore the role of Asian/Americans—their major contributions, Buddhist-inspired artistic creations, expert collaborations, and remarkable adaptations to Buddhism—in this period of transpacific translation.[25] Before he joined the U.S. Army, Whalen read "translations of Chinese poetry, and Confucius and what not" (Allen and Whalen *Off the Wall* 68). Later, it seems, he found the writings of theosophist Helena Blavatsky, translations of the Vedanta writings, and Lin Yutang's anthology *The Wisdom of China and India* (1942). After Whalen joined and quickly left a Vedanta society, Snyder began sharing with Whalen texts like R.H.

website produced by the Alan Watts Organization makes many of these films, interviews, and TV seasons readily available: www.alanwatts.org/visual. R. John Williams describes the significance of Watts' television show in detail, focusing on one particular episode for its vivid illustration of the connections between Zen and cybernetics (Williams *Buddha in the Machine* 177-179).

[25] Certainly, much of the content of interviews with Whalen do emphasize the "American version of formal Zen training" that he devoted time to later in his life (from the 1970s onward), there is very little about any relationships with Asian/Americans during the midcentury/1950s (Allen and Whalen *Off the Wall* 68). I use "Asian/American" to denote that at times, I am talking about Asians in America; at other times, I am talking about Americans of Asian descent. Of course, the label "Asian American" would not come into being until the late 1960s.

Blyth's translations of haiku poetry, "whose first volume is almost entirely devoted to commentaries and great revelations about Zen" (Meltzer 343).

> the next thing that happened was that we started reading the essays in [D.T. Suzuki's] *Zen Buddhism.* That converted me, I think, pretty much to the idea that Buddhism, and certainly Zen, was a much more free and unbent kind of operation. That one could live in the mountains and be crazy and be fine. Nobody would care. I thought that was a swell program. Of course, misunderstanding the whole point. (Meltzer 343)

Here, the language of Zen as a "free and unbent kind of operation" illustrates the ease with which Euro American (male) poets navigated this new cultural material and further points to how operationalizable the cultural materials of Zen were at the time. Not long after reading Suzuki, Whalen and Snyder met friends who connected them to Albert Saijo, a Japanese American poet who at the time was exploring Buddhism as part of his Japanese heritage.[26] Saijo showed them "how to sit," to engage in the practice of seated meditation (Meltzer 343). This, Whalen said, "was very helpful and made me feel like something was happening" (343). Whalen "found" Buddhism textually and then gained more cultural material from a Japanese American man himself. What I find interesting here is that Saijo was sought out for his expertise in Buddhist practice, but then he all but disappears from the Beat story. I attempt to remedy this disappearance in chapters three and four.

[26] Saijo's his life and work demonstrate how Buddhism was for many Nisei Japanese Americans *not* cultural or "ethnic," since overtly Asian markers like Buddhism had been downplayed or erased due to xenophobic wartime threats. Masatsugu shows how "during the post-war decades, Saijo strategically invoked Japanese and Asian cultural markers, such as haiku poetry and Buddhism. Saijo drew from these cultural practices in affirming ethnic heritage, in developing social connections across racial lines with poets and writers associated with the Beat movement, and in critiquing some aspects of the dominant ideology of Cold War domestic containment" (Masatsugu "Haiku on the Road" 60). Saijo's relationship to Buddhism further complicates the problematic "convert"/"ethnic" Buddhist binary that has developed in religious studies and literary studies scholarship, which I point to below.

The Euro-American poets' relationship with Saijo echoes another of Snyder's friendships with Charles Leong, a Chinese American man. When reflecting on this period in a 1999 interview, Snyder talks about the East Asian materials that he and his group were consuming, reading, engaging with at the time—materials and ideas ("especially Taoist, Confucian, Eastern philosophy") that he, Whalen, Welch, and a "couple professors" discussed (Meltzer 280). Arrestingly, within this mix of materials, tools, and ideas, he includes a relationship with a Chinese American veteran, Charles Leong, who taught him calligraphy:

> By the time I graduated from Reed, I had been talking this stuff, especially Taoist, Confucian, Eastern philosophy, with Phil Whalen a lot and also with Lew Welch. And then with a couple professors--the anthropology guy, David French, and the guy who did art and William Blake, Lloyd Reynolds. There was a core of people there that we could talk to. Then Charles Leong, a Chinese American veteran back from World War II, was a GI student at Reed; he was forty-something years old. He did beautiful calligraphy. Taught us all kinds of things. We had really good exposure to East Asian thinking at that time. (Meltzer 280)

Leong "taught [them] all kinds of things"; in fact, as chapter five shows, he was not only Snyder's calligraphy teacher, but also appears to have assisted Snyder in his translations of the Tang dynasty poet Han Shan/Cold Mountain, which were published first in 1958 and then to great acclaim as part of *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* in 1968. Yet, like Saijo, Leong is framed in this late-twentieth century interview as a tool that provided "really good exposure to East Asian thinking" (280). I include the full excerpt above to demonstrate the packaging of the Beat story: This is an interview telling the story of an already larger-than-life period of American literary history and popular culture. In this telling, above, the *texts* of Eastern philosophy are the

same as being taught by a *Chinese American man* (and presumably, the same as encountering Chinese *visual art* at the Met): all provide "really good exposure to East Asian thinking" (280). Here, and in interviews I quoted earlier, written texts (translated and packaged precisely for American audiences); Metropolitan Museum of Art galleries (curated for American tastes); and a relationship with an Asian American man are all simply seen as tools for "exposure" to East Asian "thinking."

Here we might consider the invisibility of Asian and Asian American cultural producers within this famous moment for transpacific American poetry—and further ask, as I do below and in chapter three, what this invisibility/erasure means morally. When reading Beat writers' interviews, I was surprised that they rarely mention the influence of diasporic communities other than "teaching them how to sit," in Saijo's case, or teaching them "all kinds of things," in Leong's case, since some of the scholarship shows that Asian American diasporic communities—indeed, individual Asian American persons like Saijo—were far more influential than those interviews suggest, their artworks deserving of far greater attention than they have enjoyed thus far.[27]

[27] While the history of this cross-cultural exchange between Japanese American and European American Buddhists in the midcentury has only recently become part of the scholarship, Masatsugu explains a few arenas in which these exchanges occurred (Masatsugu "Beyond" 425). Rick Fields' narrative history of Buddhisms in America also provides a far richer view of the relationships between diasporic Asian American communities and interested Anglo-European "converts." Masatsugu explains that a large number of Anglo American Buddhists arrived in the Bay Area in the 1950s; their close proximity to Japanese American Buddhist communities combined with "Japanese American interest in promoting Buddhism among the general American public" generated increasing interactions between the two groups of Buddhists (Masatsugu "Beyond" 437). Beyond just the Beat figures we are familiar with, Masatsugu notes that this influx of Anglo American Buddhists "were a diverse group that included academics, students, teachers, ex-soldiers, printers, editors, artists, poets, and writers" (437). These cross-cultural exchanges occurred at public conferences, within Buddhist study groups, and in Buddhist publications (Masatsugu "Beyond" 443). In these arenas, there was discussion and debate "over competing visions of Buddhism," a cross-cultural dialogue "encouraged by priests, lay leaders, and students from the Japanese American Buddhist Churches of America (BCA) as part of an attempt to develop interest and support among the general public" ("Beyond" 443). As a result of a three-day Buddhist seminar in 1952 that was "the first of its kind in the Bay Area," scholars and students from the new American Academy of Asian Studies (AAAS), including Alan Watts, "became regular participants in BCA study groups, contributors to BCA publications, and guest speakers for Japanese American Young Buddhist

This invisibility is exacerbated by a common framing of midcentury American Buddhism as a primarily literary phenomenon—we saw this framing in Whalen's interviews above. This framing is also present in Rick Fields' narrative history of Buddhism in America *How the Swans Came to the Lake* (see pp. 208-214) and in interviews with Snyder. Stephen Prothero, a historian of American religion, paraphrases Snyder in his introduction to Carole Tonkinson's influential *Big Sky Mind* anthology (1995):

> In the midst of a lifetime of considering how spiritual lineages are constructed and ancient wisdom handed down, Gary Snyder has noted that in traditional communities, wisdom is passed down orally from teacher to student, from grandparent to grandchild, without the intervention of texts. But in Western culture, Snyder has remarked, that same wisdom is often transmitted from author to reader, from book to book. Books are our elders, asserts Snyder, and libraries our repositories of spiritual insight. This observation can certainly be applied to Buddhism in America, which until very recently propagated itself largely through books. (Tonkinson 3-4)[28]

The language of this story (that Buddhism in the U.S. was literary "until very recently") omits the fact that Buddhist knowledges and traditions *were* transferred relationally (however primitivist some of Snyder's framing of this may be), and that *people of Asian descent*—not just

conferences" (443). Of the Buddhist study groups that grew in this period, the most significant was the BCA study group in Berkeley, which, "under the direction of Rev. Kanmo Imamura and his wife, Jane Imamura, became an important forum for discussions between ethnic and convert Buddhists" ("Beyond" 443). A wide variety of convert Buddhists joined Bay Area scholars, students, and BCA priests and laypersons in these study groups (443). Snyder joined this Berkeley BCA group in 1955, bringing Ginsberg, Whalen, and Kerouac a few months later (Masatsugu "Beyond" 443). Masatsugu is therefore right to note that "during the 1950s and 1960s, the boundaries dividing Japanese American and white convert Buddhists were more fluid than has been assumed" in the scholarship (Masatsugu 2008 427).

[28] See James Najarian's brief critique of the Tonkinson anthology, including his point that the anthology devotes the most pages to Jack Kerouac, in "The 'Problem' of Buddhism for Western Literature: Edwin Arnold to Jack Kerouac." *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Religion*. Routledge, 2016. 326–335. Web.

"libraries"—taught Snyder, Whalen, and Ginsberg. (Beyond this, of course, it was Shin Buddhism that first came into the U.S. in the nineteenth century. Prothero seems uninterested in the transpacific flows of Buddhist thought that occurred as a result of Japanese immigration.) Snyder and Prothero may be pointing to the fact that some of the powerful, globally-respected Buddhist clerical lineages in the U.S. are fairly recent phenomena (some only really arriving in the 1970s, though Jodo Shinshu religious institutions were firmly established in the U.S. by the late nineteenth century). Yet this narrative that "books are our elders" not only completely ignores Buddhisms practiced by Asian/Americans from the nineteenth century into the present, but it also erases the fact that Asian/Americans themselves taught Snyder and his cohort.[29]

[29] And, whether consciously or otherwise, scholarship's support of the false binary between "convert" and "ethnic" Buddhisms appears to continue to support this erasure. Broad overviews of the history of Buddhism in America that include discussion of both "ethnic" and "convert" Buddhists include: Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boston, 1992), and Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999). Scholars that tend to focus on either "ethnic" or "convert" Buddhists have, though perhaps unintentionally, tended to confirm a divide between the two groups and their histories. As Masatsugu writes, "studies of convert Buddhism have often been framed around a narrative of the transmission of Buddhism from Asian texts, monks, and teachers to convert practitioners in the United States" (2008 427). For studies on "convert" Buddhists, see Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844–1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent* (Bloomington, Ind., 1992); and Stephen Prothero, *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott* (Bloomington, Ind., 1996). "Separate studies" on "ethnic" / Asian American Buddhists, Masatsugu writes, "reinforce the notion that Asian American religious practice operated in an ethnic vacuum" (2008 427). Some of these studies are: Tetsuden Kashima, *Buddhism in America: The Social Organization of an Ethnic Religious Institution* (Westport, Conn., 1977); David K. Yoo, "Enlightened Identities: Buddhism and Japanese Americans of California, 1924–1941," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 27 (1996), 281–301; Irene Lin, "Journey to the Far West: Chinese Buddhism in America," in David K. Yoo, ed., *New Spiritual Homes: Religion and Asian Americans* (Honolulu, 1999), 134–168; and Sharon A. Suh, *Being Buddhist in a Christian World: Gender and Community in a Korean American Temple* (Seattle, 2004). In the 1990s, scholars began to grapple with the problematic binary of ethnic/convert. See Charles S. Prebish, "Two Buddhisms Reconsidered," *Buddhist Studies Review*, 10 (1993), 187–206. See also Rick Fields, "Divided Dharma: White Buddhists, Ethnic Buddhists, and Racism," in Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka, eds., *Faces of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley, 1998), 196–206; Jan Nattier, "Who is a Buddhist? Charting the Landscape of Buddhist America," in Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka, eds., *Faces of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley, 1998), 183–195; Wendy Cadge, *Heartwood: The First Generation of Theravada Buddhism in America* (Chicago, 2005); Lori Pierce, "Constructing American Buddhisms: Discourses of Race and Religion in Territorial Hawai'i" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Hawai'i, 2001); and Ryo Imamura, "Buddhist and Western Psychotherapies: An Asian American Perspective," in Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka, eds., *Faces of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley, 1998), 228–237. For a discussion of race and the problem of categorization of Buddhists in the United States, see bell hooks, "Waking up to Racism," *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, 4: 1 (1994), 42–45. More recently, *Buddhism and Whiteness: Critical Reflections* (2019) has presented a series of nuanced chapters combining Buddhist philosophy with a philosophical engagement with race and whiteness.

To appropriate means to put something to use—or, more accurately, to *take* and to use. These East Asian and Asian/American cultural materials—in particular, "Buddhism" (a term for which I provide more historical context in chapters two and three)—are all seen by the Zen lineage as tools for use. Here, the poets focus on the "use" part of appropriation because they appear unable to see the "taking" part: whiteness occluded that "taking" and made its moral implications difficult to see in that time. In the 1950s, this poetics was not yet self-aware and had not been held to historical scrutiny. The Met, on the other hand, can be and *was* held to some kind of historical scrutiny: as an institution of expertise and knowledge, it must be held responsible for how it presents and curates other cultures. (Ginsberg, as I have explained, finds the Met's collection of East Asian texts and art less compelling—not because he thinks the Met's presentation of Chinese visual art is problematic, but because he viewed those texts as static.) It is in the move from those tools to Saijo and Leong themselves, to living diasporic communities where these cultural producers view humans as resources for extracting cultural material, that we move into a less ambiguous and clearly problematic *failure to distinguish* between what/whom the Euro Americans are taking and what/whom they are using. This is a moral confusion. In other words, there are three types of "tools" or materials at work here, according to these poets: Chinese visual art; Buddhist texts like sutras/scriptures (for example); and Asian/American friends. Not all of these "tools" are simply available for *taking* and *using*. We see they are not the same, but Ginsberg and Snyder do not see this.

This failure of distinction is grounded within the ethos of the "Maker," which as it is deployed by many of these Euro Americans, manifests as an ethos that falsely believes all things are equally available for use. (I will further explicate this "Maker ethos" in chapters three, four, and five—in chapter five, interestingly, Charles Leong praises the Maker ethos as a far better

approach to the study of Chinese culture than the modes of study then-available within Sinology as a broader field.) To be sure, some Buddhist tools are openly available: a sutra, for example, is a text that is *designed* for use, indeed is meant to be reinscribed within a different culture. Then there is the artifact: a Chinese mountains and rivers painting, for example, was made for one community and then interpreted by another. This is another artistic object which, when framed within western knowledge-making institutions, has its own set of standards that holds cultural producers like gallery curators accountable. As another example, scholars of Sinology or Buddhology have a similar responsibility partly because they will teach their knowledge to the next generations of scholars: one must attempt to "get it right" and be held accountable for "getting it wrong." But a friendship with Albert Saijo is not the same thing as a sutra or a painting at the Met. What we see in Snyder's and Whalen's framing of their friends, as cultural materials on the same plane as a piece of art, is a very real moral failure to include Asian American persons *as* persons who most likely would have been very directly benefited by being included in this moment of cultural production—and, indeed, in the cultural productions themselves, and in the history of those cultural productions, and in the anthologies of those cultural productions. I attempt to get at this moral confusion in chapter three.

Therefore, at the same time that I would like to show that Buddhist cultural materials were readily available to cultural producers in the midcentury and thus provided a unique toolbox with which to articulate a poetics of uncertainty, it is *also* clear that this is a period that portends, for example, Timothy Yu's 2016 critique (in *100 Chinese Silences*) of avant-garde American poetry as a tradition that only ever, or almost always, exoticizes and Orientalizes Asian American persons, as it draws seemingly unproblematically upon the material of Others that are absent from both the poems and from the American avant-garde poetic tradition as a

whole—and in this case, even from the *story* of the Beats (told and re-told in interviews with Beat poets themselves; in scholarly articles; in anthologies; and in classrooms).

In contrast to the logical positivists' return to certitude, the Zen poets of the midcentury pull forth the meaningless, the uncertain, as the much more accurate descriptor of reality and are able to mount this critique because of their poetics' incorporation of East Asian and Asian American cultural materials. Due to its anti-instrumentalizing characteristics, Buddhism allowed poets like Whalen to write poetry that furthers new ideas of what poetry can be and do—it allowed Whalen's work to be *experimental,* that key value of the poetic avant-garde. What is missing here is an ability to distinguish which cultural materials are in fact available to this Euro American cohort.

Short-Circuiting: Limitations to the Reach of the Three Schools of Poetics

The work of Alan Watts compounds the problematic omission of Asian Americans from the Beat Buddhist story. Though there is not room here to discuss it adequately (I do so in chapter three), Watts's censure of "Protestantized" Asian American diasporic Buddhist communities ignores Asian/Americans' roles in this moment of Buddhist "availability."[30] (As I

[30] Despite the Zen lineage's and diasporic communities' shared interest in generating broader awareness of Buddhism within American culture, a debate grew around the question of whether various forms of Buddhist practice and teachings were authentic—at least, this is the ostensible center of the debates; certainly, they reflected the growing strain between differing visions of American Buddhism (Masatsugu "Beyond" 445-46). Convert Buddhists were unsettled by the external, Protestantized modifications of Japanese American Buddhist practice, finding the structure, form, and even doctrinal similarities of Jodo Shinshu practice and teaching too similar to Western religion (446-47). Alan Watts was among the loudest critics of these modifications, instead approving of the convert groups' social organization into "ashrams, that is to say, as informal schools for the study and practice of Buddhist teachings," rather than being organized "as temples and churches, which pattern themselves more and more after the Protestant Christian Churches of the West" (Watts "A Program" 21, qtd. in Masatsugu 447). Alan Watts, "A Program for Buddhism in America," *Berkeley Bussei* (1952), 21. Watts implied, in what may seem an odd reversal, that *convert* Buddhism was more authentic, as it modeled its communities after the "historical ashrams" made up of "a group of disciples studying under Gautama the Buddha" (Watts "A Program" 21, qtd. in Masatsugu 447). It appears the external religious expressions of the "ethnic" Buddhist communities felt too similar to the American religious culture the Beats were trying to get away from, and Japanese American Buddhists began to be

have suggested, the legacies of this erasure can still be felt: Timothy Yu, Cathy Park Hong, and John Yau have all pointed to the cloistered racism of American avant-garde poetry, a category that holds many Beat writers in its esteemed ranks.)[31] Watt's censure also ignores the possibility that the Buddhist transformations and hybridizations that occurred in diasporic religious communities—as a result of a need to survive and assimilate in a dangerous, xenophobic society—are perhaps the far more interesting transpacific "translations" occurring in this period.

There are therefore two major reasons that the reach of this Zen lineage was limited: first, the omission of Asian and Asian American persons from their poems and constructed poetic lineages meant not only that Asian American poets were not included in the textual communities of what would be called "American Buddhist poetry," but also that the body of texts constituting "American Buddhist poetry" largely still do not include the work of those living in communities where Buddhism had been practiced and passed down for generations. The second obstacle to this lineage's legacy is that, due to the ways in which ideas of Buddhist mindful practice were instrumentalized in the mindfulness industry of the late twentieth century, the therapeutic, "self-help" Buddhism of mindfulness obscures our understanding of the Zen lineage's work. Their work—in particular, the poetry of Snyder, Whalen, and Kyger—can be seen, as I show in chapter two, as a "prehistory" of late-twentieth and twenty-first-century mindfulness.

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characterized as apathetic and conformist (449). See Masatsugu "Beyond" 449 and Robert P. Jackson, "On Buddhist Education," in *American Buddhist*, 2 (July 15, 1958), 1.

[31] See Timothy Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry Since 1965* (Stanford University Press, 2009); Timothy Yu, *100 Chinese Silences* (Les Figues Press, 2016); Cathy Park Hong, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (One World Press, 2020); Cathy Park Hong, "Delusions of Whiteness in the Avant-Garde," *Lana Turner* 7: November 3, 2014: https://arcade.stanford.edu/content/delusions-whiteness-avant-garde; and John Yau's essay "Purity and the Avant-Garde," which was part of a larger group of essays on race and the poetic avant-garde published by the *Boston Review* in 2015. John Yau, "Purity and the Avant-Garde," *Boston Review* April 29, 2015: http://bostonreview.net/poetry/john-yau-purity-avant-garde.

The legacy of the New Criticism was also constrained, partly due to the fact it was an overwhelmingly male vision of who was allowed to speak, write, and teach, grounded as it was in universities and the New York literary establishment. Further, as Graff points out, the New Critics' conclusions are less pathbreaking when considering they implicitly take on some of the positivists' own assumptions about language. Though they rescue poetry from its de-valuing within logical positivism, the strategies they use to determine how to make poetry scrutable, how to make its uncertainty an asset, is to talk about transhistorical value—and thus to confirm some of the logical assumptions of positivism itself. In other words, by transforming ambiguity and paradox into "loss" or "grief"—a humanist argument for meaning beyond time and culture—they in a sense impose a symbolic framework perhaps not unlike the romantic symbol of Benjamin's study.

In the romantic lineage's move to bring romantic precursors into the then-present, they also brought a certain gendered inertia along. This lineage incorporates oppressive gender arrangements not just into their poetry, but also into their communities. Part of the reason they reached for a patrilineage with such fervency was that the New Critics truly were the literary gatekeepers of the time and looked upon the work of the San Francisco Renaissance poets as heretical. Linda Russo suggests that with the drama of the break from the New Critics and due to the sense that there was nothing else to say after T.S. Eliot, there was a need for a fatherly blessing to even *write*. They went looking for such a blessing in the work of their poetic forebears while also looking to each other to provide a fraternal legitimacy.[32]

[32] As Russo shows, even before Snyder, Lew Welch, and Whalen arrived in San Francisco in the late 1950s, "they had for years been cocreating their lineage, with one reconfirming for another signs of their poetic parentage" (Russo "How you Want" 26-27). One way the poets were able to fashion a sense of communal goals was through the larger "social rituals of poetic synchronicity—learning the craft, giving readings and collaborating on performances, publishing in little magazines" (Russo "How you Want" 26). All of these reinforced a sense of currency and belonging. In particular, publishing in little magazines was a crucial way to get outside of the stranglehold that New York literary elites, New Critics, and universities had over the *business* of poetry.

Yet in fashioning this patrilineal legitimacy and in creating a fraternal community in San Francisco, they also replicated the oppressive gender norms exhibited by the broader American culture. Their family was both *imagined*—keeping women from claiming the role of the poet—and *lived*—placing women into the same gender roles that the rest of the culture did: that of wife, caretaker, or mother.[33] At the center of the privileging of a male poetic identity are the same gnostic, logocentric, ontological binaries (which, otherwise, in their estimation, were responsible not only for Cold War ideologies, but for New Criticism's valuing of poetic detachment) emphasizing reason over emotion; intellect over Being; male over female. Though Davidson is right to qualify that, "to be fair, we must search for the roots of sexism among San Francisco poets in the society at large," and that "to criticize their work on feminist grounds requires a look at 1950s attitudes toward women," it is also true that "however liberated, the Beats often replicated many of the cultural stereotypes of power (passive-aggressive, master-slave) that their sexuality seemed to reject" (Davidson "San Francisco" 68). Michael K. Masatsugu writes that "many Americans turned to consumerism, the nuclear family, and the home as sanctuary" in this period, while "the Beats retained a deep ambivalence to the dominant ideology of domestic containment" ("Beyond" 439). Yet it is hard to maintain this argument when considering their outright, even if not strictly heterosexual, reincarnation of similarly problematic gendered arrangements present in the nuclear family.[34]

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[33] An unpublished essay by Duncan, then writing about the Berkeley/Spicer circle, reveals the gendered roles that women were "allowed" to fill:

> We were the champions of the boys' team in Poetry, and some day our fellow students would know that Poetry was the name of the game…[Spicer] met now with his group of poets as once he had met with his Sunday School group. George Stanley, Harold Dull, Joe Dunn, Ebbe Borregaard, Jim Alexander, Lew Ellingham, Ron Loewinsohn, Stan Persky – there were star players, bench sitters, and water boys. Joanne Kyger could play on the team, but she was a girl. Helen Adam was team godmother. Fran Herndon would make the posters, pennants, and paint the portraits of the old guard – Spicer, Blaser, and Jess and me – and the gang would rally round. (Duncan "The Underside" 5, qtd. in Davidson *San Francisco* 176).

[34] Russo shows that it was the "gender-bending" correspondence that Kyger and Whalen struck up while she was in Japan that allowed her to claim the role of poet (Russo, "How you want"). It took quite a lot of work—in Kyger's

The boys' club mentality that pervaded their literary associations spilled over into their poetry itself, in which "a patriarchal ideology pervaded" (Davidson 177). It would not be enough to simply claim male forebears nor to play on the same "team"; the poem itself would necessarily "reveal the continuation of tradition," since it was through writing that "poets made contact with their predecessors and discovered correspondences" (Russo "How you want" 28). There is not room here to illustrate how patriarchal ideologies may be visible in their work, but in reviving a primitivist ethos and resurrecting romanticism, a certain "psychic division of labor" was also brought into play "in which the male was regarded as the maker and the female as the formless material of his art" (Davidson *San Francisco* 177). It perhaps goes without saying that this patrilineage also often subordinated persons of Asian descent into the Orientalist, formless material of "Asianness."

In addition to extending a certain family "lineage" that excludes those who are not white and exoticizes and Orientalizes real people of Asian descent, the legacy of the Zen lineage is also short-circuited by the ways in which capitalism absorbs some of its unique tools. Not unlike Dick Hebdige's argument in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style,* the Beat "lifestyle" and some of the Zen lineage's tools are absorbed into the processes of late capital. Today, mental health and meditation apps clinically improve one's cognitive function in uncertain times by using the very meditative practices and poetics of some of this period's Zen poetry. This is partly because

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own writing, certainly, but Russo demonstrates her friendship and correspondence with Whalen was fundamental—for Kyger to define a poetic identity for herself that was not primarily domestic, that of the muse, or that of the sexually different "dumb blonde." At the time Donald Allen was collecting work for *The New American Poetry* anthology (1960), for example, she didn't submit any of her work because she felt incapable. As a muse-figure, Kyger had no genealogy; she was "configured as an appendage to the male poet" and "could not, like the men, acknowledge a lineage of forebears that confirmed poetry as a gender-appropriate activity" (Russo "How you want" 25). However, she, too, succeeded in enacting her own genealogical project (I discuss this further in chapter two and refer again to it in chapter five). Russo's larger oeuvre, which pays especial attention to Kyger's connections to the Spicer circle and to Kyger's early epic poetics in her first poetry collection *The Tapestry and the Web,* generally demonstrates this point. See "Dealing in Parts and Particulars: Joanne Kyger's Early Epic Poetics" (Russo 2002) for a treatment of *The Tapestry and the Web* as enacting Kyger's own genealogical project.

Snyder's work, remarkable for its natural sublimity and clean, spare aesthetics, will persist and congeal over time, eventually coalescing with the larger industry of mindfulness as a resource for balancing the ill effects of capitalism on the self. Aspects of Snyder's aesthetic can be compared to the discourse of capitalist efficiency, in which the worker is rested and ready to go at it the next day.

Indeed, when read in a more orthodox, "Square" way as Snyder does, Zen ends up being quite a conservative force. But if in Snyder's work, we see a cleaning-up of uncertainties, the poetics of Kyger and Whalen *fails* to organize the mind's uncertainties and neuroses. I illustrate these points in my next chapter. Part of the magnetism of Whalen and Kyger's work is the complete *uselessness* of enlightenment—a uselessness or ordinariness that may seem uninteresting, but which Alan Watts found preferable; it was a state he sought out. Responding to the 1960s outcry against LSD as an aid for Buddhist meditational practice, Watts was sympathetic to its use, but only because of what happens after the high. Watts was not interested in a sublime, ecstatic state, but in "the moment of return to the ordinary state of mind" (Fields *How the Swans* 251). "'It is thus,' concluded Watts, 'that many of us who have experimented with psychedelic chemicals have left them behind, like the raft which you used to cross a river, and have found growing interest and even pleasure in the simplest practice of zazen, which we perform like idiots, without any special purpose'" (Fields *How the Swans* 251-252). A poetics informed by the uselessness, perhaps idiocy, of the mundane changes nothing "on the ground," but like Wittgenstein's later work, does "bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use" (Wittgenstein *PI* 117). Such an ordinariness thus "ruins" the positivist understanding of language and perhaps also, to some extent, the towering edifice of Western

Buddhism. We can see this ordinariness in Whalen and Kyger's poetics, which I discuss in my next chapter.

Chapter Two

Spaces of Mind in the American Midcentury: The Buddhist Poetics of Philip Whalen, Gary Snyder, and Joanne Kyger

> I woke up about 2:30 this morning and thought about Philip's
> hat.
>
> It is bright lemon yellow, with a little brim
> all the way around, and a lime green hat band, printed
> with tropical plants.
>
> It sits on top
> of his shaved head. It upstages every *thing* & every *body*.
> He bought it at Walgreen's himself.
> I mean it fortunately wasn't a gift from an admirer.
> Otherwise he is dressed in soft blues. And in his hands
> a long wooden string of Buddhist Rosary beads, which he keeps
> moving. I ask him which mantra he is doing - but he tells me
> in *Zen*, you don't have to bother with any of that.
> You can just *play* with the beads.
>
> --Joanne Kyger, "Philip Whalen's Hat"

Introduction

In its representations in contemporary mainstream American society, American Buddhism often appears nearly synonymous with "mindfulness," which refers to a set of meditative practices involving an attentiveness to the breath and the mind's workings in the present.[35] Certain forms of mindfulness have been marketed as methods of self-care that can reduce the harmful side effects of "stress," and due to the marketability of some of these mindfulness practices, literary criticism on Buddhism in American literature and poetry can tend

[35] Today's term "mindfulness" is "well established as the preferred translation of [the Pali term] 'sati,'" Jeff Wilson writes, "as a survey of translations from the past half century will readily demonstrate" (15). Mindfulness's travel into the American mainstream (into popular magazines, Google searches, major American businesses that provide their employees with mindfulness training, into addiction recovery programs, into behavioral health and psychology, etc.) has been mapped out thoroughly by Wilson in *Mindful America* (2014).

to emphasize the same ideas of mindful practice seen in these mainstream iterations. In the poetics of Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, and Joanne Kyger, we can locate a "prehistory" of mindfulness in American culture. Their poetries reflect two differing conceptions of mind-phenomena and thus can be seen to illustrate two major Zen Buddhist ideas of awareness.

This chapter looks back to the midcentury to focus on an underappreciated lineage of American Buddhist poetry that necessarily changes the ways we read, teach, and understand American Buddhist poetry and poetics. First, I show how some conceptions of Buddhist poetry have come to reflect both the more marketable aesthetics of mindfulness and what Thanissaro Bhikku, a monk in the Theravadan tradition, calls "Buddhist Romanticism" (Thanissaro Bhikku). Second, the chapter's examination of midcentury American poets Philip Whalen and Joanne Kyger expands the category of "American Buddhist poetry" beyond poems that are already familiar to us. This familiarity is demonstrated, third, in the chapter's reading of the Buddhist poetics of Gary Snyder. Contemporary readers can sense the "Buddhism" in Snyder's poetry: we are more literate in seeing the signs of Buddhist epistemologies operating in his poems because these epistemologies of Buddhism are now fairly pervasive in mainstream American culture, however watered-down or commodified these mainstream iterations might be in comparison to Snyder's elegant lyric form. Yet the more popularized forms of mindfulness have over-informed our reading practices of these midcentury poems; thus, I differentiate between these poets' work by showing the "spaces of mind" visible in their poetics.

The poets discussed here were drawn to Buddhism at a historical moment when it was more available than ever before to interested Euro-Americans.[36] Of great interest in the

[36] In foregrounding the interest of Euro Americans, I do not wish to overshadow the fact that other Buddhist traditions were also robustly present in the United States in this period: Jodo Shinshu or Pure Land Buddhism, largely practiced by West Coast Japanese American Buddhist communities at this time, had been present (and had

midcentury, Joanne Kyger noted in a 2001 interview, was "meditation—Zen. It directed you to be aware of what goes on in the mind" (Meltzer 126). It was meditation, Kyger said, that "caught the fancy of Americans in the fifties" (126). This "availability" of Buddhism at midcentury was made possible because of decades of cross-cultural interest, the earlier work of Modernist figures like Arthur Waley and Ernest Fenollosa, translations of Zen Buddhist texts and ideas as in the work of D.T. Suzuki, missionary work, and Meiji-era cultural nationalisms.[37] Because the poets discussed in this article engage in Zen Buddhist meditative practices and are reading translations of Zen Buddhism, their poetry exhibits what we can call Zen-inspired practices of awareness.[38] This midcentury interest in meditation is also made possible by what David McMahan describes as "a hybrid" Buddhism composed "of a number of Buddhist traditions that have cross-fertilized with the dominant discourses of Western modernity, especially those rooted in Enlightenment rationalism, Romanticism, and Protestant Christianity" (McMahan 7). This "hybrid" Buddhism is also visible in David Hinton's framing of American Buddhist poetry, which I examine below.

Two Views of Mind: Spatialized and Dispersed

The work of Whalen and Kyger, on the one hand, and Snyder on the other, should be differentiated based on how their poems exhibit two different conceptions of an aware, or empty, mind. Broadly, Buddhists' answer to suffering lies in the four noble truths and the eight-fold

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been hybridizing/adapting) to American culture since the early nineteenth century. As Bernard Faure notes, "many received ideas about Buddhism stem from a refusal to take the diversity of Buddhism as a living tradition seriously," and this article does not want to replicate this refusal (Faure 7). Faure, *Unmasking Buddhism* (2009).

[37] For more on Meiji-era cultural nationalisms (some might suggest they are similar to strategic essentialisms), or what James Brown calls ""an Occidentalist, Japanese-centered criticism of American materialism," see Brown, "The Zen of Anarchy" (207) and also Robert H. Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Chicago, IL and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 106–60. Jonathan Stalling has also provided an explication of Fenollosa's work with the New Buddhists who would frame Zen Buddhism for American audiences in remarkably influential ways. See Stalling, "Emptiness in Flux."

[38] The popularity of meditation in the 1950s is part of a long process of Buddhism's importation and adaptation to the "West," and as Thanissaro Bhikku has argued, part of this process has been the use of western (German, in particular) Romantic concepts to make Buddhist concepts less-foreign. See Thanissaro Bhikku, "The Roots of Buddhist Romanticism."

path, all of which work together to attack the problem—a misunderstanding of the nature of "self" and by extension the universe more generally—at its root. Thus, a major idea in Buddhist thought is the emptiness of essence, the idea that phenomena have no inherent nature in and of themselves (this is why, in chapter one, I suggested that such a Zen poetics joins other postwar articulations of "timely" uncertainty). "Sitting *zazen,*" or seated meditation, is a meditative practice that can bring one to "see" the emptiness of mind phenomena. This practice, just one among many offered by Buddhism, was becoming popular among certain Euro-American cultural producers in the late 1940s and 1950s. Kyger, Whalen, and Snyder's habits of meditation were more than just spiritual practices. For them, meditation was also a tool by which they fashioned a uniquely transpacific poetics. For many who "sit *zazen*" (though not all), a realization can occur that one's mind is empty, which is to say, that it has no essence. This—the insight that mind is empty—is an enlightened awareness valued by Buddhist practitioners, insofar as it helps to dismantle that problem of the misunderstanding of self.

Within this framework, there arise two different ideas about the empty mind. One idea, which I will refer to as the spatialized mind, emphasizes that one must continually empty the mind in order to be aware. In this view, emptying is an action that is continuous, while the insight or awareness is something that will *arrive* (one empties the mind in order to achieve that awareness). The other idea, which I will refer to as the dispersed mind, negates the argument that one must *do* something in order to empty the mind: in this second view, one need not empty the mind because mind *is* emptiness. This second insight happens serendipitously, perhaps unexpectedly, and in contrast to the first, perhaps process-oriented notion of emptying the mind in order to become aware, it is instantaneous in terms of effort and time in its recognition that mind is always-already empty.

These two ideas are based on an ancient rivalry, which I discuss further below, that informs what one means by emptiness and whether one has a spatial notion of it: is emptiness a "housed" emptiness, a vessel-like concept (as in the view of the spatialized mind)? In other words, is the mind a container that must *be emptied?* Or does one envision an empty mind as having *no* spatialization, instead simply seeing mind itself as emptiness (having no essence)?[39] In this second view, there is no boundary to the mind—all is emptiness.

These two approaches thus inform both the dominant lineage of American Buddhist poetry, perhaps most clearly illustrated through Gary Snyder's poetics, and the overlooked lineage of American Buddhist poetry, in which Philip Whalen and Joanne Kyger are key figures.[40] The kinds of environments presented in Snyder's work are natural, open, free, expansive. One must embrace that expanse and empty the mind in order to be aware within that space. Not unlike mindfulness' emphasis on a clear "headspace," Snyder's lineage thus

[39] Jonathan Stalling has traced the transformations of ideas, figures, artistic representations, and translations of East Asian and western concepts of emptiness in *Poetics of Emptiness,* in which these questions—is emptiness housed, spatialized, or not?—are revealed to have an enormous history. Historically specific configurations of different Buddhist and Daoist discourses inform the radically different notions of emptiness put forth by the cultural producers in his study.

[40] Both of these poetic lineages can be traced back to the Beat generation's interest in examining the mind's role in constructing the illusion of the self; in addition, both lineages arise out of countercultural midcentury poetic communities who value meditation and take their writing as meditative practice. Many scholarly monographs focus on the Buddhist poetic communities and larger-than-life Beat personalities of the midcentury, and some of these accounts can be overly flattering, even hagiographic. Essays in *Big Sky Mind: Buddhism and the Beat Generation* (1995) discuss the role of Beat writers in "weaving" Buddhism "seamlessly into the fabric of American life" (Tonkinson 5). Editor Carole Tonkinson writes that in comparison to other religions in America, "the Beats were cultivating a much more radical ecumenism" as they "gloried in eliminating distinctions between matter and spirit, divinity and humanity, the sacred and the profane," pointing to Buddhism's potential for undermining problematic binaries (Tonkinson 14, 20). Tonkinson's introduction is emblematic of the kind of hagiographical scholarship often seen in writing about the Beats' relationship to East Asian spirituality, in which Beat writers are figured as desert mystics, wanderers, and pilgrims, veritable American saints seeking to enrich and heal culture. See also Michael Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century,* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989. A number of articles and monographs are interested in tracing the written and interpersonal relationships between avant-garde Buddhist writers, particularly the relationships between Beat male poets, for example—the lives they lived together as neighbors; their travels; the way their poetry speaks to other poets' work; or a focus on their letters to and from each other. See John Suiter, *Poets on the Peaks: Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen & Jack Kerouac in the North Cascades,* New York: Counterpoint, 2002; David Robertson, "The Circumambulation of Mt. Tamalpais," *Western American Literature* (1995): 3-28; and Timothy Gray, *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim: Creating Countercultural Community*, Iowa City, Iowa, 2006.

emphasizes a mind which, when aware, is spaciously empty. Meanwhile, this chapter seeks to recover the messiness, clutter, and ostensible difficulty of the poetics of Whalen and Kyger: if all things are empty including one's mental clutter, then that process of emptying the mind is already done—there is nowhere to go, nothing to do.

Again, these differing ideas may seem inane, but they do more than simply argue about the nature of awareness. Indeed, Whalen and Kyger's work (and their lineage, seen later in the work of Leslie Scalapino and others) provides a robust other history of American Buddhism heretofore neglected due to the power of a more dominant Buddhism that is easily sold and marketed. Glenn Wallis' argument that contemporary Western Buddhists evade the consequences of Buddhist thought—present in concepts such as vanishing, nihility, extinction, contingency, and no-self—is therefore also an argument about how Western Buddhism, which due to the above concepts should serve as a powerful alternative to Western society, has instead been shaped by Enlightenment, Romantic, and Protestant thinking and is thus a complement to neoliberal capitalism, negating the very teachings it aims to convey.[41] One of the fundamental Buddhist insights, he explains, is that "our desires and actions, however exalted, cannot withstand the nonnegotiable consequences of impermanence, dissolution, and emptiness" (Wallis viii). However, as Wallis notes, "the history of Western Buddhism is one of evading the very consequences of its own thought."[42] Wallis illustrates the power of Western Buddhism by visualizing it as a "sprawling estate, operating daily at peak capacity"—a strong, sleek fortification that "originates an order, both for itself and for its practitioner, that is at odds" with

[41] These observations are paraphrased from a filmed conversation between Glenn Wallis and Charles Hallisey. Harvard Divinity School. "The Case Against Buddhism: A Conversation between Glenn Wallis and Charles Hallisey." *YouTube*, interview by Charles Hallisey with Glenn Wallis, March 25, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4QCsx8vMw8M.
[42] Ibid.

the very insights that Buddhism has historically held (Wallis vii, viii). Wallis thus turns to Walter Benjamin's critical approach of "ruination," which refers not to destruction or annihilation but rather *a return to an unkempt state* (Wallis viii).

Literary scholars and readers of American poetry should also return to the "unkempt" work of midcentury poet Philip Whalen to recover that undervalued, understudied lineage of American Buddhist poetry that appears to be as far from that minimalist, empty headspace of contemporary "mindfulness" as the idea of the ruin itself. Just as mindful practice is supposed to help one empty the clutter of the mind so as to make way for a clear idea, image, or emotion, so too the most popular and celebrated American Buddhist poetry tends to deliver the reader into a sublime, epiphanic mental space. But Whalen's poetics clutters everything up to the point that readers can hardly "get" a single thing from his work. His is therefore a poetics that articulates how becoming aware of the mind involves paying attention to its workings—which in turn means that in reading his work, one will encounter cluttered words, thoughts, images, emotions, places, times, people, etc. Whalen's work should be read as the mind that you want to get away from (perhaps not unlike one's own mind), revealing how little one can "get" from just focusing on what is happening in a mind. Yet it holds out that idea that the mind is already empty; even in its messiness, it does not need *to be* emptied, as in the idea of the spatialized mind.

In this chapter's examination of two different ideas of the empty/ied mind—spatialized and dispersed—it outlines the stakes of a poetics that is anti-teleological, a poetics that, in its resistance to the process-oriented idea of emptying the mind in order to reach awareness, likewise resists the easy commodification and instrumentalization of the most celebrated contemporary Buddhist poetry and rhetoric. These two ideas of mind are part of the history of major Zen Buddhist clerical lineages, but in their import into the United States (and into

American lyric poetry), take on certain American and Romantic qualities that are evident in Hinton's framing of his anthology of American Buddhist poetry, *The Wilds of Poetry: Adventures in Mind and Landscape* (2017).

Dominant Ideas of American Buddhist Poetry and Poetics in *The Wilds of Poetry*

The idea of the mind as a space that is emptied and open to sublimity can be found in David Hinton's 2017 anthology of American Buddhist poetry, *The Wilds of Poetry: Adventures in Mind and Landscape*, which opens with a description of Henry David Thoreau's "state of mind" on his descent from Mount Katahdin in Maine:

> It was on the descent that Thoreau's experience of existential *contact* occurred: a moment where all the explanations and assumptions fell away, and he was confronted with the inexplicable thusness of things, this immediate reality, unknowable and unsayable, reality that is pure question, pure mystery. (Hinton 2017 1)

This experience, Hinton explains, raised central questions ("*who we are…where we are"*) for Thoreau. These "pure question[s]" are "the most profound" because they allow "no answer":

> They simply pose the unsayable reality of *contact,* which is all question and all mystery—a moment in which the mind's orienting certainties fail, even the certainty of self-identity, leaving one open to the experience of sheer immediacy. It is the experience of a mind perfectly emptied of all content, all the received explanations and assumptions about *who we are* and *where we are;* and so, a mind open to the fundamental reality of the material Cosmos in and of itself, open therefore to *these very wilds* we inhabit day by day, however rarely we are aware of that existential level of immediacy. (2, emphasis in original)

Here the mind is *spatialized,* a vessel that, when one approaches "the inexplicable thusness of things," is "perfectly emptied of all content" (Hinton 1-2). Hinton's introduction frames awareness as something that can only be present when the space of the mind is "empty" and "open." What this view of mind shares with some contemporary articulations of mindfulness practices is an emphasis on the mind as a container of "passing sensations" that eventually "fall away." Copywriters for the company *Headspace* note that "we become more capable of coping with negative emotions" when one views these "emotions as *passing states*" ("The Many Benefits," my emphasis). "Thoughts and feelings," therefore, "come and go," "passing through" the spatialized mind: through meditation, one learns to "let go of" those passing sensations, returning one's "headspace" to its perhaps more natural, emptied state (though, notably, *Headspace's* marketing does *not* imply, as Hinton does, that true awareness means one's mind is "open to the cosmos"—the Romantic resonances of which are hard to ignore; see Hinton 2).

> Further, for Hinton, the "central task" of modern American poetry has been:
>
> to rediscover that primal nature of consciousness, to reimagine consciousness not as a spirit-center with its abstract process of self-enclosed thought, but as an openness to immediate experience—as, indeed, a site where the Cosmos is open to itself. (Hinton 5)

Hinton takes Thoreau's moment on Mount Katahdin, when all the "explanations and assumptions fell away," as the starting point of his "account of a *rewilding* of consciousness in the West: a dawning awareness of our essential oneness with the world around us."[43] For Hinton, these East Asian ideas of consciousness were *in* American poetry—it's just that they didn't have the East Asian vocabulary to theorize about it. So the genre of poetry does that work.

[43] This quote is taken from copy on the back of the anthology's book jacket.

Hinton is thus reading Buddhist philosophy back on American poetry, which is framed as "an ecopoetry that weaves consciousness into the Cosmos"—it is "ecopoetic in the deeper sense that it articulates a weave of consciousness and landscape, a deep reexperiencing of consciousness as an integral part of the Cosmos, the wild" (Hinton 13). There is therefore an argument present in Hinton's introduction that each American poem in his anthology "re-wilds" American poetry because it weaves together consciousness with landscape, "thereby returning it to its original wild nature" (13). Aside from the problematic implications of "re-creat[ing] ancient Chinese rivers-and-mountains poetry as modern American poetry"—which collapses a poem's connections to specific cultural and political contexts in making both ancient Chinese and modern American poetry essentially have the same purpose and poetics—his anthology obscures Buddhism's robust tradition of thought and practice in favor of emphasizing just one dominant understanding of what consciousness looks like ("empty" and "open"). Through the aesthetics of "openness" and epiphanic "emptiness" seen in his description of Thoreau's sublime experience atop the mountain, Hinton conveys to readers that this has been the tradition of American Buddhist poetry—indeed, that this has been the tradition of American poetry generally.

The Romanticism of Hinton's framing—in which an individual (indeed, Thoreau himself) achieved this emptied awareness after a solo mountaintop hike—is palpable. The anthology would appear to replicate the problems of Buddhist Romanticism described by Thanissaro Bhikku, who writes that western students of Buddhism often do not differentiate between the "Dharma gate" of Romanticism and the "Dharma itself," and instead "relate to the doctrine of dependent co-arising" only "when it [is] interpreted as a variation on interconnectedness" and "embrace the doctrine of not-self as a denial of the separate self in favor

of a larger, more encompassing identity with the entire cosmos" (Thanissaro). In Hinton's framing, the "uncanny familiarity" of what seem to be Buddhism's central concepts is actually just Romanticism: the anthology holds a Romantic notion of a "more encompassing identity with the entire cosmos" (Thanissaro's words) in its description of "a mind open to the fundamental reality of the material Cosmos in and of itself" (indeed, these two quotes appear almost indistinguishable) (Hinton 2).

Though other anthologies are not quite this imprecise in their arguments about American Buddhist poetry and poetics, Hinton's language illustrates how Buddhist poetry and poetics is often framed by this idea of the spatialized mind. The reading experience that this anthology promises is one of epiphanic, sublime mountaintop catharsis; meanwhile, the anthology frames American Buddhist (or East Asian-inspired) poetry as a body of texts that involve a sublime drama that connects one with a Cosmos and with "the wild" (13). Thoreau's "state of mind" upon his enlightened descent from Mount Ktaadn is also the "state of mind" one will find/experience within the anthology's poems. Framed thusly, when we look at the anthology's Table of Contents, even the work of John Cage and Charles Olson will be read within that "re-wilding" idea and interpreted as work that exhibits an emptied mind as one open to experiencing sublime epiphany.

Hinton's language illustrates how Buddhist poetry and poetics is often framed by this idea of the mind-as-vessel that needs emptying in order to achieve awareness. If we were to take Hinton's work as an index of what American Buddhist poetry "is"—and, arguably, the task of an anthology is to provide the reader with just such an index—then it would appear that this

spatialized mind is *the* defining characteristic of American Buddhist poetry.[44] Further, Hinton's Buddhist Romanticism is not, to use James Najarian's phrasing, "necessarily anybody's 'fault,'" and this chapter is not "trying to castigate, or find yet another 'pure' Buddhism"; instead, I am simply suggesting that his framing and this idea of the spatialized mind may obscure other ideas, practices, and experiences of Buddhist awareness. These other mind spaces are illustrated below in Whalen and Kyger's poetry. In illustrating these other mind spaces, we can map "a clearer genealogy" of American Buddhist poetry (Najarian 312).

Just as Hinton elaborates on the metaphor of the spatialized mind in setting forth his version of American Buddhist poetics, one can find an elaboration of the figure of "dispersal" in Ronald Schleifer's account of the "political economy" of literary modernism, which does not touch upon Buddhist poetics, yet situates twentieth-century Western poetics within the economy of consumer capitalism. This figure of "dispersal" arises within a shift from need-based to "life-enhancing" commodities that hold out a future-oriented promise to a consumer (such a promise can be called the "promise of happiness," as in Stendhal's definition of art).[45] In such a consumer society—"a world in which large numbers of people consume goods and services beyond necessity, and even beyond comfort and luxury"—there are many, if not endless, "*thinkable* possibilities of life-enhancement" akin to Stendhal's "promise of happiness" (Schleifer 162). These endless "thinkable" possibilities mean that desire is never quite satiated. In such a culture, "the consuming subject herself is consumed, not so much swallowed up or buried the way that

[44] The anthology also problematically collapses the collected poems' connections to specific cultural and political contexts—seen in Hinton's argument that the anthology "re-creates ancient Chinese rivers-and-mountains poetry as modern American poetry" (2).

[45] Stendhal's definition of art (borrowed by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer and further drawn from in Fredric Jameson's *Late Marxism* (2007)), is a "promise of happiness" (*promesse de bonheur*)—a definition that as Jameson notes, "takes on its power when we stress its constitutive incompleteness: art is not bliss, but rather the latter's *promise*" (Jameson 146-47).

Dracula swallows up his victims' blood but consumed *by dispersal* across objects" (Schleifer 178, my emphasis).

"Dispersal," therefore, is a condition of a commodity culture governed by desire rather than need. This desire "inhabits – restructures – a new 'kind' of subject, immersed in repeated momentary consumption and in the endless *dispersed energy* of desire" (Schleifer 166, my emphasis). John Xiros Cooper shows this dispersal in James Joyce's Leopold Bloom, who has "plenty of qualities" but "lacks a principle of order that organizes them into a practical hierarchy of values" (Cooper 166, qtd. in Schleifer 178-179). Schleifer associates the notion of "dispersal" with capitalist consumerism, and the Buddhist poetics of Whalen and Kyger *registers* that sense of dispersal governed by desire. In other words, rather than emptying the mind of the dispersed energies of desire, as Thoreau did in Hinton's excerpt, their poetics notices that dispersal in all its difficulty and discomfort. This is a practice of awareness, too, only it is *registering* the condition of dispersal, which is to say, allowing the dispersal to remain *as it is*, rather than emptying it.

Two Conceptions of Mind in *The Platform Sutra*

A Buddhist sutra, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, further illustrates the differing ideas of the empty mind (again, to "see" mind as empty is to reach an awareness that mind-phenomena has no essence). The sutra, most likely composed in the 8th century, is a foundational Buddhist text about the formation of a specific school of Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism. It illustrates the dispersed mind's sharp negation of the telos and sublime potentialities of the spatialized mind. The dispersed mind, though it also holds a telos, in no way promises the kind of Romantic sublimities of Thoreau's "openness to the Cosmos"; in this sense, it remains inert because it is both less marketable and generally less palatable to twentieth-century readers of poetry.

Within the *Platform Sutra's* story, Huineng, a custodian with a proclivity for understanding difficult Buddhist concepts, is drawn to a contest at the monastery where he works. The contest will determine the monastery's future leadership, who the Sixth Patriarch will be. Whoever can best articulate (in poetry) an understanding of an awakened mind will win. One night, the head monk, who is slated to win, secretly writes his verse on a wall within the monastery:

> The body is the Bodhi tree,
> The mind is like a clear mirror.
> At all times we must strive to polish it,
> And must not let the dust collect.
> (Yampolsky 130)

The current Patriarch, who will choose the winner, reads the poem the next day and is dissatisfied but gives the head monk another chance. Days later, the custodian Huineng composes his own verse and, since he is illiterate, asks a passerby to write it on the wall of another corridor "so that [he] might offer [his] own original mind" (Yampolsky 132). Huineng's poem says:

> Bodhi originally has no tree,
> The mirror also has no stand.
> Buddha nature is always clean and pure;
> Where is there room for dust? (132)

As the story goes, the community of monks is amazed that an illiterate southerner (whose birthplace is significant due to regional politics of the time) could have such insight. However, though the Fifth Patriarch grasps the wisdom of Huineng's verse, he is reluctant to tell the assembly that the illiterate peasant "got it" while the head monk had failed. Later, the Patriarch establishes Huineng as the winner or proper successor in a secret ritual ceremony. For the Fifth Patriarch,

> the practice of cleansing the mind ["we must strive to polish it"] is hypostatized by a clear subject-object dichotomy, because both "mind" and "body" are rendered as discrete "things" (a mirror on a stand or a Bodhi tree) as perceived by an external observer. (Stalling "Listen" 94)

Huineng's verse, however, removes the mind's spatialization: how can one clean ("polish") the mind if it is not contained, bounded, vessel-like? In removing the subject-object dichotomy, "dust" is not distinguishable from "mind": by "abandoning the position of the external observer," Huineng "speak[s] from the position of 'Suchness' itself" (94). Jonathan Stalling shows that:

> this term ["Suchness"] in Chinese—zhenruxing (真如性, "the real which is like itself") demonstrates that "suchness" merely designates the nature of emptiness itself. All "things" are empty, including the external observer, and therefore nothing can be separate from or be the other to this emptiness. Hence, we have only suchness itself. (Stalling "Listen" 94-95).

"Dust," therefore, is not something to be *cleaned*; rather, in Huineng's "own original mind," any perceived clutter or "dust" is just the nature of one's mind, not something separate that can be "contained" in it (Yampolsky 132). In this view, to acknowledge the mind as always-already empty, however ostensibly "dusty," *is* to be aware. Indeed, the "dustiness" is no longer dusty (a word that implies a need to clean, to fix things) when mind-phenomena is recognized to be empty (lacking essence). The contest of the sutra's story led to "the schism known as the Southern School, which advocated a direct and abrupt engagement with emptiness, in contrast to the Northern School of "gradual enlightenment" (jianwu), which placed a greater emphasis on persistent and diligent meditation" (Stalling "Listen" 94).

While the poetries I discuss in this article share the ideas of these historically- and geographically-situated Zen schools, the Northern and Southern Zen lineages (which would inform the later Renzai and Soto schools, respectively) do not directly correspond to American Buddhist poetic or religious lineages. However, it is true that D.T. Suzuki brought the two ideas of mind present in *The Platform Sutra* into his work and teaching in the United States: in his essay "The Zen Doctrine of No Mind," he:

> bifurcates meditative practices into "dust-wiping" quietism and a "*prajna* producing" or wisdom-producing school, which unlike "quietism," is capable of leading the practitioner into a powerful realization of *satori*, a Japanese Buddhist term for "lasting awakening" gained through a direct experience of sunyata, or emptiness. (Stalling "Listen" 93-94)

This bifurcation, and particularly the term "dust-wiping," are allusions to *The Platform Sutra* and Huineng's "profound understanding of nonduality," one that influenced midcentury cultural producers like Jackson Mac Low, among others (Stalling "Listen" 94). We can also track the transmission of these two ideas of mind in the "two Suzukis" who "introduced two different schools of Japanese Zen" and were influential for many "Zennist" midcentury poets (Stalling "Listen" 104n9, *Poetics* 27).[46] For many American poets, including Joanne Kyger, Philip Whalen, and Diane DiPrima, Suzuki Roshi, abbot of the San Francisco Zen Center, was more influential. Suzuki Roshi "brought the Soto lineage to the West Coast with its emphasis on 'just sitting,'" while D.T. Suzuki's lay work "leaned far closer to the Rinzai tradition, with its emphasis on koans and language play" (Stalling "Listen" 104n9). Though they have not traveled

[46] "Zennist" is Stalling's term "to distinguish practitioners or advocates of Zen, rather than the family of discourses and traditions that make up Zen per se" (*Poetics* 27).

in a linear manner from *The Platform Sutra* to the vastly different contexts of the American midcentury, the sutra's two ideas of mind *do* inform the poetries discussed here.

Is the mind a space that needs constant cleaning to reach awareness? Such a view implies that awareness is distinct from the banality of suffering—that awareness in some sense frees us and is salvational. On the other hand, is it the case that any perceived clutter or "dust" is just the nature of one's mind? This second view understands nonduality as the nature of a mind, where there is no distinction made between suffering and enlightenment, and involves a fundamentally mundane understanding of enlightenment, in which just looking at one's mind is the point. The two views articulate alternate ideas of the *space* of awareness: in the spatialized, mind-as-mirror argument, it is important to keep that space clean, as if preparing for awareness. Whereas, in Huineng's argument for a view of mind as dispersed, to acknowledge the space of a mind as already-empty (however dusty) *is* to be aware.

The teleological implications of viewing the mind as a space to be cleaned can be seen in the work of Marie Kondo, a Japanese organizing consultant and author whose book and Netflix show purvey a mindful method of properly simplifying and organizing your home by assessing each object's affective impact on oneself. Though Kondo's work is likely more informed by Shinto animism than by Zen Buddhism, her work is part of a broader twenty-first century discourse on "mindful living." I bring Kondo into this chapter not simply for her "mindful living" tips, but to demonstrate the gendered implications of the idea of a cleaned-up, spatialized mind. These gendered implications are further discussed below in my reading of Kyger's poetry.

Kondo encourages one to tidy objects by keeping "only those things that speak to the heart, and discard[ing] items that no longer spark joy" (KonMari). As her "About" page notes, "People around the world have been drawn to this philosophy not only due to its effectiveness,

but also because it places great importance on being mindful, introspective and forward-looking" (KonMari). It is "The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up"—the title of Kondo's book—that helps one (and by extension, one's family) on their way to enlightened living.[47] Her international success demonstrates the power of the idea of polishing the mind: putting one's house in order, cleaning that physical space, is also way to approach a clearer "headspace," since, if you stick to her methodology, there will only ever be "joyful" items in one's home. Cleaning one's home of objects weighed down by negative ("non-joyful") affect is also a means of cleaning your affective experience within that physical space, in turn making your "headspace" joyful or happy, too.

Kondo's methodology illustrates Sara Ahmed's argument, begun in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) and developed in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), that "feelings do not simply reside within subjects and then move outward toward objects," but that "feelings are how objects create impressions in shared spaces of dwelling" (Ahmed *Promise* 14). Kondo's methodology asks one to consider objects' effects on one's (and the shared spaces of one's) affect: do they "spark joy"? And the teleology embedded within Kondo's affective methodology can be seen in Ahmed's revelation that happiness (or in Kondo's case, "joy") is something that directs life choices, that there is "the promise that happiness follows if we do this or that" (Ahmed *Promise* 14). Kondo's promise of a joyful physical space, and by extension, a joyful headspace, echoes the teleology embedded in the Northern school's notion of polishing the mind in order to arrive, eventually, in that emptied space of awareness.

[47] Kondo, Marie. *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing.* Trans. Cathy Hirano. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2014.

Both the head monk and Huineng conceive of an empty mind as metaphor for enlightenment—but where the head monk's spatialized mind becomes empty only *after* the diligent work of polishing, Huineng's dispersed mind is always-already empty, making emptiness the state you were already *in,* rather than a state you are working *toward.* The head monk's spatialized mind is present within Kondo's popular work and within the rhetoric, narrative, and dominant images of Hinton's more academic-facing anthology. An enlightened mind in these texts is spelled out in neutrals, minimalism, and positive affect ("non-joyful" objects have been donated or trashed; the space of the mind has been polished with positive affect). This dominant idea of the spatialized mind is significant because as we see in Huineng's mind-verse, there are other nondual, non-teleological ideas of the empty space of a mind. Similarly, there are other Buddhist poetries that conceive of, and enact, a poetic enlightenment that do not rely on the view of mind as spatialized.

In Kondo's work and in the mindfulness industry generally, physical and mental spaces are taken to be "unhappiness causes" that need to be solved through cleaning so that one might achieve that "promise of happiness," a promise that hinges on the idea that certain choices lead to happiness, while other choices place one outside an economy or telos (or physical space, as Kondo suggests) of happiness (Ahmed *Promise* 14). Within the mindfulness industry, one's mind itself can be taken as such an "unhappiness cause"—particularly if it is "cluttered" or "dirtied" by negative affect (or stress, anxiety, or low self-esteem). In this case, feelings are "attributed to [the] object" of the mind, and mind itself becomes obstacle, an "unhappiness cause" that needs solving (Ahmed *Promise* 14). When we connect this point to Ahmed's discussion of how happiness has historically functioned to circumscribe the choices and spaces available to women, the dominant image of a cleaned-up mind can communicate a gendered

argument about which affects are allowable in which spaces. Kyger's feminist poetics, which I examine below, addresses this dominant image.

Negative affects—including anxiety or even more generally, "stress"—are thus characterized as obstacles or "unhappiness causes" which then require subjects to translate those same affects into "flexibility, adaptability, and a readiness to reconfigure oneself." (Ngai 4). Quoting Paolo Virno's work, Sianne Ngai reveals how it used to be that the classic "sentiments of disenchantment"—anxiety, distraction, and cynicism—marked "positions of radical alienation from the system of wage labor," but these sentiments are now "perversely integrated, from the factory to the office, into contemporary capitalist production itself" (Ngai 4, Virno 17). Virno writes:

> Fears of particular dangers, if only virtual ones, haunt the workday like a mood that cannot be escaped. This fear, however, is transformed into an operational requirement, a special tool of the trade. Insecurity about one's place during periodic innovation, fear of losing recently gained privileges, and anxiety over being "left behind" translate into flexibility, adaptability, and a readiness to reconfigure oneself. (Virno 17)

Mindfulness thus becomes a tool that allows workers to recognize negative affect and transform it into potentiality: it asks subjects to take stock of a mind cluttered with negative affect and harness it—instrumentalize it—so that one remains productive. One's mind, seen as the space, the vessel, where this negative affect exercises its control over one's lived reality, is here an obstacle that will need to be constantly polished so that one is reconfigured as the most energetic, adaptable worker. This is why some have argued that mindfulness is now embedded in the logic of global capitalism, a collection of practices that have commodified the teleological aspects of the spatialized mind (the head monk's view) while promising the "suddenness" of the Southern

school (Huineng's view) in its revelation that one can find enlightenment in small, daily activities like eating mindfully. Americans enjoy the heroic, quick enlightenment of "breaking the mind" as in Huineng's poem while ascribing to the daily strategies of that hygienic polishing visible in the monk's spatialized model of enlightenment.

One of Ahmed's key points, especially in demonstrating the relationship between negative affect and feminism, is that what is meant to constitute a happy life can instead make us sad, even necessitates sadness as a mode of interacting with(in) the world (Ahmed *Promise* 75). Elizabeth Stephens notes how Ahmed's work connects to the work of Lauren Berlant, who in *Cruel Optimism* (2011) agrees that the promise of a good life is actually only good for some: "those for whom the good life is experienced as good are those privileged by existing cultural institutions and knowledge making practices" (Stephens 279). And to understand the good life or happiness as markers of privilege is very difficult; thus, they are "cruel" for Berlant because they "keep us attached to something we can't have" (Stephens 279). For Ahmed, therefore, the history of feminism teaches us that "happiness is used as a technology or instrument, which allows the reorientation of individual desire towards a common good," while "the good life" "cruelly" holds out a false promise, future, or hope to us (Ahmed *Promise* 59, Berlant *Cruel* 24). The promises of mindful living present in Marie Kondo's work, for example, can be seen as "cruel optimism" in their teleological implications: they hold out the promise that one can live in a wholly joyful space, since all negative affects will have been removed.

In contrast, Huineng's poem demonstrates the difficulty of acknowledging that the mind has no future to work toward (if the mind is dispersed, what, then, can one clean?). What is difficult about placing oneself outside of the promise of happiness or the good life is that there are not tools in this understanding of enlightenment: Huineng's vision of the dispersed mind is

inert. As Berlant notes, "our attachments, however cruel, may also be what makes our lives seem bearable" and thus "cruel optimism is thus not simply or exclusively a destructive force"—it is rather "a kind of 'sustaining negativity'" in which cruelty "does not negate the possibility of positive affects"—hence the overwhelming positivity of the mindfulness movement (Berlant *Cruel* 52). Yet when one places oneself outside of the economy of such a "cruel" "promise of happiness," particularly when one goes up against gendered prescriptions of being a "happy" woman, one is immediately "assigned to a difficult category and a category of difficulty," as Ahmed argues (Ahmed *Promise* 66).

I thus argue for "difficulty" as a positive in the work of Whalen and Kyger, for differing reasons. Whalen's work, as I explain further below, is "difficult" because his poetry resists mainstream expectations of what "good" poetry is, while the "difficulty" of reading Kyger takes on a gendered element. To read Kyger is to encounter the "difficult" feminist because she is not allowing us the ostensibly neutral, cleaned-up spaces of "happiness." In feminist work,

> we can…witness an investment in feminist unhappiness (the myth that feminists kill joy because they are joyless). There is a desire to believe that women become feminists because they are unhappy, perhaps as a displacement of their envy for those who have achieved the happiness they have failed to achieve. This desire functions as a defense of happiness against feminist critique. (Ahmed *Promise* 66)

If women "have to show that you are not difficult through displaying signs of good will and happiness," any woman who places herself outside of the promise of happiness (which one is meant to achieve through certain choices and performances, as in a conscious building of positive affect seen in Kondo's "spark joy" methodology) immediately lands in that category of

"difficulty" or sadness (as the alternative affect of happiness), becoming the difficult killjoy. Here Ahmed valorizes "difficulty" for its clear denial of that promise of happiness.

Whalen's poetics in its nonduality and anti-teleological implications is "difficult" not only because it is genuinely difficult to read when one approaches it with contemporary poetic reading conventions, but also it is "difficult" because it places the reader outside of an economy that promises to deliver happiness or the good life—or, more simply, a good feeling upon completing the poem. It feels better to exist within that cruelly optimistic idea that where we are now (immanence) is therefore different from where we are going (transcendence)—because we want the narrative that with the right tools, we can achieve transcendence. Yet Huineng's verse collapses or breaks that "cruel" duality between transcendence and immanence, revealing that there is no difference between where we are right now and where we are going.

I retell the well-known story from *The Platform Sutra* because it demonstrates that teleology—the belief that one can get somewhere—is susceptible to commodification. If awareness means you are already "there" and always were "there," *this* kind of awareness is difficult to commodify, is perhaps even "useless" in the sense that it is difficult to instrumentalize within those promises of happiness or the good life. One can certainly train the mind to be less cluttered, can polish the mirror until it shines, but this does not relate to awareness—it is just hygiene.

Reading Difficulty and Dispersal in the Work of Philip Whalen

If viewing mind as spatialized is partly what allows it to take on Romantic Buddhist sublimities of emptying and opening "to the cosmos," poems that have a "container" or boundary are similarly more meaningfully comprehensible—perhaps "Romantically" comprehensible—to readers looking for that container. Put simply, I want to compare the container of the mind to

"containers" like "meaning" (as in, *what does the poem mean?*), which delineate a poem's semiotic boundaries and, for readers familiar with seeking the answer to this question (*what does the poem mean?*), can allow easier access to poems. When a poem is *not* contained in this way, it becomes "difficult," though in a different sense than the difficulty of *The Waste Land* or *Finnegans Wake*, in which one might argue that difficulties arise from the pursuit of defamiliarization. Indeed, the poetry of Whalen and Kyger is "difficult" because it exists outside of readerly expectations about what "good" poetry and "Buddhist" poetry are. These prescriptions come to us in part from the Western Romantic poetic tradition, which has shaped expectations that a poem will deliver a central thought or feeling. In addition to this influence of Romantic *poetics*, readerly expectations for "Buddhist" poetry are, as we have seen, also shaped by *Buddhist* Romanticism. These influences make Snyder's poetry "uncannily familiar," to use Thanissaro Bhikku's phrasing, but make an encounter with Whalen's poetry perhaps a bit more "difficult" in its unfamiliarity.

Whalen's work, despite its "difficulty," is worth reading (and teaching, and anthologizing); here I draw upon Charles Bernstein's argument that instead of reading familiar poems, readers should consider the formal dynamics and non-semantic elements of a poem that do not seem to provide easy understanding of its "meaning."[48] Bernstein's argument shares an affinity with the work of both Wallis and Benjamin in its assertion that "clarity" or stability of meaning in a reading experience is less valuable than engaging with a text that is difficult to read, not unlike the difficulty of "reading" a ruin. Closure and wholeness in the poem itself allows a reader to navigate a poem more easily; in contrast, Bernstein and Roland Barthes argue

[48] Charles Bernstein, "Artifice of Absorption." In Christopher Beach, ed., *Artifice and Indeterminacy: An Anthology of New Poetics.* Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, pp. 3-23; Charles Bernstein, "The Difficult Poem." In Charles Bernstein, *Attack of the Difficult Poems.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011.

for “difficult” reading experiences in the face of what is now valued in the contemporary poetic mainstream.

Whalen’s Buddhist poetics does not lead us toward clarity, epiphany, or awareness. His poetry may not give you anything, no matter how hard you work; may not “mean” anything, no matter how closely you read. His poetry has not quite arranged itself for a reader (though I prefer to see this as a welcoming inclusivity that simply invites you in without displacing something else). Yet what is this arrangement of readerly labor (lots of work for very little “gain”) about? We want our poetry short and rich; we like the imagistic, concise poetry of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams or perhaps prefer the tidy metaphysics of a George Herbert poem (or, in a more popular register, the short runway to epiphany provided by a Billy Collins piece). We may prefer not to obtain so little in so much text. Yet some of Whalen’s poems span over 20 pages of long, rambling, Whitman-esque lines, but without the followability or sublimities we expect from Whitman’s work. If we are not meant to extract something from Whalen’s work, if reading poetry is not that, what is it? It involves dealing with the incessant banality of our own minds—this is where the difficulty lies: not in the fact that it is complicated or inaccessible, but in the same difficulty that may drive one to depression.

As Charles Bernstein writes in *Attack of the Difficult Poems* (2011) and elsewhere, difficulty is seen to be an undesirable characteristic in poetry because poetry is a “dead” genre that already struggles to survive in the US. Therefore, “difficult” poems are not taught or promoted in programs like National Poetry Month because they may turn readers away from poetry as a genre altogether. Bernstein calls attention to how readers and teachers of poetry today are instead largely interested in lyric poetry that appeals to the largest number of readers. In his satirical, but very serious, argument in “Against National Poetry Month as Such,” he registers a

frustration with what he calls "official verse culture," which is made up of institutions like the Academy of American Poets, or as Alice Notley calls them, "the centers of Poetry's meager power" (Notley). For Bernstein, the most important questions facing poetry are "what does poetry do?" and "what *can* it do today that is unique to it as a medium?" In an attempt to keep poetry alive in a culture that does not seem to value it, National Poetry Month inadequately answers these questions by promoting poems that are palatable to the largest number of readers possible.

Bernstein writes:

> Time and time again we hear the official spokespersons tell us they want to support projects that give speedy and efficient access to poetry and that the biggest obstacle to this access is, indeed, poetry, which may not provide the kind of easy reading required by such mandates. The solution: find poetry that most closely resembles the fast and easy reading experiences of most Americans under the slogans—Away with Difficulty! Make Poetry Palatable for the People! (Bernstein *Against*)

April is therefore "the cruelest month for poetry" because, as Bernstein demonstrates, the program of National Poetry Month is intended "to promote safe reading experiences" and is based on the "founding principle that safe poetry is the best prophylactic against aesthetic experience" (Bernstein *Against*).

Yet safeguarding readers against difficult poems will almost certainly render the genre of poetry even more uninteresting and meaningless to scores of readers. Poems can rearrange internal and external experiences, make epistemological arguments, and show us ways to engage with the present and future:

> Unfortunately, promoting poetry as if it were an "easy listening" station just reinforces the idea that poetry is culturally irrelevant and has done a disservice not only to poetry deemed too controversial or difficult to promote but also to the poetry it puts forward in this way. "Accessibility" has become a kind of Moral Imperative based on the condescending notion that readers are intellectually challenged and mustn't be presented with anything but Safe Poetry. As if poetry will turn people off to poetry. (Bernstein *Against*)

A difficult poem articulates some kind of response to those above questions—"what does poetry do?" and "what can it do today that is unique to it as a medium?" Poetry can be seen as epistemological inquiry; it can reveal modes of meaning that are present in language but invisible due to the familiarity of language, particularly as it is used in what Bernstein calls an "absorptive" text and what Roland Barthes calls a "readerly" text. These are texts that encourage readers to remain, and enjoy, being passive consumers of a totalizing text that is safe in its well-crafted experiences, secrets, and vocabularies, which ensure readers feel what they are supposed to feel.[49] Such an experience of reading can be described as "transparent," since the text so wholly absorbs us that the page, the words, eventually disappear, as does the mediating nature of language. Transparent, absorptive texts allow immersion within the world of words until the text disappears *as* text. On the other hand, "writerly" texts (for example, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* or William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, among many others) are those that include antiabsorptive elements or a play between antiabsorptive and absorptive elements; and as Bernstein and Barthes explain, such texts open up a world in which readers can be agents,

[49] Barthes' explanation of "readerly" and "writerly" texts can be found in *S/Z* (1974).

actively co-constructing the text alongside the speaker/writer, rather than remaining passive consumers of a text.

Poetry's greatest strength is perhaps its ability to enact a dialectic of absorptive and antiabsorptive elements, not just giving readers a uniquely antiabsorptive reading experience (and the delight of reading something new), but also revealing the text *as* text, emphasizing the textual elements (sound, rhythm, language, space, syntax) *as* elements, in which even "meaning" becomes an *element* of a text rather than its taken-for-granted telos. Engaging with a difficult poem may hurt your brain, but in a good way, as I hope to show in my reading of Whalen's work below.

A Cluttered Mind is Just a Mind

Though there is one recent biography of Whalen, scholarship on him tends to either focus on his relationships with other, better-known Beat figures or to scour his poetry for Buddhist philosophical references, often with lengthy explanations of Buddhist terms, philosophies, and textual/sacred heritages in his lines.[50] Some scholars compile lists of the Buddhist principles present in his poetics, as if to demonstrate how Buddhist his poetry is or what kind of Buddhism his poetics espouses.[51] Others discuss Whalen as part of a larger countercultural community

[50] David Schneider, *Crowded by Beauty: The Life and Zen of Poet Philip Whalen,* Oakland: University of California Press, 2015. Scholars interested in Whalen's relationship to other Beat figures and to the Beat generation generally include: Linda Russo, "How You Want to Be Styled: Philip Whalen in Correspondence with Joanne Kyger, 1959-1964," in Anne Dewey and Libbie Rifkin, eds., *Among Friends: Engendering the Social Site of Poetry,* Iowa City: University of Iowa Press (2013): 21-42; Jane Falk, "Two Takes on Japan: Joanne Kyger's The Japan and India Journals and Philip Whalen's Scenes of Life at the Capital," in Nancy M. Grace and Jennie Skerl, eds., *The Transnational Beat Generation,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012; John Suiter, *Poets on the Peaks: Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen & Jack Kerouac in the North Cascades,* New York: Counterpoint, 2002; David Robertson, "The Circumambulation of Mt. Tamalpais," *Western American Literature* (1995): 3-28; Timothy Gray, *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim: Creating Countercultural Community*, Iowa City, Iowa, 2006.

[51] See Todd Giles, "'No Permanent Home': The Five *Skandhas* and Philip Whalen's 'The Slop Barrel,'" *Philosophy and Literature* (2013): 405-420; Max Ritvo, "'Since the Day I was Kicked by Master Ma, I Have Not Stopped Laughing': Buddhism and Comedy in Philip Whalen," *Parnassus: Poetry in Review* (2015): 233-245.

engaged in critiquing and finding alternative ways of living within an oppressive WASP culture.[52]

Many write on the experience of reading his work. In his *Jacket2* essay "An Introduction to reading the poetry of Philip Whalen," Tom Devaney notes that "the tendency in Whalen's poetry is to be available, and in fact loyal to, the contours of how his mind is moving, while foregrounding how it is both overlaid and synthesized with his outer realties" (Devaney). For Devaney, Whalen's work asks readers to let go of that larger meaning-making impetus with which readers often approach poetry, and instead just follow the poetry's "remarkabl[e] lucid[ity] in relation to the states of consciousness [that Whalen] is able to capture or sometimes enact in the language" (Devaney). One therefore does not need Buddhist training in order to read his work.[53]

Most scholars agree that Whalen's poetics involves a representation of the mind's workings that collapses internal and external experience (as well as collapsing time). As Mark Rich writes in Whalen's entry in the Critical Survey of American Poets, "the seemingly oblique or broken sentences" in his work "reflect the movements of mind, in its perceptions and

[52] For example, James Patrick Brown points to Whalen's criticism of American culture and politics in what Brown calls the "radical Occidentalism" of Beat Zen, which entails a political ideology of anarchy that "merged with [Snyder and Whalen's] Zen Buddhism" (90). This form of Zen, which Brown sees as emanating first from communities surrounding Kenneth Rexroth (who famously emceed the Six Gallery reading) and secondly from Snyder and Whalen's encounter with Zen Buddhism through the works of Suzuki, "offered an anti-Western critique of rationalism and authoritarianism that Snyder and Whalen merged with their radical politics" (Brown 90). For Brown, Whalen's *Memoirs of an Interglacial Age* and *Scenes of Life at the Capital* involve poetic critiques of Cold War American life (101). James Patrick Brown, "Radical Occidentalism: The Zen Anarchism of Gary Snyder and Philip Whalen," in *Encountering Buddhism in Twentieth-Century British and American literature,* ed. Lawrence Normand and Alice Winch. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013.

[53] Jane Falk notes that while you can certainly locate references to Buddhist texts and philosophy, Whalen's work can just as easily be read as "Western" as it can be read as "Eastern" or "Buddhist"—what we find in his work, instead, is just a smattering of references to many literary, philosophical, and religious traditions. His poetry is therefore not necessarily recognizably Buddhist. Jane Falk, "Philip Whalen and the Classics: 'A Walking Grove of Trees,'" in *Hip Sublime: Beat Writers and the Classical Tradition,* ed. Sheila Murnaghan and Ralph M. Rosen. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2018: 210-255.

thoughts" (Rich 1-2). Tom Clark emphasizes the flashes of insight or "high-detail resolution" that often leap out of Whalen's work; **"**a patient reader will pick up on brilliant perceptual moments of stillness, clarity and depth and accumulate small shocks in contemplative micro-spaces" (Clark). These "unexpected, instantaneous shifts from opacity to brilliance" can be shocking and at times pleasurable, but rarely yield dramatic clarity that assists a reader in understanding the poem's "meaning." Leslie Scalapino argues that Whalen took a "freedom…from [William Carlos] Williams' poetic line" since "only its sound/shape (rather than being 'about' something else, a subject) is applied in Whalen to examination of mind itself as shape and movement itself" (Scalapino). Whalen, she writes, "prolongs the 'pressure'…until the writer/reader can reach a state of giving up on constructing and on figuring out" (Scalapino). It can take a few pages of "difficult" reading before the reader realizes they can reach that state of "giving up on constructing" meaning. Therefore, security is "a state of curtailment" within the economy of a Whalen poem, while "the poems are modes of freedom from security" (Scalapino).

The lack of a central meaning in Whalen's poems is why I have used the term "dispersal" to describe his work. To be sure, Whalen's work as a whole registers the sense that to pay attention to the mind's workings is to be aware, to have insight. However, rather than gaining mental clarity, a reader of a Whalen poem must sift through cluttered words, thoughts, images, emotions, places, times, phonemes, and what appear to be people (or perhaps they are simply other minds). This "clutter" can also be conceived of as "dispersal"—a word that describes a movement not toward centrality or uniformity (as when one determines a poem's ultimate meaning), but rather a diffusion, a scattering. What I mean by "dispersal" is a poetic effect that allows language, and the mind's relationship to language, to simply exist on the page of the poem. Perhaps unexpectedly, by dispersing language in such a thick way and without poles of

meaning with which to ground the poem, the thick semiotic entrapment of living in language is loosened, since each line's words, images, and associations are not tied to those axes of meaning that typically station a poem.

Such an experience of reading can at first be overwhelming, given that twentieth-century readers of lyric poetry often come to poetry for a central, drilled-down meaning. Much like a Kyger poem, what readers "get" from a Whalen poem appears to be what one "gets" from a certain practice of meditation. In this case, the difficulty is not that his poetry is complicated or inaccessible, as in the late Romanticism of T.S. Eliot. Rather, the difficulty lies in dealing with the incessant banality and messiness of one's own mind. In Whalen's work, despite—or really, *because* of—all of its clutter, we can locate a mind that "sees" its own emptiness, its non-essence. And the way that it demonstrates this "seeing"—this insight that mind is emptiness—is that it does not attempt to contain the poem within a boundary, within a central meaning, a "meaningful comprehension."

The seeming difficulty of reading a Whalen poem can actually transform into a sense of ease: there is a certain readerly freedom when one does not have to try to "figure out" a poem. If one "doesn't have to figure it out," the meaning of the poem ceases to exert pressure on the reader (Berrigan). In his work, interior and outside are the same, "at once," and will thus appear cluttered at the outset—but no more so than the workings of one's own mind. Unable to make the poem "mean" something specific, readers thus may enjoy the dispersal of the piece, free to explore (rather than consume) its many diffusions. Whalen's poem "Life in the City. In Memoriam Edward Gibbon.", for example, does not offer up "meaning" or "event" as elements by which a reader can navigate (i.e., "comprehend") the text.

In its "nerve movie" of a mind at work, the poem involves rapid shifts and instantaneous sensations (memories, colors, sounds of "Half-misunderstood foreign language"), none of which are necessarily processed or marked as such. At the poem's outset, the colors of "white" and "blue" merge into a "Memory" of a "Street" or "arbor in Lausanne" and then "Moonlight" (Whalen *Overtime* 178):

> The room is already white. Trim it in blue
> Memory of Bentinck Street or the arbor in Lausanne
> Moonlight. Relaxation to write while hearing
> Half-misunderstood foreign language in Grant Street
> So fat my nose becomes invisible in profile (Whalen *Overtime* 178)

The textures and speed of the piece shift in the next two stanzas, which rush through the sensations of a loud, physical, eighteenth-century London "Life in the City" as if experiencing what is happening in Gibbon's mind/"nerve movie":

> Ox wearing straw shoes hauls the groan-wheel shiny lacquer
> Carriage streets newly washed between trolley cars
> And buses plastic wisteria swings and wabbles from dark
> lacquer and gold roofbeam palanquin of gold flower head crown
> Priestess Café Trieste Grant Street several tons of horse,
> men, silk, flowers, gold, pavement, a library of 5000 volumes
> Blue and White shelves: Fat Edward Gibbon with monstrous
> Hydrocele farting sedanchairmen calmly parsing the Byzantines:
>
> 'Decline THE EMPIRE,' he tells himself, passing St. Clement
> Danes, 'decline the Honourable Danes Barrington…decline
> Doctor Goldsmith…' and squirms on the lump seat, trying
> To ease fat legs & jiggling water bag slowly scrunching (Whalen *Overtime* 178)

The speaker is perhaps imagining Gibbon's own experience of thinking, which alternates from the above metacognition of "declin[ing] THE EMPIRE" (as well as declining "Barrington" and "Goldsmith") to Gibbon's more basic mental processes of hearing and seeing, his sensoriness, which involves "gravel of the courtyard beyond the inner palace wall, / Black shiny hats" that "bend to place chock wedges under moaning wheels," and "Bronze mirrored horse[s]" (Whalen

Overtime 178). Meanwhile, "The aoi leaves [are] already melting…among the horsehair / 'Blinders' of his attendant's cap" (178). It is an overwhelming amount of sensory detail packed into a few lines that mimic the speed at which a mind might register all of them at once.

Suddenly, the lines appear to shift somewhere and to someone else, from "horse foam" to "Peter and David" in a more recent present with "cappuccinos":

> "Blinders" of his attendant's cap
> Wide floppy silk trousers wet with horse foam
> Peter and David tell me goodbye, nobody here but the rest
> Of the City drinking cappuccino and NY Egg Cream jet roar (178-179)

As readers, we are enmeshed in a visually, aurally, olfactorily (note the "farting sedanchairmen" of Gibbon's London) dense set of lines which enmesh us partly because there's very little white space on the page in which to see ("pallid flesh and gouty feet") or hear ("moaning wheels") or smell ("screaming sweat"; "coalsmoke horsefume") anything else: the lines of this piece extend nearly completely across the page (though, since they don't appear as a singular block of text, the effect is not orderly but adds to the heady sense of chaos in reading through each line).

All of this is simply happening—there is no narration and there appears to be no poetic speaker around which these sensations are grounded as phenomenological. It is not ever clear what the head or body is (or other heads or bodies are) doing—all are meshed together in one big sensory feast of "Pearl fingernail" and "drinking cappuccino" and "bad-weather town" of eighteenth-century London. While it is clear there is a mind perhaps thinking about Gibbon (and even thinking Gibbon's conscious thoughts of "EMPIRE") and a mind experiencing an interaction with "Peter and David," there is no explanation of how this occurs and no indication of how it should be comprehended. This shows us a mind without the narration of what the head is doing; what the eyes are doing; what the nose is doing; where the body is going. It is all *there*,

as in Leslie Scalapino's explanation of Whalen's work as "a continuous nerve movie, simulation of already existing interior and outside as these are at once" (Scalapino 2007).

It may be that the only indication of a shift in the mind's workings here is the passage of the poem itself, as when a new line begins with "Peter and David tell me goodbye"—but even so, there is no punctuation to mark the ending of thoughts of Gibbon and the beginning of an interaction with Peter and David (Whalen *Overtime* 179). There is no differentiation between event and sensation. The mind's functions are not narrated through story or "doing" or "going." It is all a big mess, but a rather exciting mess because of the textures, sounds, and images, which clip along at such a speed that story and meaning become far less important—indeed, are completely irrelevant, uninteresting, in the face of the poem's thick texturedness.

Within that big mess, there are not just the multi-edged textures and sounds of Gibbons' London, but also textures and sounds of elsewhere—

> Pearl fingernail patent leather knee-boot suicide blonde
> Of a certain age black T-shirt orange beads and yellow skirt
> Desperately unhappy

—as well as what appear to be sports scores in Italian "cities":

"SUI CAMPO DELLO SPORT

SERIE A SERIE B

FLORENTINA 0 SAMPDORIA 0 FOGGIA 1 VERONA 0"):

> The score in cities declining in sedan chairs gondolas
> Whip-cream french blue frosty paint for the eyelids of
> A certain age to pick up to locate to foresee I was wrong:
> Not suicide, a fairly well-made nicely-fitted wig sitting
> With the mafia but the black grosgrain band holding down
> The front of her own black hair somehow shines through (Whalen *Overtime* 179)

and on it goes. The point here is just that "meaning" is not important; but what is emphasized is the speed of the non-narrated movement of a mind as well as the loudness and physicality of what it is like in that mind, conveyed here through the textures of language and sound (seen in words like "gravel," "silk," "foam," "roar," "screech"—all of whose consonants and vowels are onomatopoeic) (178-179). In the above lines, too, there is metacognitive thinking of judgment and reflection ("to foresee I was wrong: / Not suicide") but these lines are enjambed and exist in the same thickness as the more immediate sensory thoughts.

As if to emphasize the idea that a mind is all sound, texture, color, image—sensation—as well as "thinking," the last few lines feature nothing but *sensoriness*, despite the ostensibly syntactical structures of a sentence, seen in what appears to be a subject ("refulgent spirit"), a verb ("expands"), and an object ("branches")—but these end up providing no semantic meaning, no meaningful comprehension:

> Refulgent spirit expands branches flowers which are gems
> Empty sapphire space and air just past the golfcourse
> River's bend alive changing hideously beautiful coal seam ferns
> diamond opal do you hear
> (Whalen *Overtime* 179)

These words feel like sentences, but they are not; they are sensations. The shapes, colors, images, and meaning of these words (note the light, airy "s" sounds in "beautiful coal seam ferns," "spirit expands," and "Empty sapphire space") are brighter, lighter in weight, and perhaps more pleasing than the above "Gin-squall" of London and of wherever the Italian teams' sports scores are being displayed. Yet the last question here—"*do you hear*"—can be answered in a confident affirmative. Since the poem's earlier six stanzas drew us so thoroughly into the thick textures of sound, readers can now look at this last stanza—which involves a rather weightless, flighty series of classically "romantic" sounds ("sapphire space," "seam ferns," and "refulgent spirit" are

slippery in their "s's" and "f's," not just in their semantic meaning)—and readers *can* actually "hear" the stanza. Indeed, meaning has been so downplayed as an important element of the poem that a reader may in fact be able to read these last few lines solely for their sounds and textures, rather than for their "meaning."

"Life in the City" is therefore an inviting poem in its offer to just sit in it and listen, rather than try to "comprehend" and "understand." It sets a reader loose to notice different ways of experiencing the workings of a mind beyond the reductiveness of grasped meaning. If one is looking for meaning, location, event, and narration, the poem (and the mind it depicts) indeed appear as nothing but clutter because the poem's elements aren't membrane-able; they resist containment within such structures. The poem's elements instead are texture; heady, concrete sensation; speed, noise, and reaction; and as we see in the last stanza, sound.

One therefore does not need Buddhist training in order to read Whalen's work, and because of Buddhist Romanticism and the marketability of mindfulness, one may not recognize it *as* Buddhist poetry. It is the notion of the dispersed mind that allows us to read this as an American Buddhist poem. Readers can therefore become part of its enactment of mind as emptiness—empty, not of things or thoughts, but empty of semiotic entrapments ranging from judgments or experiences of boredom to judgments or experiences of the sublime. If in consumer culture, dispersal is a sense of scattered, unfulfillable desire, in Whalen's work, those dispersed desires are simply *there,* on the page.

Scalapino has written that Whalen "many times stressed that he didn't write to teach or reform, he wrote for pleasure and curiosity," taking the view "that if there was no pleasure for reader and poet, there was no reason to do it" (Scalapino). If we cannot call the effect of reading this kind of poem "jouissance"—Barthes's term for what occurs when a reader exerts agency in a

writerly text (as opposed to the "pleasure" of being absorbed in a readerly text)—we can at least call the effect *texture*, since in reading his work's foregrounding of sound and other non-semantic elements, readers can expand their cognitive capacity of the dizzying complexity of a mind.

Consider, on the other hand, the pressure readers or listeners experience in spaces where "meaning" is the point. There may be, for example, anxiety involved in encountering a poem whose meaning is difficult to ascertain but also feels certain, as if it has already been decided. In such a case, the reader may feel as though their interpretation of the poem might be "wrong" or missing something (an anxiety perhaps palpable in a student's encounter with a classic, overdetermined text, one with a large accretion of interpretation). Yet in a Whalen poem, readers are not expected to reach some state or attain wisdom. You are not even expected to be able to "talk" about the poem intelligently—a pressure that may be present when reading highly-anthologized poets, for example. Instead, here, there is no expectation for the reader to feel something sublime or dark or emotional (or even to sympathize, another form of emotional labor that readers often exert). Even if we do not come away with an understanding of what the poem "means," "Life in the City" expands our ability to notice textures and other non-semantic modes of experiencing.

Gary Snyder's Sublime Buddhist Poetics

The experience of being "in" a poem by Gary Snyder involves that expertly-cleared space of the spatialized mind, of mental and physical emptiness. Reading a Snyder poem is perhaps less "difficult" than that of a Whalen poem because a Snyder poem tends to meet readerly expectations about lyric poetry generally, and about American Buddhist poetry in particular. In addition to holding forth expectations that the reader will do the work of interpretation and

comprehension to come away with "meaning," Snyder's poem "Piute Creek" illustrates the transcendent, emptied mental and physical spaces made legible by Buddhist Romanticism and mainstream representations of mindfulness. Here, not unlike Hinton's language, "all the junk that goes with being human" falls away and the speaker reaches an emptied space of mind:

> One granite ridge
> A tree, would be enough
> Or even a rock, a small creek
> A bark shred in a pool.
> Hill beyond hill, folded and twisted
> Tough trees crammed
> In thin stone fractures
> A huge moon on it all, is too much.
> The mind wanders. A million
> Summers, night air still and the rocks
> Warm. Sky over endless mountains.
> All the junk that goes with being human
> Drops away, hard rock wavers
> Even the heavy present seems to fail
> This bubble of a heart. (Tonkinson 173)

The speaker takes in the surrounding natural scene, noting the play between sensory detail and the movement of his mind. There is an effort on the part of the speaker to simply notice what is there and what his mind does in response. Nature "would be enough" in this scene, though in the midst of the "too muchness" of "a huge moon on it all," the mind wanders. When "the mind wanders," perhaps thinking of "A million / Summers," the "night air" remains "still and the rocks / Warm" (Tonkinson 173). It is as though the strong sensation of that "Warm[th]"—which in this line is followed by empty space—brings the "wandering mind" back to the present moment within the poem. As a result of this meditation, the concreteness and "thereness" of nature in the limited present of the poem allows "all the junk that goes with being human" to "drop away" (173). Noticing the surrounding natural scene (but particularly the sensation of a warm rock) is thus a way of keeping the speaker's mind from "wandering." As a result of this

attentiveness, the "junk that goes with being human" no longer presses upon the speaker. Then, in the next few lines, not only the "junk" of being human, but also, it appears that the mind's *content*—"words and books"—are "gone in the dry air":

Words and books

> Like a small creek off a high ledge
> Gone in the dry air. (173)

There is no effort here produced by the speaker/mind itself; "words and books" are simply "gone," where "gone" isn't a passive verb but an adjective, almost a state of being. They were there but, like a creek spilling water into the "dry air," now they're not there, just as the "junk" has also "dropped away." What is left?

> A clear, attentive mind
> Has no meaning but that
> Which sees is truly seen.
> No one loves rock, yet we are here.
> Night chills. A flick
> In the moonlight
> Slips into Juniper shadow:
> Back there unseen
> Cold proud eyes
> Of Cougar or Coyote
> Watch me rise and go. (174)

What is left when "words and books" are "gone" is "A clear, attentive mind," one that "Has no meaning but that." But also, "A clear, attentive mind / Has no meaning": grammatically, this is also what these lines suggest. This is the whole poem: a clear, attentive mind, noticing. While the poem tells us that there is no meaning "but that," of course the poem itself has meaning in the sense that a reader can "get" something from this poem. It is a poem describing and modeling mindful awareness of one's body and one's surroundings. The "I" that is implied in the poem

through “the mind” and “me” in the last line model what it’s like to meditate in nature: even when “the mind wanders” or the heart is portrayed as a “bubble,” what’s left is a “clear, attentive mind.” In this sense, it is a kind of teaching poem, and so the *poem* has meaning, even if it tells us that “A clear, attentive mind / Has no meaning but that” (Tonkinson 174).

Just by reading the poem and being attentive to its language, the reader, too, can achieve that detached awareness that the poem’s speaker has achieved. The poem’s language points out “that which sees,” revealing a self-consciousness or meta-awareness. “That which sees” is a formal way of pointing to a viewer—to the “that” reading the poem (note, too, how the pronoun “that” strips the reader of the “junk” of being human). When the poem points to the viewer, she is “truly seen,” not unlike how the “cougar or coyote” watches the speaker with “cold proud eyes.” The speaker and “Cougar or Coyote” appear to lock eyes for a moment, making the speaker notice himself as from the outside, as a “that,” as viewed *by* the animal. The eyes of another being “which sees” allows the speaker to see himself as “truly seen.”

In the same way, when one points to the beautiful natural scene here, when one allows “junk” and “words and books” to “drop away,” the one who sees is also “truly seen” to have “no meaning but that”: the seeing itself. So the poem not only notices the things surrounding it, but notices the viewer viewing (who, when pointed at as “that which sees,” may also take on a self-awareness, noticing themselves *as* a reader), just as the speaker notices the “cold proud eyes” of the “Cougar or Coyote” and considers himself as viewed/seen (174). In this way, the poem guides the reader through that process of emptying the mind, with focus on “one granite ridge” at first; then, “the mind wanders” and the speaker must refocus: “night air still and the rocks / Warm” (173). Then, “all the junk…drops away” and “words and books” are “gone in the dry air” (173). The next movement is for the speaker to see himself as from an outsider’s perspective.

And so the poem delivers us into awareness: a "seeing" not only of the natural surroundings, but a seeing of that which sees as well—a viewing of oneself from a meta perspective.

"Piute Creek" is the kind of poem one might prefer to be in as a reader—it is a beautiful space with "millions of summers" and "warm rock" that allows a kind of release. The whole action of the poem is a simple sitting and noticing. And then, the speaker turns and goes. This is what mindfulness practitioners now expect meditation to do; it's how meditation ideally feels. The goal is to empty the mind until "the junk" can "drop away" as easily as when the "words and books" pass like water through a creek and are "gone in the dry air." The solitariness of this expansive natural scene, too, is a common element in the aesthetics of meditation, which in the popular imagination now tends to be conceived of as an *individual* undertaking.

Even more simply, as a *poem*, it is a nice space to be in. It is orderly, clean. The "junk" is just contained within the word: junk (rather than sprawling across the whole page as in a Whalen poem)—and then it is emptied out. A reader can come "into" this poem and enjoy it even if she is uninterested in or unaware of the resonances of the idea and practice of meditation—one does not need Buddhist or East Asian literacies to enjoy the natural scenery or the space of the poem. Whereas, it is difficult to achieve that detachedness in a Whalen poem, whose poems are much more like the mental spaces one tries to get *away* from by practicing the emptying in Snyder's piece.

Snyder's well-known, highly anthologized poem "Riprap" in turn reveals the demands a Snyder poem can make on a reader. In this piece we see the ordered space of his poetry as a path that the speaker has fashioned for the reader. While the poem tells the reader to "lay down these words / before your mind like rocks," asking the reader to make language physical, the poem itself is an ordered space of "these words" "placed solid" as on a riprap, which as Snyder has

explained is a "cobble of stone laid on steep, slick rock to make a trail for horses in the mountains" (Tonkinson 174).[54] The reader can therefore follow the path of the poem (produced here in full):

> Lay down these words
> Before your mind like rocks.
> placed solid, by hands
> In choice of place, set
> Before the body of the mind
> in space and time:
> Solidity of bark, leaf, or wall
> riprap of things:
> Cobble of milky way,
> straying planets,
> These poems, people,
> lost ponies with
> Dragging saddles—
> and rocky sure-foot trails.
> The worlds like an endless
> four-dimensional
> Game of *Go.*
> ants and pebbles
> In the thin loam, each rock a word
> a creek-washed stone
> Granite: ingrained
> with torment of fire and weight
> Crystal and sediment linked hot
> all change, in thoughts,
> As well as things.
> (Tonkinson 174-175)

Here, words are the stones on which an embodied mind walks (174). The poem involves a directive to release abstractions: the phrase "lay down," which recalls the laying-down of weapons, can be seen as an action of surrender. The speaker makes language physical, the mind physical, and words physical: they're as simple as rocks that simply support us on our directionless way (there are no riders on the "lost ponies" with "dragging saddles") (174). There

[54] In Tonkinson's anthology, she includes a note before the text of "Riprap": "Snyder defines *riprap* as: 'a cobble of stone laid on steep, slick rock to make a trail for horses in the mountains'" (Tonkinson 174).

is a seriousness here in clearing away abstractions like “mind” and language and “laying down these words” in an attentiveness to physicality.

In asking the reader to make abstract things physical for the building of a pathway, “Riprap” also involves a breaking down of binaries. It asks the reader to place words along a path “in space and time” and models a “laying down” of these things on a rocky pathway of “straying planets,” “poems,” “people,” and “lost ponies.” All these are a “riprap of things”:

> Cobble of milky way,
> straying planets,
> These poems, people,
> lost ponies with
> Dragging saddles
> and rocky sure-foot trails.
> The worlds like an endless
> four-dimensional
> Game of *Go.*
> ants and pebbles
> In the thin loam, each rock a word
> a creek-washed stone
> Granite: ingrained
> with torment of fire and weight
> Crystal and sediment linked hot
> all change, in thoughts,
> As well as things. (174-75)

Note that the “linking” within the line “crystal and sediment linked hot” is mimicked in the poem’s cobbled appearance. It is a linked poem that suggests there is not subject nor object; the world is not occurring in your thoughts nor “out there” in the world; there is no “out there” and “in here” distinction (hence the instruction to “lay down” those abstractions that produce such binaries). No rock is privileged over a word; granite is not privileged over sediment; crystal isn’t a valuable substance, just a substance that makes up the riprap, like “thoughts.” They are all simply “placed solid” (174). Again, the poem’s speaker guides the reader toward clarity and emptiness in its language of ridding oneself of or “laying down” things.

The emphasis on "laying" and "plac[ing] solid, by hands" includes a human element to it: it's a type of labor that takes the world of a mind (words, thoughts) and holds it out at a distance so as to examine it. Here, all is made equal to "ants and pebbles"—allowing the speaker, the meditator, the mindful practitioner, the reader—to be aware of (or perhaps *see*, since the making-physical of all these things allows one to see and walk upon them) "all change, in thoughts, / As well as things" (175). Here, the mental and physical spaces, like the orderly, "linked" space of the poem itself, illustrate that dominant metaphor of the polished, emptied mind. Meanwhile, the direct, simplistic, imagistic language of "Riprap" suggests an ease and a clarity absent from Whalen's work.

While "Riprap" is demanding much from the reader—attentiveness to language, a slowing-down of the act of reading, and ultimately, of course, that "laying-down" of words to make them physical—still, the speaker has fashioned a path upon which the reader or the reader's "body of the mind" can walk: it has at least made the space of this work comfortable, cobbled together in a clean, followable manner. There is thus again a modeling, a hand-holding here; it can be read as a teaching poem, as seen in its language of instruction ("lay down these words")—a poem that models what it means to become aware of the mind—to make it "solid," a thing one can look at. One can sense, too, the idea that one must empty the mind in order to reach awareness: it is the laying-down of things that allows one's body of the mind to follow the path. At the same time, "Riprap" shows what the space of a "body of the mind"—which is to say, a mind aware of itself, embodied—might look like, as seen in the spatial orderliness of the poem and the poem's spare language.

As a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, Snyder is one of the most visible and celebrated American Buddhist poets of the twentieth century, and while I do not claim that Snyder's

sublime poetics is causal to or an origin point for contemporary mindfulness discourses' privileging of that idea of the cleaned-up, "tidied" mind, his finely-crafted work does depict the idea of an emptied mind (and as we have seen, depicts the meditative practice that can bring one to that transcendent space). My aim here in analyzing Snyder's work is to delineate what that notion of the emptied mind looks like in a complex text.

"It wasn't going to go anywhere": Joanne Kyger's Poetics of the Ordinary

In Joanne Kyger's refusal to clean the mind or offer up sublimity in her work, her poetics comes up against the domestic gender norms implied in the orderliness and epic scale of her former husband Gary Snyder's work. Snyder is incredibly in control of his space, and there is thus something problematically gendered about his poetics, particularly given the history of Kyger and Snyder's relationship, which I discuss below. In Kyger's work we see how that idea of polishing one's mind to produce poetic and mental clarity is illustrative of a midcentury cult of domesticity in which she is expected to "clean up" the mind and the physical spaces in which she writes. In both her early work, which is interested in locating a poetic, physical, and mental space outside of the strictures of marital expectations, and her later work's articulation of an already-empty mind that is *not* cleaned-up, Kyger comes up against the domestic expectation that her space should be emptied of emotionalness or affect, to which there is a certain dirtiness, unpleasantness, or "difficulty" attached. Kyger's poetics shares with Whalen an attentiveness to the workings of a mind—viewing the mind as already-empty, in no need of polishing—but in her case, the unkempt "messiness" and ordinariness of her poetry reveals the problematic gender dynamics of a poetics that demands a cleaned-up, emptied space (whether the space of a mind or a kitchen).

While Kyger certainly gained the respect of her contemporaries (particularly Jack Spicer, Robert Duncan, and Philip Whalen), she has remained relatively unknown—hence Elizabeth Manwell's aim in her 2015 essay to "reintroduce—or perhaps, introduce the poetry of Joanne Kyger" both as a contemporary and "intimate" of poets like Ginsberg, Duncan, and Gary Snyder (Manwell 55). She holds a "marginal presence in the histories (though not in the fact) of the San Francisco Renaissance," which are "largely histories of social and poetic exchange" (Russo "To Deal with Parts" 181).[55] Kyger is thus well-known among those familiar with Naropa University and with Beat Studies generally, but until recently has not shown up much in the scholarship, aside from a few texts on female Beat poets that, according to Linda Russo (the most prolific scholar on Kyger and author of an unpublished biography of her life), "inadvertently misplace Kyger as a female Beatnik" (Russo "To Deal with Parts" 203n5).[56] Though she had emerged early on and "was…a prolific and complex poet" she "yet has remained relatively unknown" (Russo 2000).

Kyger arrived in San Francisco during the obscenity hearings on "Howl"; attended what were known as Sunday night readings and workshops led by Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan; and as a "lone female among men…became Duncan's protégé" (Manwell 56). Most of Kyger's early work was later published as *The Tapestry and the Web* (1965), which collects poems

[55] Many elements of Kyger's work demonstrate how she was "drawn to the mythic consciousness of Duncan and the exactitude of Spicer rather than the jazzy street vernacular of the Beat poets, such as Allen Ginsberg, Kerouac, or Bob Kaufman" (Russo "To Deal with Parts" 181). For Russo, it is her work's lack of that "jazzy street vernacular" that explains her marginal presence in the histories of the San Francisco Renaissance. This is perhaps also related to her heavier presence in texts that seek to reclaim female poets for the Beat moment.

[56] Russo notes that "relatively little has been made of her in the anthologies and literary histories that seek to recapture and contextualize the San Francisco of the Beat Generation and the San Francisco Renaissance, with the exception of the hasty genealogies of anthologies specific to women writers that inadvertently misplace Kyger as a female Beatnik" (Russo 2002 203n5). Exceptions to this, for Russo, are Lewis Ellingham and Kevin Killian's *Poet, Be Like God: Jack Spicer and the San Francisco Renaissance* and Alan Golding's "The New American Poetry Revisited, Again," *Contemporary Literature* 39 (1998).

written during her time traveling in Japan and India with then-husband Gary Snyder.[57] In Kyger's generation, "poetic production was mainly accomplished by men"; but aside from these gendered strictures on her work, she also encountered "sex-based limitations" and domestic entrapment Kyger while married to Snyder (Kyger *Particularizing*). In this period of her life, struggle is "laid out in gendered terms: 'Is his own masculinity threatened that he must fight so hard to assert himself & show no regard for my desires or identity'" (Russo "To Deal with Parts" 190, Kyger *Japan and India Journals*). In her early writing, Kyger's backstory with Snyder is a major impetus for exploring an identity not overdetermined by midcentury expectations of being a wife—hence her anti-teleological, anti-heroic retelling of *The Odyssey* through the perspective of Penelope in *The Tapestry and the Web*. If struggle for Kyger is laid out in gendered terms, the alternative to being a wife is laid out in spatial terms:

> Out of the tension between wanting to write and being called upon to fulfill the role of wife came an imagined alternative, "a room all my own to decorate with pictures and plants just the way I wanted with no one to intrude, high ceilinged light & airy" and she hoped "someday to be able to make it alone writing in such a room." (Kyger *Japan and India Journals* 31, Russo "To Deal with Parts" 190)

[57] See the following for more on Kyger's early career: Amy L. Friedman, 'Joanne Kyger, Beat Generation Poet: "a porcupine traveling at the speed of light",' in *Reconstructing the Beats,* ed. Jennie Skerl (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 74,78; Nancy M. Grace and Ronna C. Johnson, *Breaking the Rule of Cool: Interviewing and Reading Women Beat Writers* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2004) 133-153; David Meltzer, ed., *The San Francisco Beat: Talking with the Poets* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001) 122-132; and Linda Russo, 'To Deal with Parts and Particulars: Joanne Kyger's Early Epic Poetics,' in *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation,* eds. Ronna C. Johnson and Nancy M. Grace (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002) 181-182. Kyger's controversial journals of her travels in Japan and India are: *The Japan and India Journals 1960-1964* (Bolinas, CA: Tombouctou Books, 1981), republished as *Strange Big Moon: The Japan and India Journals 1960-1964* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2000).

Kyger's envisioning of a space of freedom involves the imagining of an actual room "all [her] own" and one in which "no one will intrude"—in this sense, "solitude proposed a space in which to act freely," as opposed to the strictures of living with Snyder:

> she asked Snyder "what if I was involved in doing something & didn't want to do the dishes for say a few days—I want to feel the freedom of acting that way should the possibility arise." But her husband was inflexible: "He would not grant me that, he said." (Kyger *Japan and India Journals* 30, Russo "To Deal with Parts" 190)

Both Snyder's poetry and his treatment of Kyger emphasize cleanliness and the daily ordering of one's physical spaces, just as his Zen practice, of which he was "its privileged subject," expected a practice of awareness that similarly involved an emptying of the mess of one's mind (Russo "To Deal with Parts" 191). In her later work, Kyger explores a practice of awareness that is *not* cleaned-up but is fraught with despair and depression—"difficult" affects, as Ahmed would term them. For Kyger, including her "ugly feelings" and fears in her poetry is part of that practice of awareness in which the dispersed mind is already-empty, and thus need not *be emptied.* Kyger actively sought to become a more serious student of Zen, but not in the ways Snyder's strict discipline dictated (women, after all, were prohibited from access to the institute where Snyder studied) (Russo "To Deal with Parts" 190). Her initial search to get inside a space of her own brought her to a similar search for a Zen practice that was scaled down from Snyder's sublime. For Kyger, cluttered or "messy" spaces of mind and body are not just an argument about what awareness is; they are a mode of survival outside of the limited range of agency available to her in this marriage.

In an interview, Kyger said that *The Odyssey* was the first story she felt she could "get inside of"—and that once inside, she could refashion it from within (Kyger *Particularizing*). In

The Tapestry and the Web, this is in a sense how she writes Penelope, too: her tapestry and web (which she weaves during the day and unravels at night) are peripheral in *The Odyssey*, but in *Tapestry,* where Penelope is a masterful visionary, they are central. Penelope weaves the story from inside the domestic sphere, while the husband presumes he is "out there," "doing" the epic. Kyger thus examines things "from the inside," always keeping in mind "Jack Spicer's sense of just 'No Shit, it's gotta be true,' whatever that meant, whatever the truth was, so any posturing that went on you certainly were going to get paid for in artificiality" (Kyger *Particularizing*). Bringing *The Odyssey* away from its artificiality meant setting it loose from the teleology and grand scale of the genre of epic itself, and Kyger's *Tapestry* is both small in scale and in detail (most of what "happens" in *Tapestry* is quite mundane) so as to rid the story of that "artificiality" and posturing demanded by the genre of epic.

In making Penelope the central "I" of the poems, Kyger also explores what it means to be a female poet in a male-dominated field. As Russo notes, "women writing in the fifties faced the dilemma that they were inarticulate, at once mysterious and profoundly revelatory, Muses who would inspire but were themselves incapable of writing 'real' poetry" (Russo "to be Jack Spicer"). Rather than choosing an "oppositional, sexed role," however, Kyger:

> enjoyed acting the part of The Muse and it is perhaps no coincidence that in the company of gay male poets she managed, by returning to the source, Homer's *Odyssey,* to poetically address the sexual (and intellectual) anxieties that bolstered the poet/muse binary—and then break with them. (Russo "to be Jack Spicer")

This approach to the poet/muse binary—an approach that isn't strictly oppositional, but exploratory—is perhaps why scholars interested in *Tapestry* call it "protofeminist."[58] Manwell writes that "In *The Tapestry and the Web* we can read the plight of the 1950s housewife—and the constraints of domestic life—yet to think of Kyger's poetry as merely the reaction of a female poet chafing against the bonds of her society is at best reductive" (Manwell 76).

A better way to read *Tapestry* is to bring in Ahmed's argument about "happiness" as descriptive of a range of choices, as a state that is held out to some, and particularly held out to the happy housewife, as Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* demonstrates. Penelope is "happy" in Homer's tale because she is chaste, orderly, and steadfast. This allows her to be a version of the Muse. Kyger, however, writes a Penelope who is "difficult"—Ahmed's word for a woman whose affects are other than those delimited by "happiness"—and Penelope's "difficulty" here can be sensed in her affect, her complaints, her anxieties, her messiness. Also, as Manwell and others note, Kyger's mythic framework allows her poetic "I" to become a speaker who gathers both Kyger and Penelope into her, making the speaker's expression of negative affect quite different than what we see in lyric confessional poetry. In this sense, Penelope's "difficulty" is also Kyger's.[59]

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[58] Russo writes that sections of *Tapestry* offer a "serious protofeminist critique of the romanticized tinge upon what Adrienne Rich would, in the next decade, call the institution of motherhood" (Russo "To deal with parts" 195).

[59] Russo, noting Kyger's complex synthesis of the poetics of Duncan and Spicer, illustrates how "through the figure of Penelope, Kyger's own life could be seen and worked upon a mythic frame" (Russo "To deal with parts" 187). Kyger thus enacts Duncan's idea of a poetic imagination that "faces the challenge of finding a structure that will be the complex story of all the stories felt to be true, a myth in which something like the variety of man's experience of what is real may be contained" (Russo "To deal with parts" 187). Meanwhile, we can also identify Kyger's "Spicerian eye for a 'nonsubjective reception of poetic voice' that illustrates a 'difference between you and the Outside of you which is writing poetry' as well as involving 'the imperative 'to keep as much of [one's] self as possible out of the poem'" (Russo "To deal with parts" 187). Manwell simply argues that Kyger's wor is "not overtly confessional," unlike some of her female poet contemporaries, Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath. "Confessional poetry is perhaps best typified by poets such as Robert Lowell, who is typically read as revealing himself warts and all in his poetry, and W.D. Snodgrass" (Manwell 56n2). Notley also emphasized Kyger's use of the first person to create intimacy but not confessionalism: "the voice has charm, but though it says "I" intimately it isn't calling attention to a person" (Notley).

By centering on Penelope as an unhappy, anxious housewife whose life is one of dailiness and mundanity, Kyger dismantles the epic's telos as generative of the story she is telling. We can thus see *Tapestry* as a series of "masculine myth-debunking poems," with its interest in breaking down the immense grandeur of the epic, the hero, the poet, and of teleology generally (Russo "to be Jack Spicer"). For Kyger, "Homeric myth is 'pretend,' it 'escapes' her, and riddled with accusation it is but a web of lies tightly woven to resemble 'fact'" (Russo "to be Jack Spicer"):

> We are in a tighter web than I had imagined.
> that story
> about him capturing a girl in the woods was a lie! (Kyger *Tapestry* 30)

There is then an interest in examining "the truth" from a small scale: it is the larger scale, the teleology, the grand stories, that in their artificiality obscure the Spicerian sense of "no shit"—and for Kyger (unlike Spicer), the domestic ends up being that inside, smaller-scale space that offers up "whatever the truth was" (Kyger *Particularizing*).[60]

Unlike the happy housewife whose affects are limited to "sparking joy," to use Kondo's phrasing, the Penelope of *Tapestry* is ordinary in terms of what happens to and around her and "difficult" in terms of her many negative affects. As Manwell notes, "The shifting representation of Penelope offers a multi-faceted character, whose 'real life' reflects the drama, impulsiveness

[60] Dale Smith notes that this interest in breaking down the grandeur of the epic can also be seen in the technical elements of Kyger's poetry, which, in its visual construction, has very little impact on the reader. Her lines, as Smith notes, are often "set out into the space of the page rather than stacked along the left-hand margin" (Smith). In this sense, "visually, she is close to Pound and Williams, using the page as a kind of painting or glyph for the ease and pleasure of the eye" (Smith). In an interview, she noted that "When you move your line to the right, the lesser the impact of the line, the voice. The whole movement and rhythm on the page give us instruction as to voice and phrasing and import of what's going on" (Kyger "Energy"). Thus, her low-impact, small-scale engagement with organic life processes is "mirrored by the visual construction of her poems on the page" (Smith).

and confusion of identity" (Manwell 63). By the end of *Tapestry*, readers have gotten to know Penelope as, among other things, sick of all the suitors:

> She comes and rages
> quit eating the coffee cake and cottage cheese
> put the lid on the peanut butter jar
> sandwiches made of cucumber, stop eating the *food*! (56)

This Penelope has probably *not* been faithful ("Refresh my thought of Penelope again. / Just HOW solitary was her wait?" (31); and:

> Somewhere you can find reference to the fact that PAN was the
> son of Penelope
> Either as the result of a *god*
> or as the result of ALL the suitors
> who hung around while Odysseus was abroad. (29)

Kyger's Penelope constantly threatens to pick up and leave—"I'll / go bird you keep this place"—and, later in the same poem, "I'm going" (45). One poem asks, "waiting again / what for" (33). The collection's first poem "The Maze" suggests there is madness connected to her Sisyphean task of weaving and unweaving the "demented web" (Kyger *Tapestry* 13). Penelope registers being stuck not unlike Charlotte Perkins Gilman's speaker in "The Yellow Wallpaper": "at the very farthest wall / pushing & scratching to get out / thru the cracks in the batten" (Kyger *Tapestry* 45, Russo "To Deal with Parts" 124). Yet she is also figured as a god-like overseer of the hero's journey as a whole:

> *I* choose to think of her waiting for him
> concocting his adventures bringing
> the misfortunes to him
> --she must have had her hands full.
>
> (Kyger *Tapestry* 31, emphasis in original)

Penelope rages ("stop eating the *food*!"); she feels; she is overseeing "the corn and grass lands" and her strength is conveyed through her stance and her perceptiveness: she "stands against a pillar of the house, / watching and planning" (56). She "never refuses or accepts" the suitors, and "Still after 15 years or more she doesn't know / and may go off with the likeliest and most generous suitor" (56). Just before Odysseus' return, we catch her mid-hike, "climbing over the rough ravine / and up an impossible cliff, naked, you may how high you can go"—suggesting, like the earlier lines, "I'm going," that within this mundane domestic life there arises a desperate need to escape that existence (56).

Thus, when Odysseus comes home and the expansive strength, humor, and complex affect of Penelope dries up (as does the energy of Kyger's poetic line), there is the palpable sense that order and "happiness" have been reinstated. There is a dramatic shift from Penelope's perspective back to the linear, controlled narrative telos that her husband represents. This change is palpably felt in the experience of reading the poetry itself; we move from an articulate (if anxious) introspection about what's going on with her (in the poem "Meeting V May 20," below) to a staccato, fixed, controlled narrative in the poem "VI."

There is little punctuation and no end marks to sentences in the first poem "Meeting V May 20," which is presented by the "I" speaker:

V

Meeting May 20

'for by day my one relief is to weep and sigh
Am I to stay
winding and coming back, goes out and sees, dreams
are awkward things
a cigarette falls behind the bed

I *can't* get out of bed
she pushes
where where are the walls,
out the window the poetry, dishes broken, things torn up, please
please don't weep anymore.
the suitors are sickened w/ blood, look
how they decay, kill them all
an eagle takes a terrified dove
and she places a good chair to hear what goes on
(57)

The story is messier when Penelope is the speaker. She is wild, sad, lonely, waiting, watching, planning, etc., but even if there is anxiety and uncertainty, there is energy. It is "difficult" poetry in its negative affect and in the ways it does not arise into a readerly epiphany. She is on the verge of something important: "she places a good chair to hear what goes on" (57). This is because, as the "Meeting" of the title implies, her husband is back (though in *The Odyssey* and also here, Penelope at first does not know it is him because of his disguise).

In contrast to the above poem's energy and difficult affect, the poem that follows illustrates the effects of reinstating the trappings of the epic. As a reader, here you would turn the page to the poem "VI," which represents Odysseus' return:

Here it is, the last day. and what has happened.
Penelope had at least one night with her husband.
And he'll have to go on again to find another city
without salt and away from the sea.
She takes this as a matter of course. It is interesting to note
how cautious she was, he called her iron hearted, to see if it was really

he that had returned
until she went to bed. It's good to be clear about what you do.
They had a party. The pigman and cowherd, also the son
drank wine and danced. This was after the killing.
Not a new marriage as some might have thought
12 ladies were hung by the neck.
as usual Penelope slept through all this.
I think she is happy now.
her household is restored.
and she knows he will die an old and comfortable death.
up to your room now to wait a while he tells her
and she does what he says.
I guess it's good to know where you're going.
May 22, 1964

Just as there is now a detached, observant narrator (rather than the complex "I" of Penelope), the story has been re-centered around the hero, and whether "her household [being] restored" (a restoration emphasized by that line's orderly centering on the page) is a good thing or not, that is simply how it is now. The narrator seems uncomfortable with this restoration of telos and order: note the large amounts of periods and short, direct sentences ("Here it is, the last day. and what has happened.") (58). It is as though the narrator is begrudgingly getting used to the fact that there *is* a "last day" and is made uncomfortable by the limitations that now demand a new mode of storytelling.

We can sense this discomfort in "I guess it's good to know where you're going"—a phrase that indicates an effort to understand why Penelope might be content simply obeying her husband's order to go "up to your room now to wait a while," though the "I guess" conveys

slight judgment, as well. In other words, the narrator is trying to be generous to Penelope—a generosity seen in phrases like "It is interesting to note / how cautious she was" and, in particular, "It's good to be clear about what you do" (58). The narrator's need to clarify that "it's good to be clear about what you do" suggests that the narrator may not quite believe this herself. In providing such commentary for the audience, the narrator appears to be trying to understand Penelope's moves and choices now that Odysseus is back. We thus get a rather detached (though interested) narrator who is subtly disappointed that this is how things have turned out.

Scholars tend to read Kyger's version of "the violently restored domestic ending of the *Odyssey"* as critical of Penelope, partly because Kyger herself has implied as much (Smith).[61] Manwell argues that Kyger's choice to include Odysseus at the end presents a "deliberately ambiguous story" in which "both Odysseus and Penelope reveal conflicted emotions and share the stage as co-equal voyagers on separate but intertwining journeys of self-knowledge" (Manwell 67). Russo notes that her revisionism "displays a feminism of sorts," but "preceded the feminist poetic project of 're-vision'—[in which one would instead] ste[p] into female characters and 'tak[e] back' myth" (Kyger "Particularizing").

Yet I want to emphasize the small poem that follows this ostensible re-centering of the story. *Tapestry* ends with a poem that not only valorizes Penelope's perspective in the face of Odysseus' return, but also again, and more forcefully due to its placement just after Odysseus' return, dismantles/unweaves Penelope herself from the telos of the epic. Across from "VI" (with

[61] In an interview, Russo asks the implied question, "My sense is more that you criticize Penelope, you're very critical of her behavior" (Kyger "Particularizing"). Kyger responds: "Is she being true or not, or who is - take a step back and, well, you know" (Kyger "Particularizing").

lines like “her household is restored”) is the following untitled poem which, in its return to the “I” perspective of Penelope, seems to record her actual reactions to the “meeting”:

there is no meeting
and they could not string the bow
Memory has no direction,
a soft weeping like rain drumming dry soil
give me a pile of grape leaves
give me a lot of wine
(Kyger *Tapestry* 59)

Visually, the contrast is striking: to the left of the above poem (on the lefthand page), there is this very chronological narrative in “VI” of what happened when Odysseus got back. Penelope interestingly isn’t really a key player in that stilted narration (as is to be expected: the constraints of the epic are reasserted when Odysseus returns, and Penelope is relegated back to the role of steadfast wife). In contrast, on the righthand page, there are the above set of lines, floating in the vast, empty space of the page. The lines directly negate the certain, linear narrative of the prior poem in the lines “there is no meeting” and “Memory has no direction.” Meanwhile, “they could not string the bow” not only suggests that Penelope has not been steadfast (in the original story, stringing the bow is a test that only Odysseus can pass because Penelope rigged the test in his favor)—but also, “*they* could not” may suggest an inability to consummate an important reunion. These also appear to be Penelope’s real reactions to the “meeting,” which are articulated through a demand for excess: “give me a pile of grape leaves / give me a lot of wine” (Kyger *Tapestry* 59).

The juxtaposition of these two pieces, which face each other in the book’s leaves, demonstrates the stakes of teleology in *Tapestry’s* whole retelling. One the one (left) hand, there

is the chronological narrative that essentially mimics what happened in the *Odyssey*. A number of phrases reveals a narrator resigned to the "end" of the epic, in which the telos has been reached: "Here it is, the last day"; "her household is restored"; "She takes this [ending] as a matter of course"; and "I guess it is good to know where you're going" demonstrate both that this is the end *and* that the end is anticlimactic (58). The narrative even looks into the future and tells us what his death will be like: "old and comfortable" (58). Its simplicity and barely-withheld narrative judgment reveal the disappointment of this ending after pages of vivid, energetic poetry, and the rather slapdash way that it moves from Odysseus' return to thinking about his death creates a sense that this is not the full story—that much has been left out. Its straightforward telling of the story through simple sentences only amplifies the sense that once the story is told, many more questions will be asked than answered. On the whole, its rhetoric is that of disappointment and deficiency, which ironically demonstrates that the heightened drama of the epic, now that it is controlled from the proper perspective (Odysseus') again, ends up being far more disappointing than the supposed boring mundanity of Penelope's "happenings" and daily life.

On the other hand, on the right page, there is the untitled alternative, a complete negation of the telos of the narrative ("there is no meeting / and they could not string the bow / Memory has no direction"). This striking negation is a return to *Tapestry's* larger anti-teleological trappings that were momentarily disrupted by Odysseus' return. As Manwell notes, aside from the fact that Penelope's perspective alone is disruptive to the telos of *The Odyssey,* in which she is meant to be part of the story's ending rather than its key player, "the placement of contemporary details into the narrative"—seen in lines like "quit eating the coffee cake and cottage cheese" (56)—is likewise disruptive of the original story's telos, for two reasons:

> On the one hand, this is another step in the redefinition of epic: the poet as maker redefines 'epic' poetry as that which includes mundane domestic details and the names of one's friends. On the other hand, the conflation of various landscapes and temporal settings—like the pen and ink drawing at the section's commencement—offers a timeless mythical location, in which past, present and future need not follow chronologically because it is all the same. (Manwell 69).

"It is all the same" because where Penelope is in the present, in memory, or in space is no different from where she is supposedly "going"—hence the power of Penelope's perspective. She is simply *there:* "Memory has no direction" (Kyger *Tapestry* 59).

The untitled piece's negation of Odysseus' return is strikingly similar to Huineng's verse in its complete negation of telos, a similarity present even in the grammar of the two pieces. In the *Platform Sutra's* story, Huineng writes:

> Bodhi originally has no tree,
> The mirror also has no stand.
> Buddha nature is always clean and pure;
> Where is there room for dust?
> (Yampolsky 132)

Similarly,

> there is no meeting
> and they could not string the bow
> Memory has no direction,
> a soft weeping like rain drumming dry soil
> give me a pile of grape leaves
> give me a lot of wine
> (Kyger *Tapestry* 59)

Without the telos, we are enabled to see the realism and messiness of Penelope's pain and desires. Perhaps more importantly for Kyger's lived experience at the time of writing, it is the

negation here that allows for Penelope to make demands within her own space, rather than responding to the husband's command to go "up to [her] room…and wait a while" (58). It is the outright denial of the meeting, of the significance of the bow, of memory itself, that allows the speaker entrance back into the space of the page (Penelope's "I" was omitted on the page before)—here, the "I" is loudly present ("give me…give me"). The untitled piece's placement alone—it floats, unmoored, in the lower right corner of the page, in contrast to that centered line "her household is restored" (58)—suggests that this space belongs to that "I."

I want to simply emphasize the similarities between Kyger's and Huineng's arrangement of terms and grammar here, rather than suggesting that she is in some way referencing *The Platform Sutra* itself. I doubt this should even be taken as a "Buddhist" moment in Kyger's work. But it *is* interesting that, in this important piece in her first collection of poems, we can see the suggestion that this is where her Buddhist practice will take her later. In a feminist register, we see here a recalcitrant force of unyielding nonduality—a force that powerfully communicates the stakes of what *negating* telos (or, restoring the anti-teleological investments of *Tapestry*) actually means for Penelope. This unyielding nonduality arises here from Penelope's search for her own physical spaces of freedom (recall the lines where she is ""climbing over the rough ravine / and up an impossible cliff, naked, you may how high you can go") (56). In these last lines, this search for physical spaces of freedom outside of the limiting telos that Odysseus represents is registered in the spatial unmooredness of the lines themselves.

The same nonduality can be read in Kyger's later work as a gendered articulation of the dispersed mind as (already) empty. Where Huineng asks, "where is there room for dust?", Kyger's last two lines point to the ways her future poetry understands awareness to be a state in which messiness, "difficult" affects, and even excess ("a lot of wine" and "a pile of grape

leaves") are not problems to be cleaned. "Memory has no direction" is a sentiment echoed later in her work, which perhaps more overtly argues that where you are going is no different than where you are.

If in *Tapestry,* Kyger is interested in exploring an anti-teleological perspective of dailiness that breaks down the strictures, pressures, and grandeur of the epic, later, we can see Kyger similarly exploring a practice of awareness that does not arise into sublimity on the epic scale.[62] Alice Notley explains that other than poetry, Kyger's daily life as recorded in her books involves "domestic chores, community service, local jobs in stores, frequent teaching at the Naropa Institute in Boulder, extensive trips to Mexico, and poetry reading trips to the East Coast" (Notley). Dale Smith describes Kyger's poetry as "personal inviting, familiar, humorous, and, above everything, generous to the reader" (Smith). Her work presents narratives that "tell the story of a woman whose mind moves quickly—relating the particulars of place and her relationship to it" (Smith).[63] Yet this poetics of dailiness and mundanity does more than simply please the reader: its uneventfulness comes up against ideas of awareness that are teleological and thus easily commodified.

[62] We may perhaps sense this practice of awareness in the contrasts between Kyger's and Hinton's differing conceptions of mountaintop "awareness." Hinton depicts Thoreau's mountaintop enlightenment as a sublime experience in which his mind is spatialized, emptied, and open to sublimity. Thoreau's was that of a mind "open and emptied of all content"; this is an awareness conveyed through the aesthetics of "openness" and epiphanic "emptiness." In contrast, Penelope's hike reinforces a sense of mundanity and desperation, a desire to escape: "climbing over the rough ravine / and up an impossible cliff, naked, you may how high you can go"—these lines suggest that within this mundane domestic life there arises a desperate need to escape that existence (56).

[63] Smith adds the work of Kyger and Whalen to a history of poets' interest in the daybook. As he notes, "while traditionally the personal, unpublished daybook offered a space for private reflection," and poets in the 1950s and '60s followed initial uses of the form by Thoreau, Whitman, Williams. These midcentury poets "began to look at the narrative potential of the daybook as a way to organize phenomena within the temporal movements of the calendar" (Smith). Smith points to Jack Kerouac, Robert Creeley, James Schuyler, William Corbett, Paul Blackburn, and John Ashbery as other notable midcentury poets interested in the potentialities of the daybook. For Smith, "Philip Whalen and Joanne Kyger took the form farthest, incorporating it into a lifelong pursuit of poetry that demanded impersonal recordings of the provisory relations experienced in their private lives" (Smith).

Much of the popular mindfulness discourse explains that meditation is as simple as paying attention to "the moment," suggesting that even just noting the way your body breathes can bring one to experience epiphany, nirvana, happiness, or a better life (some writers even promise a better world, if everyone would just meditate). By contrast, the content depicted in and by Kyger's work is uneventful. It promises nothing—it even seems to prefer that "big things" should not happen at all (Kyger *As Ever* 134):

> This is the way I like to feel the best.
>
> Out the window
> the birds are feeding
> and they are jumping in the puddle
> the hose makes
> on that hard ground
> outside the front
> of the house
> some flutes
> from Peru.
>
> This is the way I like even better doing nothing at all.
>
> (Kyger *As Ever* 131)

The only action here is what is "out the window," and even that action is not eventful: "birds are feeding" and "jumping in the puddle" just "outside the front" of her house (131). For as little that is happening in this piece, it could be a William Carlos Williams poem. It is even uneventful in its narration, which announces that this uneventfulness is what the speaker "likes." "Doing nothing at all" is "even better" than what the poem announces as "feel[ing] the best" (where "feeling the best" is just watching birds "feeding" and "jumping" just outside her window). The speaker herself is still, immobile—all the movement is happening outside the window, while she herself "do[es] nothing at all" (131). Yet there is no "happiness" or "clarity" that is available—"feel[ing] the best" just involves utter ordinariness, not even any recognizable action.

Kyger's speaker also tells us of the "smallness" of "the way [she] like[s] to feel the best" in an untitled poem:

> I want a smaller thing in mind
> Like a good dinner
> I'm tired of these big things happening
> They happen to me all the time
>
> (Kyger *As Ever* 134)

The poem appears to be "about" events—the idea of "big things happening" tends to suggest an Event, a thing that happens out in the world that affects people (perhaps echoing *Tapestry's* interest in the domestic rather than the hero's journey). Yet "in mind" in the first line suggests that "big things" can also be "happening" "in mind," that is, in the speaker's mind. The idea that "big things" can happen "in mind" begs us to read the first line differently: "I want a smaller thing in mind" can therefore be read as the speaker desiring "small" emotions, feelings, thoughts, memories, rather than "big things" happening to that mind "all the time" (134). The poem communicates a desire for a "smallness" of mind very different from the expansive, grand natural scene in Snyder's poem "Piute Creek." As she says in this untitled poem originally published in *Trip Out and Fall Back* (1974),

> The vibes are too high
> They're Empire State high
> I'm a ground hole watcher
> Out my Bolinas window
> (Kyger *As Ever* 139)

Here, in addition to playing with the "state" of being "too high," the speaker plays with scale and space: The Empire State building, symbolic of massive heights, is contrasted with her own "vibes," which are also described spatially, near a "ground hole" and within walls much smaller than those of the Empire State building, since they are contained on one side of the "Bolinas

window" (139). The small scale of "things" and spaces in her work should again be understood within that early framework of her search for a room of her own in which to exercise her freedom—a search that evolves into, or is perhaps inseparable from, her later Buddhist practice. In an interview, pointing to her years in Japan with Gary Snyder, she says:

> There was a real possibility of freedom in the moment. Of course, after going to Japan, I realized you had to learn how to make a place in which you could have that freedom, that freedom had walls. In other words, you had to understand what a structure was, which meant that, yes, you got up early in the morning and you sat meditation, and that you tried to focus your mind, to empty it. You observed your mind enough to know that it was ceaselessly busy. It wasn't going to go anywhere, and it could do anything it wanted. But if you kept going back and centering yourself, then you could see that this mind, which could be a demon towards you or whip you around, was of the moment, something that you could accept and let it pass on. (Kyger *There You Are* 7)

The excerpt demonstrates Kyger's own narrative understanding of how her years in Japan are connected to her meditative practice, which bears some of the hallmarks of contemporary mindful practice: going back and "centering yourself" so that one can understand the mind as something "of the moment" (*There You Are* 7). However, a major difference here is that the mind for Kyger is not something to fix, handle, or control. Trying "to focus your mind, to empty it" in Kyger's practice means "observ[ing] your mind enough to know that it [is] ceaselessly busy" (7). Rather than cleaning up the clutter and the busy-ness of her mind, then, she "accept[s it] and let[s] it pass on" (7). For Kyger, consciousness is thus already aware of itself. Knowing this may take some introspection, but it does not need to be "cleaned."

Where contemporary mindfulness discourse represents awareness as a process of observing one's mind and emptying it to achieve awareness, and where Snyder's poetic spaces illustrate the expansiveness of a sublime awareness, Kyger's poetry is not a space of positive spiritual emotion, much less sublimity:

> I am afraid
> of the time past. . . . it is gone
> and I
> am searching in this present
>
> to get full. . . . of its reverberations
>
> Give me a little humble pride to tell
> the story
>
> I think I may have to do this forever
>
> just forever & ever (*As Ever* 175)

These lines do not evoke a moment of epiphany or clarity that helps us move forward with our practical lives (as mindfulness is meant to do); instead, they tell us how hard it is to try to be "in this present." This is about the Sisyphean "foreverness" of that "searching…to get full." The poem does not require readers to glean spiritual insight necessarily, unless that insight is just the "forever & ever" nature of daily suffering. Again, when thinking about the beautiful space of a Snyder poem in contrast with the poem above, even if it is easy to relate to this untitled piece, it may not necessarily be a space we want to exist in. This "headspace" is likely not the one we want to carry around with us all day—it is perhaps too familiar in its despair, depression, and the shame of *not* achieving that clean, aware headspace.

Her poem "Sunday" further illustrates the physical and mental spaces of awareness as messy, cluttered, anxious:

I know I do not suffer more than anyone
in the whole world
But this morning I had to have first thing
2 cigarettes, half a joint,
a poached egg and corned beef hash, 1 piece toast,
2 cups tea
Jung, Williams, shells, stones,
2 slugs rum, depression, rest of joint,
cigarette, 7 Up, and it's only 10 o'clock
Because I wanted to write a poem
Because I want something to come out of me
You can't try. I believe in life, I am living
now and for a moment the landscape
becomes clear.

(Kyger *As Ever* 122)

This room is not cleaned or arranged, but is filled with the affects and objects of a mind noticing itself rather than working to empty it for enlightenment's sake. The complaint of this excerpt ("I know I don't suffer more than anyone…But this morning…") grounds itself in a kitchen (cigarettes, half a joint, a poached egg, corned beef hash, 1 piece toast, 2 cups tea, 2 "slugs rum," rest of joint, 7 Up). We sense the poet meandering around, restlessly opening and shutting the fridge, wanting "something to come out of [her]" (122). This is a familiar, ordinary space where you try to calm down but cannot, where you want to be productive—but cannot—and so instead fixate on whatever substances are at hand. Her nervous consumption (not unlike *Tapestry's* "give me a pile of grape leaves / give me a lot of wine") (*Tapestry* 59) demonstrates the urgency and anxiety of "want[ing] to write a poem," wanting "something to come out of me" (*As Ever* 122). Fraught with a fear of failure, which the speaker attempts to keep at bay by keeping her body busy consuming, the poem is about how hard it is to write a poem. If this moment of "becoming clear" were the poem's last line, it might suggest that simply focusing on the present ("I am

living / now") is the key to achieving moments of "clear" landscapes. On the contrary, the final stanza reiterates that fear of failure in spatial terms:

> The more I slow down the harder it is
> to all of a sudden move again.
> Smaller & smaller until the
> speck in side dwindles so small
>
> (Kyger *As Ever* 123)

The first two lines here convey the feeling of being stuck, just as the rapid consumption of substances in earlier lines suggests the "stuckness" of waiting to write. In addition to the earlier anxiety of not being able to produce, there is a sense of panic here—that if one "slow[s] down," one will eventually be unable to "move again" (123). And if one cannot "move again," one shrinks "smaller & smaller" due to disuse and lack of movement. This fear of shrinking is seen in the earlier desire to have "something come out of me," a desire that is again exhibited through consumption, as if eating, drinking, and smoking (and reading, as is suggested in the references to "Jung" and Williams") would not only halt that "dwindl[ing]," but also propel something "out of [her]." Having something come out of her is perhaps an even more urgent desire due to the way it could extend or enlarge her own spatial dimensions in order to prevent getting "smaller & smaller" (122-23).

"Sunday" exhibits a restless desire to be "bigger", more mobile, and to create—but the desire to create is cast in spatial, embodied language: "have something come out of me." While there is an uncertain moment in which "now and for a moment the landscape / becomes clear," the rest of the poem's "moments" bear absolutely no sense of "landscape," itself a word that conveys broadness, perspective, clarity, an abundance of space. What the speaker yearns for is movement, embodied freedom (which in Kyger's early thinking meant having her own physical

space); here, what she fears is that she will land in a trapped space of ineptitude and "smallness" (123). Ultimately, if this is awareness—in its attention to the workings of her mind and the movements of her body—it is a "difficult" awareness that does not arise into an epiphany (indeed, is itself the "epiphany") and does not promise the happy enlightenment of Marie Kondo's "joy"-filled physical and head-spaces.

Ordinariness, messiness, "ugly" feelings, and that anti-teleological, nondual sense of not-going-anywhere are powerful alternatives to her life as Snyder's wife and, as we see here in her later work, are also present in her exploration of what it means to be aware. Here, the dispersed mind is emptiness not because it has been cleaned-up, but because it shows the dustiness of mind-phenomena itself ("Buddha nature is always clean and pure; / Where is there room for dust?") (Yampolsky 132). Finding her own space in Bolinas away from a difficult marriage (recall that negation of telos in *Tapestry's* lines "there is no meeting / and they could not string the bow") is similar to how Kyger's messy "headspace" negates the telos of an awareness achieved by daily polishing (Kyger *Tapestry* 59). Her oeuvre's dailiness, mundanity, and honest affects are invested in breaking down epic grandeur. Russo writes:

> The poem for Kyger is not an occasion for lofty proclamation and protestation, as in Snyder's essay "North Beach," which declares "the spiritual and political loneliness of America" to be an occasion to "hitch a thousand miles to meet a friend," or as in the opening line of Ginsberg's [poem] "America," "America I've given you all and now I'm nothing." As she comments dryly in her journal, "what woman ever writes a poem 'America I love you'" (Kyger *Japan* 234). Kyger could develop an alternative to a poetics that, though tremendously popular, she felt to be ill fitting. (Russo "To Deal with Parts" 181).

Kyger indeed developed an "alternative" to Beat poetries like Ginsberg's own dramatic poetics (an alternative developed partly from the poetics of mentors Duncan and Spicer who, "to different degrees, preferred a poetic authority invested in the making of poems rather than in political self-expression") (Russo "To Deal with Parts" 182), but the excerpt above also illustrates her engagement with smaller-scale poetry that does away with "lofty proclamation and protestation," a poetics that "fits" better, both in terms of gender and meta-awareness. In some poems, it is about awareness (which interestingly, as "Sunday" demonstrates, contains no overt Buddhist markers); while in other poems, Kyger demonstrates how a focus on the ordinary *also* provides a gendered alternative to what poetry is supposed to do.

Conclusion

In this chapter's reading of the work of Whalen and Kyger, it has attempted to demonstrate how their work, while responding to similar cultural contexts and birthed from the same countercultural communities as the work of Snyder and other major Beat writers, gives us a completely different view of how Buddhism "looks" and what it "does" in American poetry than what many are used to hearing and seeing in Western Buddhism today. When thinking back to the content in Whalen and Kyger's work, there is very little overt Buddhism to be found at all. But is that "lack" of overt Buddhism a result of our own contemporary reading practices? Kyger and Whalen's work reveals Buddhist awareness to be messy, cluttered, and ordinary. It may be that we cannot "see" the Buddhism of their work because of the great influence of the sublime, epiphanic sense of awareness present in Hinton's anthology and in Snyder's poem "Piute Creek."

There is, instead, very little positive affect or meaning to take away from Whalen and Kyger's poetry. In delineating these points, this chapter has also tried to explain how their poetics may begin to "ruin," through the negation of telos, the "powerful edifice" of Western

Buddhism. Certainly, I see their work as poetry that opens up our appreciation of American Buddhist poetry beyond the sublimity of poetry suffused by Buddhist Romanticism. I extend this category of "American Buddhist poetry" even further in chapter four, where I show that once we recognize the influence of whiteness on this very category, we can begin to appreciate the ways that other authors, including Asian/American writers, have inscribed Buddhism into their work.

Whalen's cluttered poetics and Kyger's poetics of the ordinary reveal an underappreciated American Buddhist poetic lineage that appears to hold out a method of critique not unlike that which Walter Benjamin argues for in his examination of the *Trauerspiel*. The work of Whalen and Kyger should be of especial interest to literary and cultural critics due to its resistance to telos, its nonduality, and because it allows us to see the hyper-commodified, shiny Buddhism of the American mainstream for what it is, even as we appreciate the ways this poetry translates Buddhist ideas in "a stranger, more creaturely, light" (Wallis 20). Though this chapter has contrasted their work with Snyder's, in all three writers, we can see a literary "prehistory" to the major contemporary transpacific phenomenon of mindfulness.

Chapter Three

Alan Watts, the Maker Ethos, and Gary Snyder's "Cosmo-Political Project #1": Buddhism and Whiteness at Midcentury

> When somebody comes in from the Orient, with a new religion, which hasn't got *any* of these associations in our minds, all the words are new, all the rites are new. And yet somehow it has feeling in it. And we can get with that, you see? And we can *dig* that. And it can *do* something for us that it can't do in Japan.
>
> –Alan Watts, "The Houseboat Summit"

Introduction

This chapter centers on what occurs when Buddhism comes into contact with whiteness in its adaptations to American society. A major result of this process of contact is the erasure of Asian American Buddhisms and Asian American persons from the literature and literary histories of twentieth-century American Buddhist poetry. This erasure occurs when Euro American cultural producers approach cultural materials with an aim to *make* and *build* (rather than *know* or *teach*). What I am calling the "Maker ethos"—an approach to cultural materials that has this emphasis on making and building—shows us that the Beat relationship to Otherness is different than what has been theorized so far. Indeed, this chapter's explication of the Maker ethos reveals a new way to understand the cultural appropriations of this midcentury period. Though the Maker ethos is not always, or never only, extractive (in chapter four, I suggest that the Maker ethos helps us understand Asian/American Makers' inscriptions of Buddhism in poetry), this chapter details instances of Making that are extractive, appropriative.

In tracing out the ways Buddhism adapts to American culture—both as a result of the whiteness of the Makers (cultural producers) working with the tools of Buddhism *and* as a result of the needs of Japanese American Buddhists in a dangerously xenophobic society—the chapter also works to avoid reinscribing the disenfranchisement of Asian/American persons in this

pivotal moment of transpacific "translation." Though this chapter focuses largely on Alan Watts and his disqualification of Japanese American Buddhist translations of Buddhism—a disqualification rooted in the occlusions of whiteness—my next chapter examines Albert Saijo's poetic critique of the extractive potentialities of the Maker ethos. Saijo is loudly critical of extractive logic writ large in settler colonialism and imperialism, while Charles Leong, whom I examine in chapter five, bridges this chapter's points to the late-twentieth century American poetic avant-garde. Though these Asian Americans are friends with better-known Euro-American Beat writers, my examination of Asian American poetry and poetics takes place in chapter four.

First, this chapter delineates the ways in which seated meditation, a tool of Buddhism highly valued by white cultural producers in this period, becomes part of the economy of consumer desire in the twentieth century. At midcentury, meditation ("sitting *zazen*") was a tool valued by a few white male cultural producers; today, it is recommended and purveyed in medicine, psychology, and behavioral therapy, among other areas of culture. This "move" into the mainstream occurs in part because of cultural appropriation and because of the larger twentieth-century shift toward life-enhancing (rather than need-based) goods. The first chapter of this dissertation suggests that the practice of seated meditation drew interest in the context of the midcentury's increasingly palpable uncertainty. As I noted in chapter two and will expand upon below, part of this "uncertainty" was the sense of a dispersal of subjectivity—a diffusion of self, a scattering—that occurred because of the intangible "promise of happiness" that commodities purveyed. Seated meditation, which would later become absorbed into the range of meditative practices known as "mindfulness," becomes part of the "promise of happiness" held out by twentieth-century commodities—and because of the class and taste markers of the

"alternativeness" of Buddhism, an educated cultural elite later gravitates to this set of meditative practices.

Second, this chapter delineates the relationship of midcentury Euro American cultural producers to East Asian and Asian American Otherness. It shows that what we can call "Beat Zen" is not strictly Orientalist nor "Occidentalist" (James Brown's term)—though it is *both* of these. Nor is "Beat Zen" adequately explained by contemporary theorizations of cultural appropriation (though these are also at play here, as the recent work of Cathy Park Hong and Timothy Yu can be connected to this period). Beat Zen's relation to Otherness is best understood if we take into account that these Euro American cultural producers approached East Asian and Asian American cultural materials with specific aims to *make* and *build.* This means they were Makers, rather than scholars, Orientalists, or anthropologists, who classically approach the Other with an aim to explain the Other to Western society. I outline the specific implications of this new "Makerly" way of understanding Beat Zen below.

Though the chapter is interested in delineating that "Maker ethos," its main target is not white Buddhists; nor is the target, in fact, the San Francisco bohemian coterie that produced the diverse poetries that I discussed in chapter one. Rather, it is whiteness itself, as well as the ignorances it perpetuates, that is the main target here, and recent scholarship on Buddhism and whiteness illuminates why our opprobrium should be most accurately directed toward whiteness.

After considering some primary texts' articulations of the "poet as Maker," I then show how Gary Snyder theorized the "cosmo-political project" of the Makers, asking a central question: what *is* the politics of the Maker? Within the Maker ethos is a specific mode of appropriation, a taking and using of tools, and many Makers assume that all tools are equally available for that taking. This assumption is present in Euro American poets' own approach to

East Asian cultural materials that I described in chapter one, but is perhaps best illustrated by the work of Alan Watts, whose censure of the Buddhisms of diasporic Asian American communities, in particular of Japanese American Shin, or Pure Land, Buddhists, excludes Japanese Americans from the Makerly project of building counterculture in the U.S. Though all the Euro-American poets I have discussed in this dissertation are variously implicated in extractive approaches to Otherness, Watts's censure of Japanese American Buddhist communities appears to be the most harmful. I examine his disqualifications of Japanese American Buddhism as part of his Maker ethos while also detailing a specific instance in which he extracted the Zen Buddhist tool of sitting *zazen,* despite the fact that his Japanese Zen master did not offer this tool to him. This instance of extraction reveals Watts' inability to discern which tools are available to him and constitutes a harmful appropriation.

Watts' disqualification of Asian American Buddhisms—in claiming they were not "authentic"—stems from a failure of being interested in these diasporic forms of Buddhism. Yet this lack of interest is also a failure of being *invited to understand* Japanese American Buddhism, which had made a series of modifications and rhetorical choices for the sake of survival and for the future of Japanese Americans in a xenophobic, broadly white supremacist society. These diasporic communities' specific manifestations and translations of Buddhism, in addition to arguably being far more interesting than the "translations" of the white male convert Buddhists of the period, are *world-building actions* that until very recently were misunderstood—partly due to Watts's own misreading and harmful disqualification, as Michael K. Masatsugu has argued and as I will expand upon below. Yet rather than an allyship with diasporic Asian American Buddhist communities, which seems to have been what these very communities expected from their Euro American friends, what occurred was extraction and dismissal—a dismissal still felt

palpably today, as there remains a dearth of Asian American poets in the anthologies and literary histories of twentieth-century American poetry and poetics.

It is perhaps understandable why Watts disqualified Asian Americans from being part of his countercultural project—we cannot perhaps expect him to have fully seen his own whiteness, nor to have quite grasped the dangers of being Japanese American (and beyond that, a Japanese American Buddhist) at the time. Certainly, the hybridization of Japanese American Buddhism that occurred before, during, and after the incarceration of thousands of Japanese Americans involved rhetorical choices that were meant to insulate and camouflage these communities from danger; hence, we can perhaps expect Watts to have understood these communities as they perhaps preferred to be understood—as "too American" or "too Protestant." Yet in being unable to see how the broader American society impacted the choices of Japanese American Buddhists, Watts reveals the harmful side effects of the interaction of Buddhism with whiteness.

Chapter Orientations and Qualifications

This chapter is thus largely "about" what occurs when Buddhism comes into contact with whiteness. It examines whiteness's inability to know itself, to see itself, and focuses on white cultural producers' resulting inability to bring that knowledge into the calculations of their art. In *Race and Religion in American Buddhism: White Supremacy and Immigrant Adaptation* (2011), Joseph Cheah notes that the "vestiges of white supremacy ideology can still be detected today in the controversy surrounding who represents 'American Buddhism'" (Cheah 3).[64] Some of the

[64] Watts and others at midcentury contributed to the ongoing separation in the scholarship between white "convert" Buddhism and Other Buddhisms—not only the older, mainline Japanese American Buddhism I discuss in this chapter, but also more recent "immigrant" Buddhisms of Korean American, Thai American, and Chinese American Buddhisms, among others—Buddhisms that have come to the U.S. as a result of American imperialism and as an outgrowth of the Hart-Celler Immigration Act of 1965. See among other scholarship, Douglas M. Padgett's discussion of Thai Buddhism's unique translations and hybridizations in Florida in the early 2000s. Padgett, "The Translating Temple: Diasporic Buddhism in Florida," in Prebish, Charles S., ed., *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

roots of this very controversy can be found in the American midcentury. Jasmine Syedullah, summarizing Cheah, emphasizes that "in order to understand the story of Buddhism in the West," one must not focus solely on the anthropological and missionary origins of its arrival, nor on its "slow integration into American culture through the counterculture of the early-nineteenth-century romantics and mid-twentieth century Beats," but must "also recognize how whiteness has colored this story in ways we may be only just beginning to name" (Syedullah 154). This chapter is an attempt to "name" one of the ways that whiteness has "colored" this story.

I should clarify, of course, that the Euro American cultural producers of the midcentury are not perhaps the major villains of this period: given the larger oppressive, racist (Jim Crow-era), sexist cultural atmosphere of the 1950s, the choices of the bohemian poets of the San Francisco Renaissance, for example, are what we can call "progressive," in that their work critiques broader American hegemony and contends with WASP-era power and anticommunist ideological conformity. The more dangerous expression of Americanness seems to be, therefore, the settler colonial American ideologies of patriotism and anticommunism and the era's moral, sexual, and political conformities (though scholars increasingly understand whiteness to be embedded in all, or many, of these oppressive ideologies, and, as I examine in my next chapter, the work of Saijo reveals the Maker ethos to be imbricated in these ideologies as well).

The appropriative Buddhist subculture in the U.S. has, to some degree, been one of the more culturally conscientious milieus—for example, Snyder's impact on the environmental movement is probably a net positive, and the work of these "Makers" can perhaps be seen as an ultimately positive corrective to the period's oppressive cultural conditions (chapter one, for example, shows that San Francisco Renaissance poets, the Zen lineage included, contributed to postwar thought on the nature of "timely" uncertainty, over against a politics of certitude). But at

the same time, the Buddhist subculture from which the Zen lineage emerged has been very isolated in terms of its racial ethnic populations. It is and has been very white and has made injurious "moves"—indeed, it is at least partly responsible for the underrepresentation of Asian American poets in the esteemed lineages of the twentieth-century American poetic avant-garde. This chapter works to parse some of those injurious moves to understand how Buddhism, whiteness, and the "Maker ethos" intersect; it seeks to show how Buddhism can be seen as white-enabling, which is to say, as particularly conducive to affirming the occlusions, invisibilities, and (perhaps willful) ignorances of whiteness.

In focusing on whiteness and Buddhism, the chapter wants to keep two elements at the forefront as qualifiers: first, the diversity of Buddhist experience in America suggests that some of the disagreements over Buddhism's future in the U.S. are disagreements about doctrine and religious practice. Second, the heterogeneity of Buddhist religious practice, even in largely white sanghas (religious communities), means that we cannot conflate "white Buddhism" or "white Buddhists" with this Maker ethos. In other words, this commentary is not about Buddhist sanghas per se (there are other scholars who have treated this, many of them in American religious studies, Buddhist Studies, and American Studies). These complexities of religious experience and wide variety of doctrinal beliefs, even in Zen Buddhism alone, mean that this chapter's primary object of investigation is not white Buddhism, nor is it white Zen Buddhism; rather, the focus here is whiteness—both an ethnicity and an ideology that articulates itself as universality and, through systems of power, insulates itself from the sense that it represents and speaks not for all, but for some.

Buddhism cannot quite be used "against its will," since it is a soteriological, convert-seeking religion; however, it can be used and translated in ways that have a range of differing

effects. There is a difference between how Buddhism "goes about its business" as a discourse seeking converts and how whiteness and its operations within American society impact, harness, and instrumentalize Buddhism. This difference is more closely examined in my below section on "Buddhism and Whiteness." One way we can parse this difference is to ask: what makes these white cultural producers' uses and translations of Buddhism different from those in India who might have been the teachers of the Chinese, or the Chinese who were teachers of the Japanese, in the larger historical migrations of Buddhism? All of these migrations are cultural. Sitting *zazen*, or seated meditation, is a tool that is extracted in this period, cut from one cultural and ethnic community and employed in another equally cultural, ethnic community. The problem with this extraction is that Euro American cultural producers assume that their way of incorporating Buddhism does not have those cultural limits—and they in turn assume that those cultural limits also do not exist in the Asian American communities from which they extracted that tool. Buddhism as it is absorbed and deployed by whiteness does not seem to have a mythos in it; it feels down-to-earth, practical, not bound with superstition. When utilized by an ethnicity that articulates itself as universality, Buddhist religiousness and its ritual practices are cast as "psychology" or "mental health," or something else. However, humans are *always* bounded by the limits and hermeneutics of culture.

Again, if we pull back and remove the Beat counterculture entirely to look at Buddhism globally, it is true that there are doctrinal differences between different sects of Zen—*and* between Zen and the more general Pure Land orientation of the majority of Buddhists around the world. This is important to acknowledge because these differences exist and of course came into the United States as well. For in Japanese Zen Buddhist circles, there is much disagreement, partly due to the differences of interpretation within clerical lineages (we saw some of these

differences in my discussion of *The Platform Sutra* in chapter two). These differences of interpretation occur within Zen and are passed down; Zen Buddhism often takes its lineages as orthodoxy, with the passing of the lamp from one teacher to another.

What occurs with Alan Watts and others is that they *break from* those lineages and *further* an extractive process—and it is this process that this chapter is critical of. And yet even still, Western Buddhism, which derives from what David McMahan and Ann Gleig call "Buddhist Modernism," in the U.S. is so diverse that there are many white practitioners, and many sanghas made up of white practitioners, who do not engage in the kinds of Makerly extraction that Watts does.[65] Still further, even outside of Zen Buddhism, it is valid for Zen to criticize Pure Land Buddhism: they are different visions of Buddhism, and it is to be expected that a Zen practitioner would be critical of (what is seen as) the *faith*-orientation of Pure Land versus, in Zen, (what is seen as) *inquiry* as the methodology of what the Buddha offers. Zen can criticize Pure Land Buddhism, therefore, because of doctrinal differences; and even Japanese American Pure Land expressions of Buddhism are distinct from the Pure Land sects in China, Japan, and Korea. Meanwhile, Zen practitioners in Japan do tend to be more modern and practice-oriented in their religious attitudes. There is a modern, formal, practice-oriented movement in Buddhism in Korea, China, and Japan, where laypeope *do* go to retreat, taking long periods of silent retreat and practicing in a more monastic manner than would have happened in

[65] The term "Buddhist Modernism" refers to 'a historically new and distinct form of Buddhism that resulted from the encounter between traditional Asian Buddhism and Western modernity under the conditions of colonialism' (Gleig 23). Buddhist modernism evolved over decades in colonial contexts, as when the Theravada meditation revival began 'as a form of resistance to colonialism' in Myanmar (Gleig 24, see Braun). Common characteristics of the vision of Buddhism that emerged from years of reforms, many of them anti-colonial in nature, included 'a claim to return to the "original," "pure," and "authentic" teachings of the Buddha that have been distorted by cultural and institutional overlays; [and] a framing of Buddhism as a rational and empirical religion aligned with science' (Gleig 23). See David McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008; Erik Braun, *The Birth of Insight* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

earlier generations (further destabilizing the "convert" vs. "ethnic" argument that Buddhists of Asian descent do not sit *zazen* or meditate as white Buddhists do). My point here is to simply emphasize the *heterogeneity* of Buddhist sanghas and doctrinal differences in the U.S. and to clarify my own chapter's focus: the fact that the Maker ethos often functions in this period, in these social coteries, to harmfully extract—though we should always ask: who is using Buddhism? Where/when? And to what end? As I show in chapter four, the ethics of the Maker ethos depends on how these questions are answered.

It is thus fair game for one interpretation of Buddhism to differ with others; that is not my contention or my area of complaint. Rather, I want to focus on that assumption that all cultural practices and materials are available for use and for appropriation—and the resulting assumption that white cultural producers' modes of modifying and translating Buddhism *have no* cultural limits (due to whiteness's ethos of universality). What Alan Watts, for example, does not see, is that there are some cultural practices that are available and some that are not. This failure to discern is a moral failing.

In their work as Makers, it is Asian diasporas that come up as the expunged, the irrelevant. A major moral question of this chapter was raised in chapter one: how can we account for the fact that Asian and Asian American cultural producers are largely absent from the scholarship on and narratives about this famous midcentury transpacific moment? These diasporic communities, these individuals like Albert Saijo and Charles Leong, would have benefited by being included in this moment of cultural production. But Asian Americans were not included and did not benefit; and persons of Asian descent are thus still largely absent from the midcentury cultural productions themselves, the histories of those cultural productions, and from the anthologies of those cultural productions (though, it may be that Asian persons around

the globe *have* benefited from the Makers' work, even if diasporic Asians in America communities have *not*—a point perhaps evidenced by Chinese cultural institutions' recent valorization of the work of Gary Snyder). Also, though there is not room here to examine this hypothesis, it may be that this ongoing absence also informs the whiteness of the mindfulness movement and may further inform the fact that the tools of mindfulness are not as popular in contemporary Buddhist communities of color. In its attempt to broadly outline the kinds of appropriation occurring at midcentury as a result of what I am calling the "Maker ethos," the chapter seeks to understand how whiteness functioned and also seeks to understand what this omission of persons of Asian descent means morally.

Twentieth-Century Commodities of Future-Oriented Desire

The phenomena of *zazen,* which for many is now interchangeable with "mindfulness," should be contextualized within the larger twentieth-century shift of commodities from need-based to "life-enhancing" commodities that hold out a future-oriented promise to a consumer. From the late nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, a consumer society came into being because goods were increasingly "constructed and shaped (by advertising and marketing) into *objects of desire*" (Trachtenberg 130, qtd. in Schleifer *Political* 162). This process of "constructing" and "shaping" occurred in part due to the consolidation of corporate capitalism, which,

> by reducing the significance of relations of production, underwrites a culture in which value is constituted by the varieties of subject positions or social relations required to produce commodities ... and in which *the integrity of the self finally becomes a function of the modern subject's fragmentation and reconstruction*. This is a consumer culture because it presupposes the ubiquity of the commodity form but supersedes the categories

> of necessity, production, and class. (Livingston 112, qtd. in Schleifer *Political* 162, my emphasis)

Value, in such a consumer society, is constituted by "the varieties of subject positions or social relations," which produce commodities and which commodities themselves connote. This is to say that commodities increasingly become valuable for their ability to "mark" subjects as within a certain class, to mark one's identity within a network of social relations. This is a culture where the "integrity of the self" is continually "fragment[ed] and "reconstruct[ed]" because of those "varieties of subject positions," which always feel untenable in a society where class identity is a constantly moving object, a semiotic project that is never quite complete due to the lack of stable classes (Livingston 112, qtd. in Schleifer *Political* 162). From this turn-of-the-twentieth century modernist period to the present, the future-oriented promise that many life-enhancing commodities hold out to a consumer can be called the "promise of happiness," which is Stendhal's definition of art (borrowed by Adorno and Horkheimer and further drawn from in Fredric Jameson's *Late Marxism*) (2007). According to Stendhal, art is a "promise of happiness" (*promesse de bonheur*)—a definition that as Jameson notes, "takes on its power when we stress its constitutive incompleteness: art is not bliss, but rather the latter's *promise*" (Jameson 146-47).

This future-oriented promise of happiness is a major index to this early twentieth-century shift away from need-based goods to life-enhancing (or "social marking") commodities. Such a shift in commodities builds, of course, upon Marx's notion of the commodity, and arguably also corrects his account. For there is a problem with Marx's *Capital,* in which he "read[s] the whole system of capitalism out of the structure of the commodity" (Brown *Sense* 29). *Capital* is, as Bill Brown calls it, a "mystery story" because its "hermeneutic enterprise" of showing how one structural fact—"the fact that the commodity is both a thing and not a thing at all"—holds "the

rhetorical force" of a "richly described mystery" (29). Marx's account has a capacity "to convince us that there is truth—the whole truth of Capital understood as a system—lurk[ing] at the bottom of the mystery, lingering there, right there in the commodity" (Brown *Sense* 29). Yet, "predicated" as it is "on the difference between the commodity's apparent and actual source of value," the story of Capital in Marx's telling "never begins to address the mystery of *consumer desire*, without which capitalism (in any of its stages) cannot be sustained" (Brown *Sense* 29, my emphasis).

This "mystery of consumer desire" arises out of the "abundance" of goods in the new twentieth century. These goods, as Ronald Schleifer shows, did not *erase* subsistence—did not do away with those "categories of necessity, production, and class" that Livingston is pointing to—but instead rearranged individuals and groups' *relationship* to "the world of necessity, production, and class" (Schleifer *Political* 162). In such a consumer society—"a world in which large numbers of people consume goods and services beyond necessity, and even beyond comfort and luxury" (162)—there are many, if not endless, "*thinkable* possibilities of life-enhancement" akin to Stendhal's "promise of happiness" (162). These possibilities make consumption "symbolic" rather than need-based, "in that a consumable good – a pair of shoes when you already have shoes, a particular model of automobile, the house you live in – is vaguely felt to possess…a significance beyond use" (Schleifer *Political* 163).

The "significance beyond use" of life-enhancing commodities is its promise; or, looked at another way, involves "the nonmaterial (or at least non-positivist) phenomena at the heart of consumerism" (165). This is a shift *from* a "nonconsumption world" in which "goods are not 'used up' or consumed but take their place within the rhythms of creation, use, and repair" (164) and *toward* a system of exchange—in which: 1) "rhythms of activity are replaced by the silent

ubiquity of the market system and, with it, the ubiquity of advertising" (164); and 2) where "the silent ubiquity of the market system…pervades all aspects of experience, understanding, and social relations" (Schleifer *Political* 164).

Both Brown and Schleifer turn to Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) to illustrate this shift from need-based to life-enhancing commodities that pervades all aspects of experience and social relations. Young Carrie moves to "the big city" to realize her own American Dream. Looking for work in a department store, she is cast by Dreiser as a "victim of the city's hypnotic influence, the subject of the mesmeric operations of super-intelligible forces" and is "overcome by the merchandise displayed in the department store" (Brown *Sense* 33). Yet she is "overcome" not simply by the promises made by a seller to a buyer, but by the promises made "to the community in which they, corporation and consumer, exist" (Schleifer *Political* 168): for Carrie, in taking in "the intangible promises and desire of a consumer society" (168), saw that "there was nothing there which she could not have used" because all of the goods on display promised a "fulfillment…insofar as commodities *promised* a solid situation within the social structure" (169). Dreiser writes that there was "nothing which she did not long to own. The dainty slippers and stockings, the delicately frilled skirts and petticoats, the laces, ribbons, hair-combs, purses, all touched her with individual desire" (Dreiser 29, qtd. in Schleifer 169). Another visit to the store reveals the "vast persuasion" of "fine clothes":

> they spoke tenderly and Jesuitically for themselves. When she came within earshot of their pleading, desire in her bent a willing ear. The voice of the so-called inanimate! Who shall translate for us the language of the stones? "My dear," said the lace collar she secured from Partridge's, "I fit you beautifully; don't give me up." (Dreiser 103–4, qtd. in Schleifer *Political* 169)

The "theater" of the department store is one that arranges individual desire within the larger social structure, and this is its major missionary-like, "Jesuitic" persuasion, its promise. Yet this persuasiveness is also what brought Carrie *back* to the store, for the plethora of *tangible* commodities on display has for Carrie "create[d] the necessity "for all kinds of 'intangible' phenomena, including the very sense of (free-floating) desire, 'transcendence,' and momentary fulfillment afforded by consumption"—as well as "a sense of the always-to-be-achieved 'respectability' of a middle-class social status" (Schleifer *Political* 175).

This "always-to-be-achieved 'respectability'" is that future-oriented promise of happiness, embedded in how the department store's wares call to Carrie. This production of consumer desire "succeeds," Brown writes, "because consumption, possession, accumulation, and display appear as modes through which one might solve the ontological dilemma posed by the structural fact of inhabiting a democratic state…objects always mediate identity, and always fail to" (Brown *Sense* 48-49). The promises of these tangible commodities (which communicate and necessitate *intangible* phenomena) is that they will grant one a social status that never quite arrives, or never quite feels stable.

Advertised goods in particular, as Schleifer writes, generate the sense that those objects are necessary to one's "place in the world." Yet "when the desired object is obtained, one still feels a vague sense that one's being in the world – one's being as a consumer – is unfulfilled, and that there seems nothing in the world to fulfill it: except, perhaps, another pair of shoes, another trip, another dishwasher" (Schleifer *Political* 163). There is therefore a "seemingly endless multiplication of desired objects," which Schleifer calls the creation of "objectless desire" (163).

And this proliferation of "objectless desire" (163) is exacerbated by the continual deferral of the promised social status one is meant to achieve *by* consuming. Writing on Thorstein

Veblen's famous formulation of "leisure goods" and the "leisure class," Brown points to what readers of Veblen always seem to miss: "the absence of any leisure class in the U.S., despite the presence of wealth, leisure, and inequity" (Brown *Sense* 48). The absence of such a class activates "the mimetic rivalry Veblen describes. That is, the absence of stable class markers (the *absence of rank*) compels the subject to *mark*" (Brown 48, my emphasis). As when Carrie "secures" her lace collar, the subject must "mark" to "certify distinction"; yet she lives within a form of society where such distinction cannot be stabilized:

> if my things are not inherited and exclusively heritable rather than exchangeable—then how can my possessions genuinely distinguish me? The triumph and trial of capitalism in America, the virulence of consumerism in America, amounts to the fact that in the midst of proliferating things, the Thing is always missed. (Brown *Sense* 48)

In this state of things, once one's eagerness to obtain a commodity diminishes (upon "getting" it), desire becomes "diffuse, pervasive, and not quite consciously apprehended" (Schleifer *Political* 165). In chapter two, I showed how this "diffuse," "dispersed" desire appears in Philip Whalen and Joanne Kyger's Buddhist poetics of ordinary, "cluttered" awareness.

I want to suggest that this diffusiveness, this discomfort of the "diminishing commodity" that yields a desire for "some other thing," is part of the late-twentieth century discourse of anxiety and "stress"—and it is a condition to which the technology of mindfulness is continually applied as a remedy. Yet as I showed in chapter two, because mindfulness is increasingly cast as *delivering an outcome,* which is to say it is instrumentalized to deliver positive affect so that workers and subjects can return to their lives ostensibly *free* of those anxieties, it becomes part of the discourse—the reality—of consumer desire because of its promise of happiness. The telos of a Snyder poem, for example, paired with the Maker's ethos of taking and using these tools to

build, builds the groundwork for mindfulness's later great growth as a tool for remedying these difficulties of diffusive, scattered consumer desire (hence chapter two's contention that in Snyder's poetics one can locate a "prehistory" to the late-twentieth-century mindfulness movement).

Life-enhancing consumption causes the subject to be "consumed *by dispersal* across objects" (Schleifer *Political* 178, my emphasis). What occurs, then, is a dispersal of self across many objects and commodities, tangible and intangible. Desire becomes "flittingly and momentarily focused" (165), as in Carrie's sweep of the department store and, as Schleifer shows, in *Mrs. Dalloway,* where Clarissa, "sitting on the bus going up Shaftesbury Avenue":

> felt herself everywhere; not 'here, here, here'; and she tapped the back of the seat; but everywhere ... [In this way, she goes on to think,] our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide" (Woolf 231–2, qtd. in Schleifer *Political* 179).

Clarissa and Carrie are "dispersed" in relation to the "things" they encounter (Schleifer *Political* 179); similarly, John Xiros Cooper shows this dispersal in Leopold Bloom, who is "no 'man without qualities'"—he has "plenty of qualities"; rather, "what he lacks is a principle of order that organizes them into a practical hierarchy of values" (Cooper 166, qtd. in Schleifer *Political* 178-179). Without such a "principle of order that organizes" desire or the self, mass consumption becomes a respectable goal, while self-identity and self-fulfillment become "overriding aspirations" (Schleifer *Political* 166). This desire "inhabits – restructures – a new "kind" of subject, immersed in repeated momentary consumption and in the endless *dispersed energy* of desire" (Schleifer 166, my emphasis).

Mindfulness provides the subject with an ability to "watch" as one's desires, anxieties, or despairs move through the mind—it allows the subject an ability to take the "dispersed energ[ies] of desire" and empty them through meditation (Schleifer *Political* 166). The technology of meditation becomes an intangible commodity that, if repeated as a habit and/or a lifestyle, holds out a "promise of happiness" in its ostensible ability to empty out the dispersed energies of desire and attempt to reclaim some kind of self-identity.

It is these dispersed energies of desire that "commodify phenomenal objects of desire (including experience) beyond need" (Schleifer *Political* 168). This is the way in which mindfulness, which involves a seemingly uncommodifiable act of awareness, can in fact *be* commodified: If in the twentieth century, MasterCard could "position its owner to receive "priceless" experiences – which is to say, experiences that are neither necessary nor within the nexus of exchange-value," it might be that another late-twentieth century "phenomenal object of desire…beyond need" that was commodified is a clear headspace, a sense of grounded mental emptiness that ostensibly allows one to engage with the complexities of late-twentieth century phenomena and experience *without* that anxious sense of dispersal and diffusion of self (Schleifer *Political* 168). And since it is the practice of mindfulness that holds out the *promise* of that clear headspace—which I am describing as a commodifiable "object of desire beyond need"—mindfulness itself becomes valuable.

In this state of things, or "in such a world," Schleifer writes, "desire might well be described as the feeling of an intangible need, freefloating, with neither a definite lack nor a definite stable object to satisfy that lack" (168). That sense of lack itself is something *felt phenomenally* in the late twentieth century, as is the sense of *dispersal of self*—and thus, subjects, aware of the instability both of desire ("freefloating, intangible need" that arises in part

out of the absence of stable class markers that Brown describes) and of self, reach for a tool that empties out dispersal and instead promises *groundedness,* emptiness of space from which to reassess.

Indeed, it may be that the central "promise of happiness" innate to mindfulness as it has been repackaged and reframed over the past few decades is the promise of wholeness or centering—where "ancillary" anxieties turn out to be not just "ancillary," but perhaps not even real, not even something one has to deal with at all. This is a promise of happiness akin to Schleifer's description of how the art of advertising works, "which pursues acts of invitation, persuasion, and even 'lures and deceits' in order to create a sense of personal wholeness outside the fragmentations and anxieties of work inside and outside manual labor" (Schleifer *Political* 170). My point here is that mindfulness can be commodified, but that this very commodification comes out of modernist "abundances" of goods that shaped the world we still live in—one of life-enhancing commodities beyond need. As Schleifer notes, "this state of affairs is still with us" (162).

It is against this modernist "abundance," in part, that the Makers I discuss in this chapter are reacting. As is clear in the "Houseboat Summit" (a meeting between some of the larger-than-life countercultural figures of the 1960s—I describe it further below), Euro American cultural producers in the late 1960s value seated meditation because it is a technology that can remedy or address the overwhelming "dispersal" of subjectivity and desire that Schleifer and Brown describe. And, in addition to their inability to understand their cultural appropriations as potentially harmful, what these figures do not quite see is how mindfulness itself (what they would alternately call "meditation" or "sitting *zazen*") is part of this great shift toward life-enhancing goods that began in the modernist period and extends into our present moment. What

these men of the Houseboat Summit do not see, in other words, is how mindfulness, while a valuable *tool,* is also part of the "promise of happiness" of many other advertised and intangible goods of the twentieth century.

We can see this fact—that mindfulness is part of this shift toward life-enhancing goods—not only in the ways that mindfulness promises a positive affective mental space, as I noted in chapter two, but also in the ways that, later in the century, practices of mindfulness (along with all the "bells and whistles" of one's meditative practices, from actual meditative bells to chic yoga mats) become still another way to "*mark*"—to symbolically signify one's "wokeness," one's liberal values, one's free-thinking identity, or at the very least, the fact that one has had a liberal education, and this last marker is essentially a *class* marker. Mindfulness eventually helps to mark one's identity, one's values, one's position within society.

In the midst of their larger railing against the fakeness of midcentury American society, the Makers at the 1967 Houseboat Summit chastise "wretched women shopping" in Manhattan, disgusted that such women, like Dreiser's Carrie, appear to move through their lives completely unaware (or uncritical) of the ways they are coaxed into buying tangible goods. To these cultural producers at the Summit (Watts, Timothy Leary, Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, and Allen Cohen), such women are operating under a false consciousness; in their view, these women are "sheeple." Meanwhile, they see themselves as successful thinkers who "dropped out" and can thus presumably "really see" the *actual* state of American society in the late 1960s, which to them is plastic, fake (there is, they imply, no self-identity when consumer goods are mass-produced and everyone watches the same television shows every night). Yet like Carrie, the choices those "wretched women" make when shopping in Manhattan are the same choices many

subjects make when they choose mindfulness, which, because it *marks* and because it holds out a promise of happiness, is just as much a life-enhancing commodity as is Carrie's lace collar.

Beat Zen's Unique Relation to the Other: Orientalism? Occidentalism?

How these midcentury Makers—a category that encompasses a few more figures than those I discussed in chapter two—approached Otherness and Others' cultural materials is a question that needs scholarly attention because this Maker ethos does not easily fall under the theoretical ways we think about cultural appropriation and Otherness. As I showed in chapter one, these cultural producers saw "Buddhism," friendships with Asian Americans, and East Asian cultural materials as a set of *tools* by which they could fashion, or make, a new poetics.[66] It is the inability to differentiate between which cultural materials are available for appropriation that is the problem here; this inability to distinguish is the moral problem with their mode of appropriating (this further means that other Makers who do *not* operate based on this "inability to differentiate" probably inscribe Buddhism, and use Others' cultural materials in their work, in more ethical ways). Yet this moral problem is not adequately explained by the kinds of appropriation we see in Orientalism, for example. My suggestion, therefore, is that, rather than seeing these Euro-American cultural producers as simply Orientalist or simply "Occidentalist

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[66] I place Buddhism in quotes here (though not throughout this chapter) to point to the fact that the "Buddhism" that these cultural producers encountered was a result of decades of hybridization and many accretions of interpretation and translation. These midcentury 'Zennist' cultural producers were engaging with what scholars alternately call a 'hybrid Buddhism,' 'neo-Buddhism,' Buddhist Modernism, and Buddhist Romanticism. Because the cultural producers discussed in this article engage in Zen Buddhist meditative practices and are reading translations of Zen Buddhism, and because the 'Buddhism' they encountered was so remarkably hybrid, we can call their approach and interaction with Buddhism 'Zennist' (Jonathan Stalling's term to 'distinguish practitioners or advocates of Zen, rather than the family of discourses and traditions that make up Zen per se' (*Poetics* 27). There are, after all, Zen clerical and religious lineages that came into North America in completely different processes of transpacific crossing, and this dissertation does not claim to tell those stories. See David McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008; Bernard Faure, *Unmasking Buddhism Bernard Faure*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009; and Thanissaro Bhikku, 'The Roots of Buddhist Romanticism.' *Purity of Heart: Meditations on the Buddhist Path.* Valley Center, CA: Metta Forest Monastery, 2012. <www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/rootsofbuddhistromanticism.html>.

critics" (as James Brown argues), it is more accurate to view their relationship to East Asian materials as one of a Maker + tools. This Maker view allows us to place their cultural appropriation somewhere in-between an "Occidentalist" or Orientalist lens, which hold different motives for appropriating than those of the Maker. When considering, as John Yau does later in the twentieth century, that many of the American poetic avant-garde's ideas and assumptions about poesis share many of the characteristics of the Maker ethos, the stakes of outlining this Beat relation to Otherness perhaps become clearer (I take up this question of the relationship of the Maker ethos to the poetic avant-garde in chapter five).

Recent scholarship has argued, first, that the midcentury Zen practiced by white cultural producers emerged not from an Orientalist appropriation of "the East," but from the rhetorical power of "an Occidentalist, Japanese-centered criticism of American materialism" (Brown "Zen of Anarchy" 207). James Brown's phrase "Occidentalist, Japanese-centered criticism," as well as his general use of the terms "Occidentalist" and "Occidentalism" appear to mean a kind of strategic essentialism within his essay, but are better described as a cultural nationalism.[67] Despite the fact that "Occidentalism" is not quite the same thing as cultural nationalism, for Brown, Beat Zen, including the work of the Buddhist midcentury poets, arises not from an Orientalist impulse, but from the fact that Euro Americans were persuaded by the rhetorical posturing of Japanese cultural producers themselves. Influenced in this way, they then fashioned their work according to that same posture (and this is the rationale for his use of the term

[67] This essentialism was marshaled at the famous World's Parliament of Religions (an 1893 event that many scholars see as the pivotal moment when Zen was introduced to the "West") to great effect. And, as Brown notes, such a strategic essentialism was echoed by other major translators of Buddhism like D.T. Suzuki. However, it seems a problem to use this term as a stand-in for strategic essentialism when it has another agreed-upon meaning: "Occidentalism," generally understood as the counterpart to Orientalism, refers to a body of texts that contain ideological representations of "the West" or involve representations of the West that are dehumanizing, culturally reductive, and stereotypical.

"Occidentalism"). Brown's argument therefore suggests that the Beats were simply absorbing an argument produced *by the Japanese:* that Zen Buddhism is superior to Judeo-Christian religions and is a stronger candidate for a "modern" religion. Thus, for Brown, Beat Zen is primarily impacted by this view that originated *in* Japanese culture, *by* Japanese cultural producers.

One of the implications of this argument is that the Beats cannot be seen as Orientalist for simply echoing the views of Japanese cultural producers themselves. Brown's argument does not exactly excuse the Beats of their appropriative habits, but in casting the Beats as "Occidentalist critics of cold war culture" and in arguing that their understandings of Buddhism "were adopted directly from Japanese missionary Zen emergent from Meiji Zen's Occidentalist criticism of American and Western culture," Brown's essay does have the effect of lessening the opprobrium that might be directed against these white cultural producers (Brown "Zen of Anarchy" 233-34).[68] Brown's overall argument is compelling because of its specificity: the "understanding of Buddhism as a timeless, universal monastic religion equated with Asia itself and offering a liberation of the individual from the pitfalls of cold war consumerism and rationalism" *does* seem to be lifted directly from Japanese missionary work, and Meiji-era Japan did indeed deploy (which is to say, weaponize) Buddhism as part of its imperialist cultural nationalism (Brown "Zen of Anarchy" 233-34).[69] Yet, as I will argue, these poets cannot be excused from other

[68] For example, Brown argues that "Beat understandings of Buddhism as a timeless, universal monastic religion equated with Asia itself and offering a liberation of the individual from the pitfalls of cold war consumerism and rationalism were adopted directly from Japanese missionary Zen emergent from Meiji Zen's Occidentalist criticism of American and Western culture. In other words, the Beats who took Zen seriously were, foremost, Occidentalist critics of cold war culture" (Brown 233-34).

[69] Many have pointed to the great influence of the "New Buddhists" on Beat Zen. See *Poetics of Emptiness* for Jonathan Stalling's discussion of the "bodhisattva burden" that Japan marshaled within its imperialist encroachments in East Asia. Stalling also discusses the work of Fenollosa, who worked with the New Buddhists. Indeed, 'the Japanese teachers who visited American shores with the 1893 Parliament of World Religions were in part inspired by their own "New Buddhism,"' which was 'a response to the forcible repression of Buddhism by the Meiji authorities in favor of State Shinto' (Najarian 312). These Japanese teachers 'presented Buddhism in ways that would especially appeal to Westerners disaffected by their own religions' (Najarian 312). The World's Parliament of Religions has been discussed considerably. See, for example, Ketelaar, James E. 'Strategic Occidentalism: Meiji

rhetorical "moves" like disqualifying Asian American Buddhisms as inauthentically Buddhist (a move whose consequences are far from just rhetorical); nor does Brown's work excuse these white cultural producers' inability to grasp the moral dimensions of their appropriations.

For it is true that the Beats *were* Orientalist: in their writing, they exoticize, silence, or stereotype people of Asian descent, even Asian Americans who were their friends. Michael K. Masatsugu has demonstrated this Orientalism in Jack Kerouac and Lew Welch's representations of their Japanese American friend Albert Saijo (in their accounts of a road trip, they cast Saijo as silent, wise, passive: a sage-like figure who rarely spoke, but when he did, his speech emerged in tidy, haiku-like sayings. Saijo's account of the same trip is very different, in part because he sees himself as an active participant rather than a passive Orientalized figure) (Masatsugu "Haiku").[70] In addition, many primary sources penned by the poets and other Beat figures reflect the Orientalisms of broader American culture at the midcentury. Allen Ginsberg's 1953 letter, which I quoted in chapter one, is just one example of this; Gary Snyder's letters recounting his travels in 1950s Japan are loudly Orientalist and exoticist (Morgan).[71] Brown may be correct that the specific criticism of American materialism comes directly from the Japanese, but it is very difficult *not* to see Beat Zen as Orientalist, which is to say, as part of broader Western discourse that portrays "the East" and people of Asian descent in stereotypical, Orientalist, exoticized ways. Masatsugu is therefore right to argue that "the Beats extracted Buddhism from its long

Buddhists at the World's Parliament of Religions.' *Buddhist-Christian Studies* (1991): 37-56; and Sharf, Robert. 'The Zen of Japanese Nationalism.' In *Curators of the Buddha: the Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism*, edited by Jr. Donald S. Lopez, 106-60. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

[70] Masatsugu, "Haiku on the Road: Albert Saijo's Contested Historical Legacy." *Amerasia Journal* (2013): 57-82. This road trip was memorialized in: Kerouac, Jack, Albert Saijo and Lew Welch. *Trip Trap: Haiku on the Road.* Grey Fox Press, 1973, 1998.

[71] I have outlined one strong example of this in chapter 1, where I discuss Allen Ginsberg's letter to Neal Cassady. This letter contains a representation of "Asia" as both ancient and new, a continent that holds time-tested wisdoms only recently available to "the West." For Snyder's letters describing 1950s Japan, see Morgan 2009, in particular pages 11-12.

history and transformed it into a timeless essence that harked back to the solitary, monastic practice of ancient sages" (Masatsugu "Beyond" 440). These Euro American cultural producers were Orientalist and wrote texts that are Orientalist—Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* is just one example.

To be sure, the perspectives of Brown and Masatsugu are required reading because of their attention to parsing out precisely what the Beats' relation to Otherness was—an endeavor that few scholars have attempted.[72] Yet these Euro Americans' specific purposes for and uses of East Asian cultural materials are different from what both Brown and Masatsugu are describing. Neither Brown nor Masatsugu focus enough on the specific ways these cultural producers are appropriating. On the one hand, as Brown notes, their understanding of Buddhism is directly derived from the important framing of Buddhism by Japanese teachers at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions. Yet that is not enough of a framework to determine what is happening here, at midcentury, in terms of appropriation. Similarly, Masatsugu has done so much excellent work identifying not only the hybridizations of diasporic communities of the time, but also the tensions between diasporic Asian American Buddhisms and Euro American Buddhisms (indeed, this chapter would not be possible without his award-winning article's discussion of these tensions).[73] Yet while there is undoubtedly a lot of Orientalism present everywhere in this period,

[72] One reason for this lack of attention in literary studies is outlined by James Najarian: "The versions of Buddhism that are valorized in North America, and that American literature both descends from and proselytizes for, are interpretations of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism that emphasize individual meditation, solo retreats, individual vision, ecstatic states, and artistic expression. Many of the most important concerns, particularly ethical ones, fall by the wayside. Most importantly, Western Buddhist literature represents and argues for these unacknowledged romanticizations, however unconsciously" (313). This is to say that literary studies and Western Buddhist literature itself "propagandizes," through productions like *The Dharma Bums*, "for the replication of itself: it created (and still creates) the images of what Buddhism is supposed to be in the West" (313). If *The Dharma Bums*, for example, represents what "Buddhism is supposed to be," therefore, there is no real reason to examine Beat Zen's relation to Otherness—it ends up being folded into "what Buddhism *is."*

[73] "'Beyond this world of transiency and impermanence': Japanese Americans, Dharma Bums and the Making of American Buddhism in the Early Cold War Years." *Pacific Historical Review* 77:3 (August, 2008), 423-51. Winner, Arrington-Prucha Essay Prize, Western History Association.

Orientalism does not fully explain these cultural producers' relationship to Buddhism, nor their specific modes of appropriation—and it is literary studies that seems best equipped to trace out these modes of appropriation because they are innate to the poets' specific aims *in the making of* their poetry—aims which are grounded in the *building* of a new poetics and which extend outward into other projects, as seen in Gary Snyder's "cosmo-political project" that I describe below. In fact, I see this chapter's orientation toward the extractive *needs* of these young poets as something adjacent to the recent argument that we should return Orientalism, and Edward Said's legacy more generally, to *materiality:* Orientalism, as a few scholars have recently shown, is not innate to any white person's interaction with Asianness; it is not innate to colonialist Western societies (as Said's own writing suggested), but rather emerges from the material needs of empire (more on this below). Similarly, focusing on Euro-American poets' needs for new *materials* with which to build poetry allows us to parse the "Orientalism" and extractiveness of their work more precisely.

Instead of saying, "the Beats were Orientalist," we should ask: is the Makers' mode of appropriating (i.e., taking and using) East Asian cultural materials—is *that* Orientalist? I mean to ask after the specific way they appropriated East Asianness and incorporated it into their poetries and into their countercultural projects: is *that* figurative "translation" Orientalist—particularly if Orientalism is a textual, discursive phenomenon, a body of texts meant to inform or entertain readers *about* "the Orient," as Said argued?[74] Their work certainly contributed to broader popular

[74] Vivek Chibber has recently argued that, "precisely because of its classic status, and its continuing influence, Orientalism deserves a careful reexamination." Its importance as a moral anchor for the anti-imperialist Left has to be balanced against some of the other, less auspicious aspects of its legacy. In particular, alongside its excoriation of Western colonialism and its deep investigation of colonialism's ideological carapace, the book undeniably took several steps backward in the analysis of colonial expansion. Chibber, Vivek. "Orientalism and Its Afterlives." *Catalyst* Vol. 4 No. 3 Fall 2020
https://catalyst-journal.com/2020/12/orientalism-and-its-afterlives

American Orientalist ideas of Asianness. But perhaps far more sinister is the fact that these Euro American builders of counterculture erased the work and Buddhisms of Asian Americans in their own country and in a sense claimed American Buddhism as *theirs*. I am not sure that *that* erasure is strictly Orientalist, though it must have been informed by Orientalist thinking on their part. It seems to be more complex than that.

I voice these questions about Beat Zen and Orientalism alongside other contemporary scholars examining the legacy of Said's *Orientalism.*[75] One of the problematic legacies of Said's arguments is, as Chibber has shown, that Said specifically argues that Orientalism (i.e., the belief that "the West was ordained the center of moral and scientific progress, and the exotic and unchanging East was an object to be studied and apprehended, but always alien, always distant") (Chibber) was *causal to* colonialism. Chibber explains that "this [causal argument] implies that Orientalism is not so much a product of circumstances specific to a historical conjuncture, but rather something embedded deeply in Western culture itself" (Chibber). Though Said essentially suggests that Orientalism was "a putative continuity in Western discourse from Homer to Richard Nixon," colonialism was motivated by material interests, not by a transhistorical belief in the inferiority of the Orient. Said, therefore, "views Orientalism as in some way responsible for the rise of European colonialism, not just as its consequence" (Chibber). This is to suggest that Orientalism was "part of the enduring cognitive apparatus of the West," a suggestion whose conclusion, as Sadik Jalal al-'Azm noted, is that "Orientalism is not really a thoroughly modern

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[75] See Vivek Chibber, "Orientalism and its Afterlives." *Catalyst* Vol 4. No. 3, Fall 2020: https://catalyst-journal.com/2020/12/orientalism-and-its-afterlives; Hussein Omar, "Unexamined Life: The Too Many Faces of Edward Said" *The Baffler*. No. 58, July 2021 (a review of *Places of Mind: A Life of Edward Said* (2021) by Timothy Brennan); and Arif Dirlik's 1996 article, "Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism." *History and Theory* , Dec., 1996, Vol. 35, No. 4, pp. 96-118.

phenomenon … but is the natural product of an ancient and almost irresistible European bent of mind to misrepresent the realities of other cultures, peoples, and their languages, in favor of Occidental self-affirmation" (al-'Azm 5-26).

The problem of this conclusion is outlined by Aijaz Ahmad, who, in "a landmark assessment of [Said's] broader oeuvre," suggested that the critical problem was "the theoretical and political consequences of locating Orientalism in the deep recesses of Western culture rather than among the consequences of colonialism" (Chibber). Ahmad showed that one implication of Said's "argument, as well as his vocabulary," is that it "pushed strongly to displace the traditional interest-based explanations for colonialism, and toward [an explanation] relying on civilizational clashes" (Chibber). Many accounts of colonialist expansion note the central role of "material interests as the motivating factor in colonial rule": "For Marxists, it had been capitalists; for nationalists, it had been 'British interests'; for liberals, it was overly ambitious political leaders" (Chibber). However:

> if, in fact, Orientalism as a body of thought propels its believers toward the accumulation of territories, then it is not interests that drive the project, but a deeply rooted cultural disposition — a discourse, to put it in contemporary jargon. (Chibber)

Ahmad concludes:

> This idea of constituting Identity through Difference points, again, not to the realm of political economy … wherein colonization may be seen as a process of capitalist accumulation[,] but to a necessity which arises within discourse and has always been there at the origin of discourse, so that not only is the modern Orientalist presumably

> already there in Dante and Euripedes but modern imperialism itself appears to be an effect that arises, as if naturally, from the necessary practices of discourse. (Ahmad 182)

Following this logic, modern imperialism is not a consequence of historically-situated developments particular to a certain era, but is "an expression of a deeper ontological divide between East and West"; in other words, "we have gone from the culprit being British capitalists to its being "the West" — from classes to cultures" (Chibber).

My contention in this section aligns with these broader questions about the legacies of *Orientalism*: Yes, the Beats are Orientalist insofar as they represent East Asian and Asian American persons in exoticist and Orientalist ways; however, their motivations for engaging with East Asian and Asian American cultural materials are better understood as *colonialist* (or perhaps, simply, materialist)*;* i.e., motivated by material interests that located tools *useful* for the building of something (even if that "something" was poetics)—*not,* as Said might suggest, motivated by some transhistorical, innately western disposition to view the "East" in Orientalist ways. "Orientalism," Chibber continues, "*could not* have generated modern colonialism, or even contributed to it in any significant way. Its roots, therefore, have to be sought in political economy, not in European culture — much as materialists had argued for decades" (Chibber). Similarly, the roots of Beat Zen's relation to Otherness must be sought out in these cultural producers' specific *needs and uses for* East Asian cultural materials, *not* in some innately Western Orientalism (nor, even, in the Orientalist representations penned by Beat writers, though these of course deserve scholarly attention). Chibber concludes:

> placing the questions of class and capitalism back at the center of political and historical analysis of colonialism — and of the postcolonial states that followed in its wake…does not, by any means, entail a rejection of Orientalism itself. [Instead,] Said's great work

> will have to be embedded in an analytical framework that draws upon, and returns to, those categories that are missing from *Orientalism*, and that postcolonial theory has worked for more than a generation to either bury or forget — back to political economy. (Chibber)

In chapter four, I discuss how Albert Saijo's work shows the aggressive, political-economic factors behind colonialism. It is not about civilizational clashes nor about "the positing of an East-West dichotomy" in his work; it is about extraction, labor, and capital, and the harms these incur on the Earth and on humans. In this sense, his poetics returns *Orientalism* to the ground of political economy.

As for the Euro American Makers, their erasure of Asian American Buddhisms occurred because these writers sought out, in a colonialist manner, Asian Americans as tools (again, *not* primarily because of some innate Orientalist predisposition): they asked their Japanese American friend Albert Saijo how to "sit," treating his knowledge as a tool for their poetics. Similarly, Alan Watts approached Japanese Zen master Sokei-An Sasaki as a repository of knowledge that could help him build a counterculture. This means that they approached East Asian texts, Buddhist sutras, and Asian American Buddhists and friends not from the perspective of the anthropologist, Orientalist, or Sinologist—all academic identities and disciplines meant to build knowledge *about* the Other—but from the perspective of the Maker. As such, and as I hope to further verify below, they cannot be held to the same standards of accountability that scholars are, as when a religious studies scholar writes a book on 12th century Buddhisms in western China. An Orientalist—an expert on "the East"—has to be scholarly, accurate, and derives value from *explaining* another culture. Such figures have a moral responsibility to "get it right." However, though a maker is interested in Others' cultural materials, she does not claim to know

(and therefore teach) in the same manner as the old Orientalists did, but *uses*—sometimes indiscriminately—and in this "using," these midcentury makers failed to delineate which materials were available for taking/using in the first place (I expand upon the moral responsibilities of scholars versus Makers later in this chapter, in my discussion of Tim Ingold's book *Making* (2013); further, the admirable qualities of the Maker become clearer in chapter five's examination of the friendship of Snyder and Charles Leong, whose admiration for Snyder's approach to knowledge-making is palpable).

If the Makers, as I am arguing, saw Buddhism as a set of tools with which to *make* something new, this means they were approaching these tools and knowledges differently than other knowledge-makers like the Sinologist and classic Orientalist. Their work is therefore laced through with Orientalism, but to simply call Beat Zen (and its poetries, and the work of its cultural producers) Orientalist does not account for the fact that these were figures who used Buddhism to build counterculture, rather than contributing epistemological "truths" *about* the cultural Other (even though this is probably one of the effects of their poetics). So while they were certainly Orientalist across the board and even incorporated Orientalism into their writing (thus adding to the body of work that Said describes as a discursive wall of text and symbols that is detached from the "reality" of the Orient), we need a more precise way of parsing what was happening in this period; how whiteness worked here; and how these cultural producers were *not* building knowledge in quite the same way as the old Orientalists did (as a Sinologist would/does), but were building counterculture, which is a different project with different ethical demands. In other words, one cannot necessarily say to a Beat Buddhist: "You got that wrong." Another way of looking at this is to examine the many scholarly articles that are interested in whether the Beats were "authentically" Buddhist—whether their Buddhism was "real." Such

articles make similar arguments as the "volumes and articles written about early nineteenth-century authors and their relationships to the Dharma," most of which "go no further than proclaiming how an individual author's work 'seems like' or 'parallels' a scholar's own Buddhism" (Najarian 313).[76] Why do these articles feel so irrelevant? Because Beats interested in Zen did not aim to "get Buddhism right," but to *build* something with it.

Can one be held accountable for incorporating Others' cultural materials into a new transpacific aesthetics? Yes, but not in the same way that an anthropologist (one who builds knowledge about the Other) can. Yes, because we can differentiate the many materials that were, or were not, available to them (as we have seen, a Buddhist sutra is literally designed to be passed on and adapted to whomever, for whatever needs; however, the teacher-student relationship between Sokei-an Sasaki and Watts is not the same kind of cultural material as a sutra.) And it is in the materials that *were not* available to them—and Euro Americans' ignorant, hurtful responses to that unavailability—that we see more clearly how whiteness functioned here and how the Maker ethos sometimes functions to harmfully extract. If the midcentury poets could not perhaps see the "taking" part of their appropriation (whiteness occluded this self-awareness) and cannot exactly be held accountable for their "using" (it is not about "getting it right"), we can certainly hold them accountable for taking indiscriminately and for their disqualification of diasporic Buddhisms. Though their relationship to East Asian friends and cultural materials was one of the *Maker,* this does not excuse them from opprobrium; it merely

[76] Thus, Najarian explains, "we have volumes on Wordsworth and Zen, Emerson and Zen, Blake and Shelley and Buddhism, each identifying varieties of Romantic transcendence with Buddhist transcendence, or, more precisely, with the kinds of Romanticized transcendence that Western Buddhism, and Western Buddhist literature, has mined Buddhist practices for. Most of these readings of nineteenth-century literature are *inadequate*, *resorting* to fairly nonspecific terms such as "paths of connection," "coincidences," or "analogues" to connect Romantic and Buddhist ideas" (313).

means their relation to the cultural Other is not simply Occidentalist (by which Brown means the Beats reiterated a cultural nationalism/strategic essentialism formulated by the Japanese) or Orientalist (though it *is* both of those).

Below, I examine recent scholarly work on Buddhism and whiteness to illuminate what occurs when the two come into contact in the U.S. Ann Gleig's work, drawing on Joseph Cheah's, illuminates the difference between the ways Buddhism has always adapted to new cultures and the specific ways it adapts to a white supremacist society like the U.S. of the early and mid-twentieth century. After discussing Gleig and others' work, I show some of Snyder's wording on the "poet as Maker," which illustrates how these cultural producers viewed their role as "Makers"; then, I engage with a central question of this chapter: what is the politics of the Euro American Maker?

Ultimately, the strategic essentialisms that James Brown writes about are not incorrect, as I have noted, but what Brown may not have considered is how "Occidentalism" enables this new strand of Buddhism that will become embedded in late-capitalist global logic because of the ways in which whiteness extracts elements of Buddhism that serve to reinforce whiteness. Though I again want to be quite careful in emphasizing the broad diversity of Buddhist experience in America—even the heterogeneity of largely-white sanghas—my discussion of the Maker ethos is in this chapter (though not in chapter four) essentially a discussion of whiteness, of how the ignorances and occlusions of whiteness are enabled *by* Buddhism, in a sense. Buddhism at midcentury is therefore a particularly egregious example of white enablement, and this period shows how, despite the transpacific, intercultural origins of "Beat Zen," it perhaps does not have the productive, progressive political ends that its practitioners over several

generations have imagined themselves as being a part of (in this sense, my project "ruins" these assumptions of Buddhism's liberatory potential).

Buddhism and Whiteness

Recent work collected in *Buddhism and Whiteness: Critical Reflections* (2019) grapples with the problem of whiteness in American Buddhisms. The volume "offer[s] a collection of philosophical analyses of whiteness, race, and racism using Buddhist conceptual frameworks" (xvii). In each chapter, Buddhism (Buddhist concepts, understandings of suffering, philosophical orientations) is applied to "the nature of race and racism" and "the mechanisms of racial injustice" to demonstrate "the potential for dismantling such injustice" (xvii). The volume thus "recognize[s], and criticize[s], the ways in which white supremacy (as well as capitalism and patriarchy) are operative in Western Buddhism and the academic study of Buddhism in the West" (xvii). It is a unique text that combines scholarship and activism, Critical Philosophy of Race and Buddhist Philosophy—rare combinations inside or outside of academia (xvii).

The volume is positioned as a text that shows how Buddhism itself can begin to dismantle whiteness in American Buddhism and in American society. Like the Makers, it draws from Buddhism as a repository of resources, tools; only in this case, these tools are useful for dismantling white supremacy—or, at the very least, for revealing to Buddhist practitioners the ways in which whiteness works in American society and how it may be embedded in their own practices. Yet while volume's work generally demonstrates how Buddhism holds a set of tools that can dismantle white supremacy, what I hope my work reveals is that it is very difficult to see Buddhism in the American midcentury as anything other than white-enabling. Buddhism in this period is uniquely positioned, perhaps because of the ways it has been imported and translated into American bohemian groups at that point, to exacerbate problems of whiteness.

In its attention to the overwhelming whiteness of many contemporary American sanghas, *Buddhism and Whiteness* addresses the problem of "invisible whiteness as the center and normative yardstick to measure nonwhites"—a problem operating in many Buddhist sanghas and meditation centers "where white privilege is shrouded in ignoble yet seemingly golden silence, a gilded refusal to speak up lest one breaches the oneness that emptiness and interdependence connote" (Suh 3). This stubbornness against acknowledging the whiteness of Buddhism in America can be traced back to this pivotal midcentury moment, where white cultural producers "measured" Japanese American Buddhism against an invisible (to them) white yardstick and then criticized them when these diasporic communities did not measure up.

But also, some of the central ideas in Buddhism enable whiteness to continue to be both invisible and unseeing. In this midcentury period, white producers embraced the nondualism of Buddhism as an ostensibly anti-Enlightenment way of engaging with the world. As I showed in chapters one and two, Buddhism's nondualism and anti-teleological trappings were part of a larger cultural shift toward a non-positivist, Wittgensteinian understanding of "facts" of reality. Yet paired with whiteness, this nondualism can erase everything down to ultimate reality truth claims. When this occurs, it is difficult not to replicate whiteness and the privileges that follow from it in American society because everything (truth claims; ultimate reality) is what *you* think it is. Everything is easily reduced to whatever one's own definition of 'the truth' is. There is therefore no otherness: because there is no self, there is no other.

Scholars in *Buddhism and Whiteness* often turn to the work of Zenju Earthlyn Manuel, the first African American to receive Dharma transmission in Suzuki Roshi's Soto Zen Buddhist lineage, to illustrate how Buddhism's Two Truths doctrine (summarized below) transforms when it comes into contact with whiteness or is interpreted by white communities who do not see, or

do not acknowledge, their own whiteness. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's notion of the "difficult woman" that I referred to in chapter two, Sharon A. Suh explains how many well-meaning "good Buddhist" practitioners dismiss complaints of "bad Buddhists," who "give lie to the rhetoric of the emptiness that many white Buddhists allude to when abdicating any responsibility to speak up and out about injustices" (Suh 3).[77] Complaints lodged by "bad Buddhists" are easily dismissed "by invoking the Buddhist philosophical notion of Two Truths"—an invocation that "goes something like this":

> 'Buddhism adheres to the two truths theory after all—conventional truth and ultimate truth. Conventional truth means that gender, race, and sex are but conventions and heuristic designations, but, ultimately, they are not real. Through the lens of ultimate reality, these are but mere illusions.' (Suh 3)

This is that "rhetoric of emptiness" that "good Buddhists" often ascribe to when challenged to reckon with injustices. As Suh explains, "this defensive application of ultimate reality to the lived experience of difference does little more than render the critique empty of significant weight" (3). This rhetorical appeal to "ultimate reality" erases embodied difference and allows whiteness to "recenter itself through the language of emptiness. Such recourse to emptiness belies an equivalence drawn between whiteness and oneness that makes no room for the particulars of race, gender, and sexuality" (Suh 3-4). Manuel's work shows how, in "using such ancient teachings to promote favorable blindness, we end up turning away from the very types of lived experiences that motivated such teachings in the first place" (Suh 3, Manuel 27). (We shall

[77] Jonathan Stalling has traced the transformations of ideas, figures, artistic representations, and translations of East Asian and western concepts of emptiness in *Poetics of Emptiness,* in which "emptiness" is revealed to have an enormous history. Historically specific configurations of different Buddhist and Daoist discourses inform the radically different notions of emptiness put forth by the cultural producers in his study.

see this appeal to emptiness below in Snyder's 1968 letter to Allen Ginsberg.) This "favorable blindness" of whiteness, if left unexamined, can excuse well-meaning practitioners from needing to deal directly with the lived experiences of difference.

Ann Gleig turns to the cultural particularities of the American midcentury, showing how whiteness in American society simply exacerbated the effects of older Buddhist reforms that had been made in colonial contexts. Her chapter, "Undoing Whiteness in American Buddhist Modernism: Critical, Collective, and Contextual Turns," considers "the ways in which whiteness functioned in the construction of Buddhist modernism in Asia and has become amplified in its North American iterations" (Gleig 22). This term, "Buddhist modernism," refers to "a historically new and distinct form of Buddhism that resulted from the encounter between traditional Asian Buddhism and Western modernity under the conditions of colonialism" (Gleig 23).[78] This is a form of Buddhism that evolved over decades in colonial contexts, as when the Theravada meditation revival began "as a form of resistance to colonialism" in Myanmar/Burma (Gleig 24, see Braun).[79] The vision of Buddhism that emerged from years of reforms, many of them anti-colonial in nature, "selectively privileged aspects of Buddhism that were compatible

[78] Scholars George Bond, Donald Swearer, Donald S. Lopez, and David McMahan "examined the modern reformation of Buddhism across South-East Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (Gleig 23). George Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religions Tradition, Reinterpretation and Response* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988). Donald Swearer, *The Buddhist World of South-East Asia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995). Donald S. Lopez Jr., *A Modern Buddhist Bible: Essential Readings from East and West* (Boston: Beacon, 2002). David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008).

[79] Erik Braun, *The Birth of Insight* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). What happened here with Buddhist modernism was, "simultaneously demonstrating accommodation and resistance to colonialism, the vision of Buddhism that emerged from these reforms selectively privileged aspects of Buddhism that were compatible with modern Western discourses, particularly science, and discarded elements that were incompatible. Common characteristics include, 1) a claim to return to the 'original,' 'pure,' and 'authentic' teachings of the Buddha that have been distorted by cultural and institutional overlays; 2) a framing of Buddhism as a rational and empirical religion aligned with science; 3) a rejection of the traditional Theravadan separation of the mundane and supermundane levels and a blurring of the roles of the layperson and the monk; 4) a revival of meditation practice and a claim that Nibbana is an attainable goal in this lifetime fro not only monastics but also the laity; and 5) an interest in social reform issues such as gender equality" (Braun 23).

with modern Western discourses," and "given the colonial heritage and underpinnings of Buddhist modernism, it is tempting to dismiss it as an inherently white project"—indeed, there has been much scholarly disagreement on the subject of Buddhist modernism "because of its colonial origins and departure from traditional forms of Asian Buddhism" (Gleig 23).[80] Focusing on these problems, however, "fails to acknowledge the agency of Asian Buddhists in the creation of Buddhist modernism, the subversive ways Buddhist modernism functioned against colonialism, and risks assimilating Asian Buddhists and Asian American Buddhists to whiteness" (Gleig 24). Indeed, it may be that what Gleig and others call "Buddhist modernism" is in fact *less* white than we thought, given the world-building actions of Asian and Asian American Buddhists of the period.

Nevertheless, Gleig's unique addition to the large body of work on Buddhist modernism is to simply hone in on whiteness: "given the above considerations, I differentiate between Buddhist modernism as a complex historical and cultural phenomenon, which has served both radical and assimilative ends for Asian Buddhists, and whiteness as a component of Buddhist modernism" (24). Indeed, the component of whiteness "became particularly prominent and problematic when Buddhist modernism took root in North America" (Gleig 24). When "adopted and rearticulated" in "a white-dominant cultural context marked by an ongoing legacy of racial discrimination," Buddhist modernism's core characteristics—"a distinction between essential

[80] For example, McMahan shows that Asian Buddhists played a key role in fashioning Buddhist modernism (this is part of James Brown's arguments as well) (Gleig 24, McMahan 4-5). As another example, Erik Braun has shown that the Theravada meditation revival began "as a form of resistance to colonialism" in Myanmar/Burma (Gleig 24). Erik Braun, *The Birth of Insight* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). And of course, as Natalie Quli has cautioned, "scholarly critiques of the inauthenticity of Buddhist modernism too often fetishize Asians as the carriers of the 'traditional' and Westerners as the carriers of the 'modern,' thereby merely reinforcing and reproducing stereotypes of the passive Asian and the active Westerner" (Quli, qtd. in Gleig 24). Natalie Quli, "Western Self, Asian Other: Modernity, Authenticity, and Nostalgia for 'Tradition' in Buddhist Studies," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 16 (2009): 1-38, 18.

and cultural Buddhist practice, an emphasis on the universal nature of Dharma, and a focus on individual meditation experience"—became infused with new meanings, derived from American culture, "'in ways that preserve[d] the prevailing system of racial hegemony'" (Cheah *Race and Religion* 59-60, qtd. in Gleig 25).

Here, Gleig draws from Cheah's work, which differentiates between two forms of "rearticulation": cultural and racial. Himself drawing from Michael Omi and Howard Winant, Cheah "extends their work to define 'cultural rearticulation' as 'a way of representing religious tradition from another's culture into ideas and practices that are familiar and meaningful to people of one's own culture'" (Gleig 25, Cheah 60). This is an inevitable process of religious "travel" across cultural contexts, and examples from Buddhist history abound, including the Sinicization of Buddhism in China (Gleig 25). However, "cultural rearticulation," this process of religious "travel" in which religions adapt and evolve in new cultural contexts, is not the same as a "racial rearticulation," which Cheah defines as "'the acquisition of the beliefs and practices of another's religious tradition and infusing them with new meanings derived from one's own culture in ways that preserve the prevailing system of racial hegemony'" (Cheah *Race and Religion* 59-60, qtd. in Gleig 25).

In other words, Buddhism has always traveled into new cultures, and in doing so, it has always adapted, evolved, and adopted new forms of religious practice and expression. Yet what is different about the midcentury moment of "travel" and translation into new contexts is that Buddhism made its way into a society that "racially rearticulated" Buddhism—which is to say, cultural producers, unable to see the workings of whiteness, "infuse[d]" Buddhism with "new meanings" derived from their own racially structured society. These "meanings" served to preserve the system of racial hegemony even though many of these cultural producers saw

themselves as—indeed, *were*—radical agents of change within a society of which they were markedly critical (Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" is just one such expression of criticism).

In an attempt to further explicate the problems of whiteness' "favorable blindness" mentioned above, I want to return briefly to Gleig's point about the two major elements of Buddhist modernism that were particularly amenable to this "racial rearticulation." A major part of this rearticulation is "the entwinement of Buddhist modernist hermeneutics of the absolute and the universal with the discourse of whiteness" (Gleig 33). Drawing again from Manuel's Buddhist hermeneutics, Gleig excerpts Manuel's experience to illustrate the ways in which whiteness interacts with Buddhism's "Two Truths" doctrine (again, this is both a doctrine of "absolute truth (paramartha-satya), which refers to the ontological ultimate nature of reality, and relative truth (samvrrti-satya), which refers to conventional daily existence") (Gleig 33). Manuel's relationship to this doctrine was liberatory: she "experienced an immediate sense of personal liberation through the Two Truths doctrine," returning, in her words,

> to that expansive way of seeing myself before I was told that I could not go to a particular place because I was black. I returned to that original moment when I was born free from the hatred placed on darkness and on dark things and dark people. (Manuel "Difference and Harmony")

But despite this sense of personal liberation, Manuel "soon observed" that:

> [the Two Truths doctrine] and other related foundational Buddhist teachings such as *anatta* (no-self) and nonduality were being (mis)represented and (mis)interpreted in majority white American Zen sanghas as ways not to embrace and integrate the lived

> experience of difference that constitutes relative reality, but rather to attempt to erase and bypass it. (Gleig 34)

These teachings have often been "reductively translated to assert a basic sameness or universality among humans and to dismiss differences in identity as illusory and not of significance" (34). When rearticulated in American society by Euro American cultural producers who cannot see whiteness, "ultimate reality" and absolute truths "enable whiteness to flourish under the guise of a false universalism or superficial 'oneness'" (Gleig 38).

Thus, Buddhist modernism's teachings of "absolute oneness" and "universalism"—perhaps revolutionary in "Asian cultural contexts marked by rigid social hierarchies…such as the caste system in India"—function in North America to "reproduce and reinforce dominant cultural hierarchies" because in the United States, "the category and lived experience of identity is not the same for white people and for people of color" (Gleig 38, 34). Indeed, dismissals of identity "conveyed by the unskillful presentation of these teachings" of Two Truths "can evoke the traumatic social and political erasure and exclusion of their communities" (Gleig 34). And that—social and political erasure and exclusion—is precisely what happened at midcentury when Euro American Makers, unable to see their own whiteness and the ways that whiteness impacted their interpretation and practice of Buddhism, and in turn unable to see how whiteness and violent xenophobias would impact Japanese American expressions of Buddhism, disqualified Japanese American Buddhists from being part of their projects.

Approaching the Other for Guidance, Knowledge, or Extraction

As I have suggested above, the Maker is interested in a different kind of knowing and learning than that of the academy, whose legitimacy is founded on a principal epistemological claim: "the claim of the academy [is] to deliver an authoritative account of how the world works,

or to reveal the reality behind the illusion of appearances" (Ingold 2). In contrast, Tim Ingold writes in *Making* (2013) about a different approach, one of "learning to learn" by "learning with." Rather than taking on the role of the knower or observer as someone situated "outside of the world of which he or she seeks knowledge," which implies that the world or the Other is an *object*, Ingold's version of "knowing" is embodied, is a combination of "knowing and being." This is different from science's normative view of humans, in which human beings "are a species of nature, yet to be human is to transcend that nature" (Ingold 5). In this normative view, "it is already taken for granted that the world is given to science not as part of any offering or commitment but as a reserve or residue that is there *for the taking*" (5, my emphasis). Ingold's problem is the ways that this normative view has at times informed disciplines like anthropology:

> Disguised as social scientists we enter this world either by stealth, feigning invisibility, or under false pretenses by claiming we have come to learn from teachers whose words are heeded not for the guidance they have to offer but as evidence of how they think, of their beliefs or attitudes. Then, as soon as we have filled our bags, we cut and run. (Ingold 5)

Such an approach to the Other is, as Ingold says, "fundamentally unethical" (5).

For Ingold, this "filling of bags" only to "cut and run" is the theorist's approach, one that "makes through thinking." Alternatively, there is the position of the ally—"support, do not touch" the Other culture. But Ingold proposes a third option, the "craftsman's" approach, which he calls "an art of inquiry" that "thinks through making" (6):

> What then is the relation between thinking and making? To this, the theorist and the craftsman would give different answers. It is not that the former only thinks and the latter only makes, but that the one makes through thinking and the other thinks through

> making. The theorist does his thinking in his head, and only then applies the forms of thought to the substance of the material world. The way of the craftsman, by contrast, is to allow knowledge to grow from the crucible of our practical and observational engagements with the beings and things around us. (Ingold 6)

Ingold's excerpt above parallels some of my arguments in chapter one, where I differentiated between the logical positivists and a few cultural producers, including Ludwig Wittgenstein, who broadly suggest that knowledge should "grow from the crucible of our practical and observational engagements with the beings and things around us" (Ingold 6). But as may be clear already, Ingold's conception of the craftsman illustrates to a certain extent what I myself mean by "the maker." The Zen lineage poets are "makers," "craftsmen" in this sense: I explained how they are so in chapter one, where Whalen's encounter with Zen texts and his meditative practice helped him "get past" the modernists because it showed him another mode of "making" poetry than what his contemporaries the New Critics were doing at the time (like Ingold's theorist described above, the New Critics positivistically "appl[ied] forms of thought to the substance" of language) (Ingold 6).

In Snyder and Ginsberg's letters from 1961, they theorize about this "way of the craftsman", seeing the poet as a Maker, someone who wields tools for the creation of something new. In one letter, Ginsberg finds himself discouraged as a poet/writer because many other tools of developing consciousness that had arrived by 1961 appeared to have dislodged his status, his important work, as a poet:

> I see no way of writing at the moment since my original interest was something like mind transmission and present scientific research techniques have made great leap forward and

> perhaps by now obviated words…That is, any aesthetic thrill or awareness a poem can bring can be catalyzed by wires and drugs, much more precisely. (Morgan 35)

This letter about writer's block worries that other figures are taking this area of exploration and expertise away from him, that perhaps due to the rising interest in "mind-break[ing]" exercises and substances, he as a poet cannot contribute. William Burroughs' cut-up method, the Buddhist "koan method," Timothy Leary's experiments with LSD, drugs, and "wires" are now also tools for "catalyzing" awareness and "breaking the mind" (Morgan 35). And, indeed, poetry can do this, too, as we saw in chapter two; but Ginsberg's fear is that these other tools will far outstrip the ability of poetics to bring about awareness.

Snyder's reply, penned about a month after Ginsberg's letter, is to argue for the unique role of the poet as Maker—someone who *wields* those tools in a powerful way. Responding to Ginsberg's chagrin at seemingly no longer being able to contribute to what he calls the "present world psychic struggle," Snyder encourages him by taking a broad view of history. "Listen man," he writes, "the non-Western cultures have been doing what Burroughs is up to (part of it anyhow) for thousands of years…i.e. the dissociation of consciousness through techniques" (Morgan 35). The difference between what the poet does and what the "psychological researchers are just now studying" is two kinds of work:

> no wire or pill will ever put poet out of work, any more than it did in the past, in yoga India, say: because the wire or pill today is simply the equivalent of the ascetic technique in ancient times and other cultures…if one wants far-outness and insight through dissociation he NEVER DID go to a poet, he went to a man who could show him the drug or the best ways to dance, etc… (Morgan 35-36)

The poet is not a peddler, in other words: to get "far-outness…through dissociation," one goes to "a man who could show him the drug" itself (35-36). However, Snyder writes, the poet "has another work" that is "in language":

> not to be free of the word, but TO MAKE THE WORD FREE, sit down on the tongue of any man in the world…and, to celebrate his insight, to sing, to tell, to push the hearer's mind of words far as it goes. (Morgan 36)

The poet's "prime aim is…something a bit else"—to take those techniques and tools and forge something new, whether that new thing be a song, a story, or an "insight" (36). He supports Ginsberg as a friend and encourages Ginsberg as poet by arguing that the poet's unique calling is to *make:*

> You Allen Ginsberg aren't great just because you're a see-er, but because you make it with the Muse too...And [I] passionately believe nothing will ever put poet out of business, he sees and he MAKES. (Morgan 36)

Snyder's language here echoes Ingold's "way of the craftsman," whose work is to gather the techniques, pills, or "best ways to dance" and learn through the making. Many of Ingold's chapters are case studies of "making": in the second chapter, he describes how he and his students wove baskets in Aberdeen to illustrate the craftsman's mode of thinking through making; and in this case, the materials out of which their new "craftsman's" knowledge grew were immediately and unproblematically available to them. Thus, to take those materials for the making of baskets is an ethical form of "making."

But the ethics of taking and using materials—to "make it with the Muse"—depends very crucially on whether those materials were truly available to the maker. Or, in other words, the ethics of the craftsman depends on her ability to distinguish between materials that are appropriate for use and those that are inappropriate for use or are unavailable. The Euro Americans I am writing about seem to straddle a fine line between Ingold's craftsman and the culturally appropriative "theorist." They appear to fill a different category (or perhaps they are a combination of the theorist and the craftsman): they are "makers" who *do* approach the Other for guidance but because of whiteness, cannot differentiate which elements and tools they are allowed to work with, instead assuming, as in Ingold's description of the normative view of science, that "the world is given…not as part of any offering or commitment but as a reserve or residue that is there for the taking" (Ingold 5).

These midcentury poet-makers do genuinely "come to learn from teachers whose words are heeded…for the guidance they have to offer"—but tended to "make" counterculture by using some cultural materials that were not on offer (i.e., extracting cultural materials from actual friends). Further, once the white Makers learned to sit zazen, Asian American persons (Makers in their own right) largely disappear from the interviews, autobiographical works, and the larger body of texts that has now built our scholarly and popular understanding of this pivotal Beat transpacific moment (in chapter four, I point to two recent scholarly texts that omit Saijo and Leong). This is not just about an absentminded exclusion of their Asian American friends in the acknowledgements section of a given book of poetry; it is instead about the fact that interviews, anthologies, autobiographical accounts, and a large amount of scholarship on Beats has excluded Asian Americans from this story, partly as a result of how the larger-than-life Beat figures

themselves tell the story of their "cosmo-political project" (see my discussion of *The Dharma Bums* below).

In Meghan Warner Mettler's 2018 book *How to Reach Japan by Subway: America's Fascination with Japanese Culture, 1945-1965,* she echoes some of Masatsugu's arguments about Beat-era cultural producers: that, "granting themselves authority of interpretation, they created a new philosophy to suit their own tastes by picking and choosing as they liked, rather than attempting to sincerely comprehend the viewpoint of those who lived the culture and religion as a regular part of their lives" (Warner Mettler 178). This is correct. But I am suggesting that there should not be this expectation for them to "comprehend the viewpoint of those who lived the culture and religion," since their aims and projects were not that of the scholar. Certainly, Mettler is right that "they nevertheless took a privileged position in utilizing Zen and other various Buddhist practices" and that their "picking and choosing as they liked" was a problem. Yet this "picking and choosing" is problematic *not* because they needed to represent Buddhism accurately or "comprehend the viewpoint of those who lived the culture and religion," though many, myself included, would prefer that they had attempted to do so. Rather, their "picking and choosing" is unethical because they either were not able to differentiate between what tools were available to them or did not care to differentiate (Warner Mettler 178). The real problem is not that they "got it wrong," but that they morally failed to *take care* in that picking and choosing of tools—a moral failure that also meant that they would not raise up or support the work of their Asian American friends, as I show in chapters four and five and below.

An Extractive Relationship: Alan Watts and Sokei-An Sasaki

The relationship between Alan Watts and Sokei-an Sasaki, his teacher for the better part of a year in 1938, illustrates how an initial approach to the Other for guidance quickly became an

extractive approach that is morally fraught.[81] Despite the fact that, in his 1935 book *The Spirit of Zen,* Watts argued that Zen had "no doctrinal teaching, no study of scriptures, no formal program of spiritual development," Watts himself actually studied under a Zen master, Sokei-An Sasaki, a Zen scholar and monk who had settled in New York City (after a series of difficult moves from Japan to California, back to Japan, and finally to New York City) (Watts *Spirit of Zen* 1958 25-30, qtd. in Masatsugu "Beyond" 438).[82] Watts's relationship with Sasaki soured when he disagreed with his teacher's methods of *sanzen* study, which centers on the interpretation of *koans,* and instead took up *zazen* study.[83] We can certainly see this "souring" as a result of a valid doctrinal disagreement, but it is also true that Watts extracted cultural materials from Sasaki while also Orientalizing and erasing him.

In his autobiography *In My Own Way*, Watts is critical of Sasaki's knowledge and practice, comparing what he sees in Sasaki to what he has read and studied himself. He had asked Sasaki to teach him in 1938, Sasaki being one of the few Zen masters in the U.S. at the time "and indeed, the only one I had ever met," "although," Watts qualifies, "in Asia it is often the custom to shop around for a teacher with whom one feels a special rapport" (Watts *Own Way* 163). Sasaki agreed, and in Watts's telling, he accepted Watts with "the odd observation that 'a

[81] Sokei-an Sasaki had studied art in Tokyo and was a painter, carver and sculptor. He then went on to become a student of the famous Zen master Sokatsu Shaku (Furlong 68). Sokatsu and some of his students, Sokei-an included, moved to San Francisco in 1906 and then attempted a life farming in Hayward, California, but were unsuccessful. After a brief marriage, he returned to Japan, where his old teacher was then living. "There," Furlong writes, "he gave himself up at last to his Zen studies" (68). He was authorized to teach by the age of forty-eight "and told to return to America where his life's work would henceforth be" (Furlong 69). After a "rich Japanese businessman" funded him, he was able to take a couple of rooms in New York City and slowly began to acquire students (68-69). There, he founded the Buddhist Society of America in May of 1931.

[82] As Masatsugu notes, Watts maintained "this idiosyncratic vision of Buddhism" even though his study under Sokei-An Sasaki would seem to have suggested the opposite: Zen study under Sasaki was indeed formal, and this formal rigor was actually the reason why Watts left Zen study under this master.

[83] Pronounced *koh-ahn,* koans are seemingly irresolvable riddles presented to a practitioner by a Zen master and are designed to jar recipients from conventional frames of reference and understanding, ultimately developing a new awareness (Masatsugu "Beyond" 438 n46).

person with a good brain' could get well into Zen within three or four years"—this was "odd" to Watts "because I was under the impression that Zen involved something far more than 'brains' in the usual intellectual sense of the word" (Watts *Own Way* 163). Still, "contrary to my lone-wolf inclination to find my own way," Watts writes, "I worked along with him for several weeks" (163-64). In these quotes, Watts discounts Sasaki's expertise, suggesting that he worked "along with" Sasaki against his better judgment (163).

Over time, Watts grew weary of Sasaki's program of study, which was *sanzen,* a study that occurs through private discussion about the interpretation of a *koan.* Watts, again signaling a wariness about this program of study, notes that this method of handling *koan* "is quite formal, since every *koan* has to be answered in a specific way—which seemed to be hunting for a needle in a haystack" (164). Watts himself "preferred the informal approach of such ancient Chinese masters as Hui-neng, Shen-hui, and Matsu whose methods followed no codified system" (Watts *Own Way* 164). This "preference," again, can be seen as a valid doctrinal disagreement: as chapter two noted, Huineng's famous intervention in Zen created a whole new lineage of Buddhism, and it appears Watts sees himself as a member of this school of thought.

Yet even as early as 1938, Watts sought out the practice of *zazen,* or "sitting in meditation," over the program of study assigned to him by an actual Zen master, preferring *zazen'*s individual, "lone wolf" approach to "silencing the perpetual chatter in the skull" (Watts *Own Way* 164n1). He found it "strange" that Sokei-an "gave no instruction in *zazen*…nor were sessions for *zazen* held in his temple" (164). Instead, Watts learned to sit *zazen* from Ruth Everett, a close friend of Sasaki's at the time and the person who had introduced him to Sasaki in the first place (she would later marry Sasaki). Watts preferred the individual rigor of *zazen* instead of *sanzen,* a method of teaching that is social in nature, as it involves private interviews

needed to tease out the wisdoms of *koans.* Sanzen study also appears to have included lectures to the community that would meet at Sasaki's temple (Watts *Own Way* 164).[84] Instead, Watts seeks out *zazen* and breaks his teacher-student relationship with Sasaki.

Monica Furlong's biography of Watts (1987) details how their teacher-student relationship came to an end. After working "extremely hard" for about 9 months in Sasaki's program of study, Watts' initial enthusiasm turned into "bored[om] and ang[er]": "he reached a point of near-intolerable frustration and felt as if he was looking for a needle in a haystack" (Furlong 70). Furlong writes:

> The irony was that, in *The Spirit of Zen,* he had described this sort of discouragement as an essential stage in the pupil's development, the suffering described as an iron ball in the throat which could neither be swallowed down nor spat out. It was indeed precisely the experience of being driven 'out of one's mind,' and thus on to another level of awareness altogether, that the *koan* so uncomfortably existed to promote. (Furlong 69)

Furlong theorizes that Watts either "did not have enough trust in Sokei-an to undergo this ordeal at his hands," or may have found the "role of apprentice too humiliating to be bearable" (69).[85] One day, Watts lost his temper in *sanzen,* "shouting at his teacher that he was right. 'No, you're not right,' Sokei-an replied. That was the end of formal Zen study" (Furlong 70). Unable to separate himself from Sasaki completely, he decided Sasaki could still teach him something, but given that "he resented the teacher/pupil role," he came up with a different solution (Furlong 70).

[84] Watts wrote that "I learned about *za-zen* from Ruth [Sasaki's wife], even though she herself was not seriously practicing it at this time" (Watts *In My Own Way*164)

[85] Noting that "other pupils saw Sokei-an very differently"—"he was formidably silent, and the silence created a vacuum in which the pupil was drawn out of his or her habitual self into a new awareness of the One"—Furlong explains that "either Watts did not see this or his envy of the rival spellbinder was insupportable" (70).

His solution was to engage in "a kind of surreptitious observation of Sokei-an, a study of how a Zen master lived as he went about his daily life" (Furlong 70). Watts writes:

> I decided, therefore, to change my approach and study with Sokei-an without his knowing it. I wanted to observe a Zen master in his personal everyday life, and for this I had ample opportunity, since he visited us often at the hotel, and accompanied us to restaurants and for drives about the countryside. (165)

Furlong's biography, of course, which details the heated exchange between teacher and student, tells it differently than this cool "decision…to change [his] approach" (Watts *Own Way* 165). But what I want to emphasize here is the shift in the power dynamics of their relationship. Though these are the activities friends might engage in—drives around the countryside, dinners at restaurants—Watts here takes on a different relationship to Sasaki than that of student or friend. Watts has made Sasaki an object of study. Ironically, on the same page that he details this "decision…to change his approach," Watts scoffs at the "dreary pandits of the American Oriental Society," the "in-group of academic Orientalists who, as librarians, philological nit-pickers, and scholarly drudges, dissolve all creative interest into acidulated pedantry" (Watts *Own Way* 165). Here Watts delineates and clearly separates himself out from this group that "turn[s] all creative interest into acidulated pedantry" (165).

Yet Watts's choice to approach Sasaki in this new, distant way, as someone studying the Other, makes it hard *not* to see him as a similar kind of "knower" as the Orientalists. Certainly, the ways he will use this new knowledge of Sasaki will likely not become part of a monograph about Zen masters (as a scholar might use such knowledge), but his approach to Sasaki mirrors that of the anthropologist who "cuts and runs" after "filling his bag," to use Ingold's phrasing. He clearly did not trust Sasaki to teach him, and thus shifted the power dynamic of the

relationship in his own favor, silencing Sasaki and making the man himself an object of study rather than an agent. Despite Watts's initial aim to study *with* Sasaki, he ends up *studying Sasaki.* It becomes a relationship of extraction, and the narrative effect of this is to erase Sasaki as agent from the story of Beat Zen, since for Watts, *sanzen* very clearly is *not* the best way to study Zen. Instead, for Watts, meditation via *zazen* is. And he learned *zazen* from someone else. Therefore, Sasaki is relegated to the sidelines of this Beat Zen game—just as he was relegated to an object of study in Watts' quote above—since Watts seems to believe he did not really learn much from him—only *about* him.

Beyond this rearrangement of the power dynamics where Sasaki become an object, it should be noted that Watts took cultural material not on offer to him: the practice of sitting *zazen.* Certainly, Sasaki's "major teaching was not *zazen*—there was no *sesshin* [a period of intense meditation] at his zendo either—only *sanzen*, the private interview in which *koans* were assigned and discussed"—yet by 1938, the year Watts began his program of *sanzen* study, Sasaki had some thirty students who would meet for *zazen* for about half an hour at a time (Furlong 69). What is interesting here is that Sasaki was trained in *zazen* as well, but had determined that for Watts, the best mode of study would be *sanzen.* This does not mean, as Watts believes, that Sasaki did not have *zazen* in his teaching arsenal. It simply means that Sasaki made *zazen* unavailable to Watts. This form of study was not on offer to the Englishman.

Thus, what Watts chose to interpret as Sasaki not "doing it right" was in fact a lack of an invitation: Sasaki did not invite Watts to study Zen in this way.[86] But Watts, it seems, does not

[86] In a footnote presumably written for readers unfamiliar with Zen, Watts briefly explains the origins of Ch'an in China and then Zen in Japan, and notes that many Zen centers are available to Americans at the time of writing (1970s). But the footnote also implies that Sasaki is doing it wrong:

> [Zen Buddhism] continues, in its own way, the general practice of Buddhism, which is to free to mind from its habitual confusion of words, ideas, and concepts with reality, and from all those emotional disturbances and

see that this tool of Buddhist practice was not available. Because of this blindness, he not only disqualifies Sasaki for being a poor teacher, but also omits him from the story of the transmission of Zen Buddhist practices in America (instead implying that he himself, through his own studies, and Ruth Everett Sasaki, who taught him "to sit," were his "real" teachers). In fact, we might take his "lone wolf" approach to study, echoed in the title of his autobiography, *In My Own Way*, as an argument that he taught himself how to be Buddhist. The omission of his actual teachers is perhaps best illustrated in Watts's own excerpt above, which shows a shift from student/teacher to knower/object.

In the case of Sokei-an Sasaki training Alan Watts, this was very clearly a case of Sasaki making a few Buddhist tools available to Watts. But Watts, frustrated with the limited range of tools Sasaki offered, in turn disqualified Sasaki completely. Watts gets into moral trouble here because once he disqualifies Sokei-an, he still cannot bring himself not to learn *something* from (or rather, about) Sasaki. In his drive to do things "his way," and in his words "determine his vocation in America," he then takes on the characteristics of the Orientalists he so despises, instead *observing* Sokei-an the Zen master in the hopes of just learning from him that way. This case study illustrates my earlier point, that the ethics of taking and using materials to make something new depends very crucially on whether those materials were truly available to the maker. This is yet another instance of these cultural producers using diasporic persons of Asian

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> entanglements which flow from this confusion…The Zen school holds that this freedom has to be found by an intuitive leap rather than a gradual and cumulative process of learning, although this leap may not be possible until one has tried through long periods of meditation to let the mind settle into calm clarity, silencing the perpetual chatter in the skull. (164)

In this footnote's brief overview of Zen, of which the above is an excerpt, Watts does mention *koans* and *koan* study, but clearly, meditation is the key to "finding" that freedom via an "intuitive leap." Here, according to Watts, it is meditation that leads one toward that freedom.

descent as tools (other instances are described in chapter one) and then disallowing them from being agents in this pivotal transpacific moment.

The Politics of Snyder's Countercultural "Cosmo-Political Project"

This emphasis on the *using* of tools to fashion something can be seen in the urgency of the San Francisco poets' need to forge a "new American" poetics (as I discussed in chapter one); it can be seen in Snyder's encouraging letter to Ginsberg about the "poet as Maker"; and can also be seen in later letters in which Snyder theorizes on how Buddhist tools can forge an American counterculture. In a 1962 letter, Snyder begins to theorize about a certain "cosmo-political project" (Morgan 55). This letter signals a shift in Ginsberg and Snyder's letters away from writing and publishing books of poetry (though that continues) and toward the building of countercultural communities. The tenor of their correspondence moves toward a question of "how can we spread the tools we have?" But the *specific politics* of this "cosmo-political project" are murkier. We might then ask: what *are* the politics of the Euro American Maker?

In that 1962 letter, Snyder writes Ginsberg that Alan Watts had arrived in Japan "and is very turned on by it" (Morgan 55).[87] Watts, Snyder explains, "says the future of society will have to be one where there is total sexual freedom with tantric practices—children raised in groups, and people use LSD, mushrooms, etc." (55). As if responding to Watts's forecast of "the future of society" and drawing from what he is seeing in Japan and the U.S., Snyder gathers together "two things going" at the time:

> There do seem to be two things going:
> 1. The individual working out his path by lonely self-enquiry and meditation.

[87] Later that same year, Donald Allen would also arrive in Japan to begin zazen training at Tokyo's Daitokuji monastery (Morgan 57).

2. A kind of social-sexual communal breakthrough, aided by dance, drugs, music, (meditation), etc. Now if we can reconcile these two and use them we can remake society utterly. (Cosmo-political project #1)

Love,

Gary

(Morgan 55)

Snyder is thinking about "the future of society"—what it will look like; what is going on now that will transform or "remake society." This "cosmo-political project" extends their work as Makers beyond just the realm of poetics. Here, Snyder theorizes on the building of counterculture—a building that is "*aided by*" many tools: "dance, drugs, music, (meditation)"—but *driven by* "the individual working out his path by lonely self-enquiry and meditation" (Morgan 55, my emphasis).

But who is "the individual"? This is yet another moment when a specific subject position articulates itself as universality. Similar to contemporary mindfulness discourses, there is the implication that if "everyone" would just meditate with the right tools and the proper "self-enquiry," society would be "rema[de] utterly" (Morgan 55). There is a blindness here: Snyder is unable to acknowledge, in Manuel's words, "the lived experience of difference that constitutes relative reality"—instead, Snyder "erase[s] and bypass[es] it" (Gleig 34). Snyder's inability to see the component of whiteness here is exacerbated in a 1968 letter, in which he reports on the flourishing "cosmo-political" Kyoto subculture even as he admits he "do[es]n't know what to do about the Negroes" Morgan 99). In this 1968 letter, he writes that Tassajara, a Buddhist retreat center in California, "seems to be doing extremely well," and more importantly, that those at Tassajara will:

> produce a number of people with good zazen and discipline capacities who will be capable of carrying things a step beyond the narrowness of Japanese Zen—all sorts of foundations for the new community being laid. In the meantime America may go all shit to hell; but the "neolithic countryside" may be precisely the survival power we need to sit out a fascist takeover, or a major economic depression, or total decay of the cities into violence. I don't know what to do about the Negroes tho except show them the tribal African sense connection with American Indians, let us all join as Indians and forget both white and black; Red Brothers…Lévi-Strauss *The Savage Mind* is a fine book. (Morgan 98-99)

The Tassajara community's countercultural value is emphasized here as one that can *withstand*, rather than become part of, the struggle of an America that has "go[ne] all shit to hell" in 1968 because it has denied the humanity of Black Americans for hundreds of years. Snyder focuses on the power of Buddhist counterculture to "*sit out*…[the] total decay of the cities into violence," a perhaps surprisingly escapist view of the politics of this "cosmo-political project," which is clearly disengaged with the larger struggle for the rights and lives of Black Americans because Snyder, like many of his contemporaries, cannot see the systemic nature of racism in the U.S.

This "politics" is to some degree anti-consumerist and conceives of itself as anti-capitalist: it is, as the "Houseboat Summit" further illustrates, about detaching "individuals" from false consciousness, from their consumptive habits in an American society in which commodities increasingly "promise happiness." These cosmo-political orientations are of course part of the lasting draw of these writers, since they are to some degree accurately diagnosing some of the problems that would later morph into neoliberal capitalism (though, as I noted above, an unexpected outcome would be that the technologies of meditation would also morph into

neoliberal capitalism's "promise of happiness"). But this is a politics focused on "dropping out" of an oppressive economic system, which causes people to be detached from the Earth, from their bodies, and from their communities. And it is about *building* a new mode of living (in the "Houseboat Summit," Snyder responds to Leary's celebration of "dropping out" with: "your dropout line is fine…but I want to hear what you're building. What are you making?") (LucidMaui).[88] Though their view of Nature as a realm *outside of* the reaches of capitalism would prove to be incorrect (see Iyko Day's excellent *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism* (2016) for more on this point), Kerouac's *Dharma Bums* character Japhy Ryder (not-so-loosely based on Snyder) describes the cosmo-political project as "the Zen Lunacy bard of old desert paths":

> see the whole thing is a world full of rucksack wanderers, Dharma Bums refusing to subscribe to the general demand that they consume production and therefore have to work for the privilege of consuming, all that crap they didn't really want anyway such as refrigerators, TV sets, cars, at least new fancy cars, certain hair oils and deodorants and general junk you finally always see a week later in the garbage anyway, all of them imprisoned in a system of work, produce, consume, work, produce, consume, I see a vision of a great rucksack revolution thousands or even millions of young Americans wandering around with rucksacks, going up to mountains to pray, making children laugh and old men glad, making young girls happy and old girls happier, all of 'em Zen Lunatics who go about writing poems that happen to appear in their heads for no reason

[88] Snyder adds, "what is very important here is that people learn the *techniques* [vocal emphasis] which have been forgotten—that they learn new structures and new techniques. Like, you can't just go out and grow vegetables; you've got to *learn* to do it. We've got learn to do the things we've forgotten to do" (LucidMaui).

> and also by being kind and also by strange unexpected acts keep giving visions of eternal freedom to everybody and to all living creatures … (Kerouac 73-74)

It is the "rucksack revolution" that is the focus here, and it is defined *as* a revolution because it pulls "individuals" out of the "prison" of working, producing, consuming—hence why Kerouac's narrator Ray Smith (a stand-in for Kerouac himself) is so fascinated by the particular details and "thingness" of Snyder's Marin-an shack, his spartan "dropout" home described in *The Dharma Bums* as having "nothing in it but typical Japhy [Snyder] appurtenances that showed his belief in the simple monastic life" (Kerouac 12).[89] But this project of "dropping out" and "relearning" the techniques of environmentally-sustainable living outside of American WASP-dominated institutions is a difficult project to be a part of if the "individual" in question is Black or Japanese American in these years.

When considering the Japanese American poet Albert Saijo, for example, this is a person who will already find it impossible to "drop out" because his health, his body, has been so dramatically marred by American empire. In Saijo's letters to Snyder, particularly those written during the 1950s, it is clear that Saijo is part of the community of dropouts who care for the Marin-an shack mentioned above in *The Dharma Bums*; however, he cannot consistently help

[89] These "appurtenances," Smith tells us, "showed his belief in the simple monastic life—no chairs at all, not even one sentimental rocking chair, but just straw mats. In the corner was his famous rucksack with cleaned-up pots and pans all fitting into one another in a compact unit and all tied and put away inside a knotted-up blue bandana. Then his Japanese wooden pata shoes, which he never used, and a pair of black inside-pata socks to pad around softly in over his pretty straw mats, just room for your four toes on one side and your big toe on the other. He had a slew of orange crates all filled with beautiful scholarly books, some of them in Oriental languages, all the great sutras, comments on sutras, the complete works of D.T. Suzuki and a fine quadruple-volume edition of Japanese haikus. He also had an immense collection of valuable general poetry….Japhy's clothes were all old hand-me-downs bought secondhand with a bemused and happy expression in Goodwill and Salvation Army stores: wool socks darned, colored undershirts, jeans, workshirts, moccasin shoes, and a few turtleneck sweaters that he wore one on top the other in the cold mountain nights of the High Sierras in California and the High Cascades of Washington and Oregon on the long incredible jaunts that sometimes lasted weeks and weeks with just a few pounds of dried food in his pack. A few orange crates made his table, on which, one late sunny afternoon as I arrived, was steaming, a peaceful cup of tea at his side as he bent his serious head to the Chinese signs of the poet Han Shan" (Kerouac 12-13).

out because he is so often ill as a result of internment, where he contracted tuberculosis, and as a result of injuries sustained while fighting America's wars abroad as an American GI. Very clearly, he was drawn to the "cosmo-political project," as is clear in his commitment to the Marin-an shack and way of life, the "politics," that it represents. But Saijo cannot actually "drop out" because he has already been so harmed by the violences of American empire that he must continually return to the Veterans Administration Hospital, struggling with TB and other injuries for years. I discuss his excoriation of these violences in chapter four.

Similarly, Snyder's Chinese American friend Charles Leong, who worked to make a career for himself in academia as a translator and scholar of Chinese language and culture, has a long struggle attempting to gain funding and keep jobs, as his letters show. He cannot "drop out" and detach himself from the university as Snyder can. As still another example of how *specific* Snyder's seemingly universal "individual working out his path by lonely self-enquiry and meditation" is, the character Ichiro in John Okada's *No-No Boy* (1957) is perhaps a version of what it looks like to "drop out" as an Asian American during wartime—a figure who illustrates the stakes of this "dropout" politics when the "individual" is Japanese American. Ichiro, who answered "no" when asked to fight for the U.S. in World War II, is forced into Tule Lake Relocation Camp as a result, segregated from other detainees. The anti-Japanese stigmas are so heightened when he returns from prison after the war that his Japanese American friends are ashamed of him, hateful toward him. The choices Japanese Americans had to make for survival's sake were incredibly limited, and the novel *No-No Boy* registers the intense hostility and resulting feeling of contained in-betweenness that Ichiro feels upon returning to American society after staking such a seemingly anti-American stance, the consequences of which are described as "his burden": "it was the way he felt, stripped of dignity, respect, purpose, honor, all

the things which added up to schooling and marriage and family and work and happiness" (Okada 12-13).

When a white person "drops out," she still has whiteness; because of the racial infrastructures of American society, she retains "respect, purpose, honor," and importantly, citizenship; her humanity—her very ontology—is not in question (Okada 13). "Dropping out" appears political for a white person, but when compared to the politics of saying "no" as Ichiro did, it appears fairly innocuous. A white "dropout" also still has Americanness—"it's all right to be German and American or Italian and American or Russian and American," Okada's narrator notes, "but, as things turned out, it wasn't all right to be Japanese and American" (Okada 84). Ichiro sees that he will exist in an in-between state for years, "already dead but still alive and contemplating fifty or sixty years more of dead aliveness" (Okada 68). In Cathy Park Hong's words, a white person "has all of Western history, politics, literature, and mass culture on their side," and all these combined "prov[e] that you," the Asian American Other, "don't exist" (Hong 18). And so to drop out as an Asian American would mean a special kind of social death that *is not quite* death—hence Ichiro's sense of stuck in-betweenness ("already dead but still alive") and Saijo's cynical vision of "BODHISATTVAHOOD" that we shall see in my next chapter (Okada 68). Ichiro, "neither Japanese nor American because he had failed to recognize the gift of his birthright when recognition meant everything," sees that:

> when one is born in America and learning to love it more and more every day without thinking it, it is not an easy thing to discover suddenly that being American is a terribly incomplete thing if one's face is not white and one's parents are Japanese of the country Japan which attacked America. (Okada 49)

As a result of his choice, his "burden," he is "not even a son of a bitch. I'm nobody, nothing. Just plain nothing" (Okada 70).

My point here is that Snyder does not see the stakes and the difficulty of retaining one's humanity, one's basic *ontology,* when one is Japanese American in the U.S. of the 1950s. This is the struggle of all Japanese American characters in *No-No Boy:* even in their hatred of Ichiro for his choice, all understand what his choice meant *and* that a choice had to be made; and that, in truth, there were no "good" choices available to anyone—that, indeed, even the choice to say "yes" and fight as American soldiers, as Ichiro's friend Kenji did, is perhaps an even more loathsome choice, given that their families were at the same time living/dying in concentration camps. The white Makers in this chapter believe that "dropping out" has the same effects for everyone, when in this period, it is only a white "dropout" who can actually *retain* her humanity, her ontology, her Americanness, her "dignity, respect, purpose, honor, all the things which added up to schooling and marriage and family and work and happiness" (Okada 12-13).

What is therefore interesting about Snyder's "cosmo-political project" is how *apolitical* this vision is, insofar as it relates to racial and social justice. Very clearly, there is a goal for this cosmo-political project, but Snyder's own language reveals an inability to see how (or rather, *if*) his "project" aligns with other revolutions of the period. Snyder does not see Buddhist counterculture as being part of the same political moment as the Civil Rights Movement. The "politics" here, then, appear to lie in the "cosmological" rather than the "political."

In Snyder's excerpt above, we see evidence of Gleig's and Cheah's arguments: whiteness, combined with Buddhist ideas of universality, has made it so that Snyder does not feel a responsibility to "know what to do about the Negroes"—*other than* to simply return to the logic of Buddhist universality (now inflected with whiteness): "Let us," he says at the end of the

letter, "all join as Indians and forget both white and black" (99). Beyond the primitivist overtones of this phrase, not everyone can simply "forget white and black," can unsee the violences of whiteness, as Snyder can.[90] This is a "specific and pernicious form of ignorance" specific to whiteness that "yields an inaccurate rendering of the world because the biases that inhere in white ignorance entail *not* seeing what is there but instead "seeing" a fictionalized Other" (Locke 168). On the other end of this "unseeing" white gaze "is of course, a person of color who can [see] and does realize that 'they are not seen at all'" (Locke 169, Mills 18). This is part of the pain of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (whose unnamed narrator is also a "dropout" illustrating the limited politics of Snyder's "cosmo-political project") and Okada's *No-No Boy:* the all-seeingness that one has when one is (*un*)*seen by* the white gaze as a "fictionalized Other" *and* when one *sees* the whiteness of that gaze itself. It pains Ichiro to see all, including how American racial hierarchies structure not just the identities and "burdens" of himself and his Japanese American GI friend Kenji (who suffers similarly to Saijo), but also structures the madness of his mother who, staunch in her Japanese loyalties, angrily holds onto her belief that Japan won World War II.[91] (And why would we see her "madness" as all that different from the "RATIONAL MADNESS" that Saijo excoriates in his work? More on this in chapter four.)

Unable to see the politics of 1968 America as anything other than "total decay of the cities into violence," and unable to see "white and black" as real, violent categories, Snyder sees "politics" as something where "the individual" develops "good zazen and discipline capacities"—and it is the growing number of this type of "individual," in communities, with the

[90] To put it differently, not everyone can ask with sincerity, as Kerouac's Japhy Ryder [Snyder] does, "Who's to say the cops of America and the Republicans and Democrats are gonna tell everybody what to do?" (Kerouac *Dharma Bums* 75).

[91] For a complex examination of how American empire and American society structure "madnesses," see Grace M. Cho's memoir, *Tastes Like War* (2021), which examines how such forces structured her mother's schizophrenia.

right tools of "good zazen" and "discipline capacities," that will make the counterculture at Tassajara "capable of carrying things" beyond Japanese Zen and able to "sit out" an America "gone all shit to hell" (Morgan 99). To be fair, this is a "cosmo-politics" that is indeed coming up against some of the more harmful modernist master narratives, including those found in the religion of Christianity, that had given logic to many of the violences of the 19th and 20th centuries. It is worth remembering Watts's point, articulated in chapter one, that it takes quite a lot of work to free oneself from harmful indoctrinations that often occur under the banner of "religion" or "Christianity." "Good zazen" in this regard *is indeed* a tool that can free one up to make new, different choices.

Yet Snyder's reference to Claude Lévi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind* (1962) further demonstrates the narrowness of the "cosmo-political project." Lévi-Strauss's notion of the "savage mind" does not refer to a distinct "mind" of any specific kind of human, but to "untamed" human inquiry. "Savage thought" for Lévi-Strauss is a mind able to separate itself from ideology, a mind "untamed" in that it is "distinct from mind cultivated or domesticated for the purpose of yielding a return" (which, given the anti-consumerist underpinnings of the "dropout" mythos, would be of great interest to Snyder) (Lévi-Strauss 219). This is a "mind" or mode of thought which, unlike the problem-solving scientist who may ask a question and design a specific, comprehensive solution thereafter, more closely resembles the thought process of "the bricoleur," a figure reminiscent of Ingold's "craftsman" who gathers materials at hand and constructs based on what happens to be available. However, again, if this "bricoleur" is for Snyder the agent of countercultural politics, this agent is essentially a Euro American Maker, for no other body in 1960s American society is able to sit at this position of power and

indiscriminately gather cultural materials for a "cosmo-political project" which, from our vantage point, may be more cosmological than political.

"This copying of Christian church organization is most unfortunate": Alan Watts's Disqualification of Asian American Buddhisms

The Euro American, Makerly uses for Buddhism, in that broader conception of politics as a "dropping-out," meant that the rationale behind Japanese American Buddhist religious expression was very confusing to the Euro-Americans. With such a "politics" informing their relationship with diasporic Japanese American Buddhist communities, and due to the occlusions of whiteness, all Watts sees in Jodo Shinshu Japanese American religious expression is the very conformity that the "rucksack revolution" was meant to overturn. But Jodo Shinshu communities modified their Buddhist religious expressions not to conform or assimilate into a middle class, for example, but because of racial violence and extreme danger—to themselves, their communities, and their children's future as Japanese American Buddhists in the U.S.[92] I therefore describe Watts's censure of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism as a "disqualification" because he misinterpreted the reasons behind Japanese American Buddhist hybridizations of Buddhism in this period, instead arguing that this form of Japanese American Buddhism, because it is too "Protestantized," will not be a key player in the building of the future of Buddhism in America.

Watts's disqualification of Asian American Buddhisms as "inauthentic" began in 1952, in a keynote address that I examine later in this section. I want to begin, however, with a 1967 conversation in which Watts jokes about why it is that Japanese American Buddhism cannot be

[92] Some early Japanese American Buddhist modifications were surely made as a result of the growing "yellow peril" narratives of global anti-Japanese sentiment, which would have impacted Japanese American immigrants at least as early as the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905).

part of the building of counterculture.[93] This joke is simply an echo of Watts's earlier 1952 disqualification, which had been delivered to Japanese audiences themselves. Before this point, the relationship between Japanese American and European American convert Buddhists appeared to have been friendly, as Japanese American Buddhists considered their white convert friends to be allies in determining the future of Buddhism in America. But the 1952 keynote address is a moment when the relationship between "convert" and Japanese Buddhists is severed.[94] Once that severing occurs, it is easy enough to joke, as he does in 1967, about how "their" Buddhism is not useful to these Makers.

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[93] Watts is a main focus in this chapter because he has far more impact than the poets of this period, given that he was producing radio broadcasts, giving lectures, and generally speaking to a far broader audience than even Ginsberg, whose popularity and influence grew in the 1960s. As Masatsugu states, "Alan Watts was one of the most visible convert Buddhists in the San Francisco Bay Area," and with his particular interest in supporting the growth of Zen in the U.S., he produced "numerous popular books on psychology, comparative religion, and Asian religion and culture" ("Beyond" 438). In addition, though all these midcentury poets are implicated in this "disqualification," Watts articulated it in the loudest and most harmful way. Watts's *The Way of Zen* is one notable book among many that "posit Eastern mysticism as an answer to the overmechanization of the West" (Williams *Buddha* 176). Other texts that argue the same include, as Williams lists them off in his book *The Buddha in the Machine*, D. T. Suzuki's *Zen Buddhism* (1976), Allen Ginsberg's "Sunflower Sutra" (1955), Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* (1958), Philip Whalen's "Vision of the Bodhisattvas" (1960), Gary Snyder's "Buddhist Anarchism" (1961), Aldous Huxley's Zen Buddhist *Island* (1962), John Cage's *Yijing*-inspired *Music of Changes* (1951) and *Variations I-VII* (1958-1966), and "the widespread 1950s and 1960s circulation of Paul Reps's *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, Richard Wilhelm's translation of the *Yijing*, P. D. Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous*, and G. I. Gudjieff's *All and Everything"* (Williams *Buddha* 176). In 1953, Watts gained greater visibility in the Bay Area when he began hosting a weekly radio show with topics on Asian philosophy and religion, including numerous discussions on Zen. He also began hosting a regular program on the San Francisco public television station KQED. See Peter Tamony, "Beat Generation: Beat, Beatniks," *Western Folklore*, 28 (1969).
276. Three of Alan Watts's radio programs have been transcribed in Alan Watts, *Zen and the Beat Way* (Boston, 1997).

[94] A three-day conference in 1952 would prove to be a pivotal arena where Bussei and the Anglo Americans would join together based on their shared interest in the growth of Buddhism in the U.S. This conference brought together "Jodo Shinshu Buddhist priests, faculty from the American Academy of Asian Studies (AAAS), including Watts, and students and faculty from Stanford University, the University of California, Berkeley, and other surrounding colleges" (Masatsugu "Beyond" 442). This conference was a catalyst for bringing together Watts "and other scholars and students from the AAAS," who became "regular participants in BCA study groups, contributors to BCA publications, and guest speakers for Japanese American Young Buddhist conferences" (442). BCA study groups were a major arena for these cross-cultural exchanges, the most significant of which (for this chapter) was the BCA study group in Berkeley, which included "Bay Area scholars, students, and convert Buddhists from a variety of backgrounds" (443). This was the group where, in the fall of 1955, Ginsberg, Whalen, and Kerouac began to participate after being introduced by Snyder (443). Like with the BCA conferences, the study groups were praised "by participants as a step forward in race relations and religious dialogue by both ethnic and convert Buddhists" (443).

Toward the end of the "Houseboat Summit," which is a 1967 recorded interview between Alan Watts, Timothy Leary, Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, and Allen Cohen, the group's discussion turns to the question of why so many of their contemporaries are embracing East Asian religions (one friend thinks that Krishna is "the thing uniting things") (LucidMaui).[95] Watts steps in: "I'll tell you why he feels this." He argues that because Christianity and Buddhism have such entrenched associations within their "home" cultures, they both end up being quite attractive to people who have not grown up with those "horrible associations attached to them" (LucidMaui). With much feeling, Watts uses an example: "'Get down on your knees and be humbled before your heavenly father.' That gives everybody the *creeps*!" Watts says, "It's just *awful* to say something like that, you see" (LucidMaui, vocal emphasis in original). Crucially, Watts argues, Buddhism can "*do* something for us that it can't do in Japan":

> Whereas, when somebody comes in from the Orient, with a new religion, which hasn't got ANY of these associations in our minds, all the words are new, all the rites are new. And yet somehow it has feeling in it. And we can get with that, you see? And we can *dig* that. And it can *do* something for us that it can't do in Japan. (LucidMaui, vocal emphasis in original)

"We" can put Buddhism to good use, Watts suggests, because it is a blank canvas, a new technology without those "horrible associations." For Watts, the same unfortunate associations are also present in Japan, where "when young people hear the Buddhist sutra chanted, they think

[95] The "Houseboat Summit" of 1967 is a recorded interview between Alan Watts, Timothy Leary, Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, and Allen Cohen, publisher of the countercultural periodical *The San Francisco Oracle*. It was later transcribed and printed in the *Oracle* of the same year. This "Summit" reveals the self-conscious nature of the Makers' approach to the building of counterculture. This meet-up also disqualifies Asian American Buddhisms (but particularly Jodo Shinshu Buddhism) from participation in this project. The recording of this "Summit" can be found on YouTube: https://youtu.be/lKi4zoJPfFs and in DVD and CD formats: *The Oracle: The Psychedelic Newspaper of the Haight Ashbury*. 2005. DVD. Regent Press, regentpress.net. ed. Allen Cohen. ISBN 1-58790-118-8.

'ughhh. yech.' Because they associate all that with fogeyism" (LucidMaui). Part of Watts's censure here is about what seems to be a generally accurate assumption that differing generations of Asian/Americans approach religion differently and have differing practices, in part based on familiarity, or lack thereof, with the languages in which certain rituals and services are performed. Chenxing Han has recently written on this in her book *Be the Refuge* (2021), which includes a series of interviews with contemporary young adult Asian Americans whose practices of Buddhism vary widely. Still, though Watts may be onto something here, and while Buddhism may indeed seem old and tired to young people in Japan at this time, he makes a flawed lateral comparison—that Nisei Buddhists also dislike sutras and instead have embraced Christianity because of its exoticism, newness, and its seeming lack of bad associations:

> Here in the Buddhist churches, the Niseis, they can't *stand* it when the priest chants the sutras in Sino-Japanese language for the oldsters. They want to hear, [singing] "Buddha loves me this I know, for the sutra tells me so"—[*raucous laughter from all present*]—as much as they can, like Protestants, because that's exotic to them, you see? (LucidMaui, vocal emphases in original)

Interestingly, the way Watts welded together a Christian tune with the words "Buddha" and "sutra" does illustrate the modifications that Japanese American religious communities were deploying as strategies for survival in a dangerously xenophobic society.[96] They did indeed take

[96] Many of the modifications Japanese Americans made to their Buddhist temples and practices were as a result of the violence of the World War II incarceration. Yet even before that, Issei (the generation of Japanese immigrants to the U.S. who were born in Japan) and Nisei (the first-generation Japanese American children of the Issei) were sharply attuned to the ways in which they might revise their religion within American contexts. In fact, many major modifications were made long before 1910, suggesting that, beyond the urgent need to ensure the future of Japanese American people in the U.S. (Issei were not allowed citizenship and thus dealt with the existential question of what their lives and their children's lives would look like)—beyond this, earlier modifications suggest that, long before the mass incarceration of Japanese American persons, anti-Asian sentiment and other pressures upon Japanese Americans were very difficult to navigate.

on ostensibly "Christian" markers and hybridize Buddhism in this way, and scholars have traced the use of the "Buddha loves me" tune, a riff on the Christian "Jesus loves me" song, in some Japanese American Buddhist communities.[97]

Yet Watts's explanation of why Bussei (Japanese American Buddhists) took on these "Protestant" markers is not correct.[98] Japanese Americans modified their Buddhist practices *not* because Christianity lacked "horrible associations," nor because they found Protestantism "exotic," but because these were strategies of survival in American society.[99] Watts interprets this the wrong way, rather cruelly makes fun of these communities, and moves on with the building of counterculture, disallowing Japanese Americans from helping them build it.

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[97] Weekly religious discussions and *sutra* study classes developed in the late 1890s, and an official head institution for Buddhism in North America was established in 1899 (Masatsugu "Beyond" 429-30). Also by 1910 (just under 20 years after Pure Land Buddhism arrived in California), public religious ceremonies were held on Sundays, rather than being organized around a lunar calendar as they had been in Japan (Masatsugu "Beyond" 431). Blankenship notes the many changes that were made to Japanese Buddhism during and after the incarceration: "attendants listened to sermons, joined choirs, and supplemented traditional *gathas* with new hymns like 'Onward Buddhist Soldiers' and 'Buddha Loves Me this I Know'" (Blankenship 322). See also Yoo *Growing Up* 44; Williams "From Pearl Harbor." Carl Becker has shown that even in the 1990s, some Buddhist churches continued to use "Buddha Loves Me" in their Sunday services (Becker 149).

[98] Yoo credits sociologist Isao Horinouchi for coining the term "Protestantization" in reference to the changes Japanese Buddhists made throughout the first half of the twentieth century (Yoo "Enlightened" 289-90). Isao Horinouchi, "Americanized Buddhism: A Sociological Analysis of a Protestantized Japanese Religion" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Davis, 1973).

[99] The "Christian" modifications that were implemented from the 1890s into the 1950s were both a protective measure *and* a way to retain their cultural identities without converting to Christianity, which many Japanese Americans opted to do. Anti-Japanese activity had a long history and did not begin either with the Johnson-Reed 1924 exclusion act (which, in preventing immigration from Asia, "left Buddhists especially wary of public perceptions and misconceptions") nor with the concentration camps (Yoo "Enlightened" 289). There has been a long history of racial hostility and discrimination. Much of the hostilities toward Japanese people was based in Christian ideas and communities, and though they were "rooted in economic competition and xenophobia," hostilities were "fortified by the portrayal by nativist exclusionists and Protestant ministers of Japanese people as a 'yellow peril,' a threat to an implicitly white, Christian nation" (Masatsugu "Beyond" 430). Protestant missionaries shared this nativist, exclusionist view while also "endors[ing] Japanese assimilation, contingent upon their conversion to Christianity" (430). This Christian push for assimilation even influenced the Chicago School of Sociology (Masatsugu 430). [Masatsugu's note: "For a discussion of the influence on sociologists of missionary arguments for conversion, see Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York, 2001), 25, 65.] The process of racialization in California followed precedents set by the racialization of Native Americans. See Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley, 1994).

What is implicit here is that Watts and other Makers are better equipped to "hear" the wisdom of Zen and therefore better equipped to build the counterculture.[100] After all, how could one build counterculture with "Buddha loves me"? Thus, Watts is very clearly advocating for the Euro Americans' version of Zen because it will *work* better in building that counterculture: "we can *dig* that. And it can *do* something for us that it can't do in Japan" (LucidMaui). There is a usefulness/uselessness that he is pointing out here, and indeed, it would have been quite challenging to build something like their "cosmo-political" counterculture with what appeared to be "Christian" cultural materials.

Watts's sing-song joke about Japanese American Buddhist communities of this period is an echo of his earlier, sustained argument about the "uselessness" of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, which he articulated in a 1952 keynote address to the Japanese American Western Young Buddhist League. His argument in this keynote drew from a tradition of Orientalist scholarship and thus emphasized "the importance of tracing Buddhist teaching and practice to Buddhism's founder and its ancient sages" (Masatsugu "Beyond" 438). A result of this was a complete dismissal of "many of the 'modern' developments in Buddhism," which he saw as "distortions of the original teachings" (438).[101] He "read" these Jodo Shinshu temples as having the exact same hierarchies as the Christian churches he so despised—and Christianity, of course, is for Watts connected to the broader problems with the Establishment and with WASP-dominated American

[100] Implied in his above excerpt is the Orientalist idea that in fact, these white cultural producers are better guardians and disseminators of Zen knowledge and practices *because* they do not have those "horrible associations" with it.
[101] "In Watts's rendition, Zen was to be praised precisely because it was antithetical to the institutionalized sense of hierarchy that he had experienced in his Christian upbringing and that he attributed to organized religion" (Masatsugu "Beyond" 438) See, for example, Alan Watts, *The Spirit of Zen: A Way of Life, Work, and Art in the Far East* (New York, 1958), 25–30.

society.[102] Zazen and the reading of Zen texts are for Watts the key ways to "unravel" oneself from conventional thought; for Watts, anything that smacks of Christianity will not be enough to produce "the liberation of mind from conventional thought" so crucial to being part of the counterculture (as Snyder's admiration of Lévi-Strauss's "savage mind" shows) (Watts "Beat Zen").[103]

Watts appealed to "a historically based authenticity" (Masatsugu "Beyond" 447), arguing that the converts' "ashram" style of Buddhism "existed in Buddhism long before temples" (Watts "A Program" 21):

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[102] Many converts disliked the structure and form of Jodo Shinshu practice and teaching, "which were deemed too similar to Western religion" (Masatsugu "Beyond" 446). A major perceived difference between the Zen Buddhist tradition embraced by converts and the Jodo Shinshu doctrine was an "emphasis on *tariki* rather than *jiriki*":

> Jo¯do Shinshu¯ founder Shinran had emphasized *tariki*, or an acknowledgment of the "Other Power" of the Amida Buddha's compassion as the only necessary precondition to attaining enlightenment. This stood in stark contrast to Zen Buddhist tradition, which emphasized *jiriki*, or "Self-Power," generated through persistent and rigorous practice of zazen sitting meditation, something that many convert Buddhists found appealing. The emphasis in *tariki*, expressed through "faith" or gratitude to the Amida Buddha through the practice of devotional recitation, was often criticized for its similarity to the Christian concepts of faith and redemption by the Christian God. (Masatsugu "Beyond" 446)

(See Carl Becker's 1990 article for a more sustained engagement on "several areas of Buddhist transition and transformation" that have appeared "Christian" to many, "namely language and logic, rituals and ceremony, history, mythology, and conceptions of the sacred") (Becker 144). "Japanese Pure Land Buddhism in Christian America." *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, Vol. 10 (1990), pp. 143-156. Though *tariki's* emphasis on "Other Power" is hardly the same as a Christian faith, for the converts, especially combined with the outward markers that to them "read" as Christian, this was too similar to the Establishment and the American mainstream from which they were trying to "drop out" and detach themselves. Aside from the perceived "doctrinal similarities to Western religion," converts also disliked the ways in which Jodo Shinshu communities organized their meetings into weekly temple services which, since the 1910s, had taken place on Sundays (Masatsugu "Beyond" 446, 431). White Buddhists also disagreed with many of the Jodo Shinshu modifications to Buddhist practices described above, like Sunday school programs; Buddhist choirs; Young Buddhist Associations with basketball and baseball leagues that resembled YMCA and YWCA programs; and Buddhist Boy Scout troops (Masatsugu "Beyond" 448). (See Becker also for numerous other ways that Buddhist churches in many areas of the country, serving adherents of many cultural and Buddhist backgrounds, have hybridized similarly.)

[103] Watts wrote: "the Westerner who is attracted by Zen and who would understand it deeply must have one indispensable qualification: he must understand his own culture so thoroughly that he is no longer swayed by its premises unconsciously. He must really have come to terms with the Lord God Jehovah and with his Hebrew-Christian conscience so that he can take it or leave it without fear or rebellion. He must be free of the itch to justify himself. Lacking this, his Zen will be either "beat" or "square," either a revolt from the culture and social order or a new form of stuffiness and respectability. For Zen is above all the liberation of the mind from conventional thought, and this is something utterly different from rebellion against convention, on the one hand, or adopting foreign conventions, on the other" (Watts "Beat Zen").

> Buddhism began as an ashram—a group of disciples studying under Gautama the Buddha. Temple life came later, as a way of paying respect or giving thanks to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for their compassion in pointing out the way of deliverance from illusion. (Watts "A Program" 21)

This "temple life," which in "coming later," Watts suggests, is less authentically original to Buddhism itself, is "organized as temples and churches, which pattern themselves more and more after the Protestant Christian Churches of the West" (Watts "A Program" 21). The ashram style, "that is to say, informal schools for the study and practice of Buddhist teachings," is the authentic Buddhism here—and, Watts argued, *the* future of Buddhism in America. Indeed, in this keynote address—with the Japanese American Western Young Buddhist League as his live audience—he "tapped into a source of anxiety for most Nisei by claiming that similarities in practice to Christianity threatened the future of Buddhism in the United States" (Masatsugu "Beyond" 447).

In suggesting that Japanese American Buddhists may *inhibit* the growth of Buddhism in the U.S., he is also implying that the Buddhism of "ashram" converts is the less-threatening and more authentic version, and that the converts are the rightful heirs of the transmission of Buddhism in America.[104] "It is very understandable," Watts concludes, "that Americans of

[104] In articulating his argument in this way, Watts exhibits what Faure calls a "neo-Buddhism": In many cases, Western "neo-Buddhism" (the term is Faure's) represents itself as a recovery of the "real" or "true" Buddhism, unencumbered by long-held beliefs and practices, in order to make Buddhism more appealing to modernity. Probably in its most distasteful form, it involves Europeans or European-Americans "purifying" Buddhism of its "Asian" traditions, a movement that has its roots in the brief nineteenth-century vogue for emphasizing the Buddha's "Aryan" heritage. At its most extreme, of course, Buddhist modernism reduces Buddhism to a form of self-help or a mere style of life" (Najarian 311). Temple Buddhism is fine, Watts says, "so long as it does not supplant or overshadow ashram-Buddhism" (21). "But," he continues, this is precisely what was happening, "particularly in the American groups of Japanese origin, and it is to be feared that if this course continues, these [ashram] groups will die out, and fail to make their important contribution to Western life" (Watts "A Program" 21, qtd. in Masatsugu "Beyond" 447-448). This instance of "neo-Buddhism" is not necessarily anybody's "fault," and this chapter is not

Japanese origin want to adapt themselves to American life, and to fit in with the social patterns which they find in this country. But this copying of Christian church organization is most unfortunate" ("A Program" 21, qtd. in Masatsugu "Beyond" 447-48). Asian Americans are here disqualified from being active participants in the future of Buddhism in America because their religion is too Christian-looking.[105] The central disqualification, ironically, is that Jodo Shinshu worship, Jodo Shinshu buildings, Jodo Shinshu organization, and Jodo Shinshu religious practices are not Asian(-seeming) enough.

Doctrinal disagreements between Jodo Shinshu (Pure Land) Buddhism and Zen Buddhism are to be expected, but what Watts is doing here goes beyond simple doctrinal disagreements. This is not simply about the fact that Jodo Shinshu Buddhism *is indeed* largely seen as more "faith"-oriented in practice, and that Zen scholars and practitioners tend not to agree with this school of Buddhism.[106] Watts is warning the Japanese Buddhists to stay in their lane ("you are not authentic enough and therefore cannot help us build Buddhism's future in

trying to unnecessarily castigate, or find yet another "pure" Buddhism. Instead, I am adding to the body of work on "neo-Buddhism" and want to bring the component of whiteness—just as others have brought Western Romanticism's relation to Buddhism—to the fore.

[105] David Iwamoto, a Young Buddhist Association (YBA) member who had in 1952 been ordained as a Buddhist priest, "rejected Watts's characterization of Jo¯do Shinshu¯ Buddhism as equivalent to or very similar to Christianity and also disagreed that Jo¯do Shinshu¯ Buddhists needed to adjust their practice to an ashram format to remain significant" (Masastsugu "Beyond" 449). Pointing to Watts's ostensible credentials as a student of Buddhism, Iwamoto wrote that "[Watts] must know that Shakyamuni Buddha made difficult truths intelligible to minds of various capacities and that this diversity of provisions in Shakyamuni Buddha's teaching has been responsible for the establishment of various Buddhist sects" (Iwamoto 7-8, qtd. in Masatsugu 449). This is an argument for a basic scholarly understanding that Buddhism, quite simply, is made up of many different sects. Iwamoto concluded, "No one doubts today that the Shin Sect is an established Buddhist sect. People out of number have found joy in following the doctrine of the Shin Sect as the way to Enlightenment as propounded by Shakyamuni Buddha" (Iwamoto 7-8, qtd. in Masatsugu "Beyond" 449). This last point that "people out of number" are followers of the Shin Sect is a pointed retort that Anglo American converts are, quite simply, far outnumbered, which alone suggests the legitimacy of Jodo Shinshu worship.

[106] A major perceived difference between the Zen Buddhist tradition embraced by converts and the Jodo Shinshu doctrine was an "emphasis on *tariki* rather than *jiriki*." See note 102, above.

America"), and also relegates them out of the whole story of the transmission of Buddhism to America by claiming that the converts are the rightful heirs to the "authentic" Buddhism of yore.

If we recall Watts's relationship with his teacher Sokei-an Sasaki, his disqualifying "move" is hurtful: it claims that Zen was transported across the Pacific to these white Makers, who draw from its wealth of tools in building the "dropout" ethos while completely discounting the fact that much of what they learned of Zen came from their Asian American friends and neighbors—indeed, while erasing these friends, neighbors, and teachers from the Maker project and from the story itself. But the American reception of the technology of mindfulness, which is an outgrowth of this midcentury fascination with sitting *zazen*, "developed in a more complex process of mutual influence, in the sense of transcultural flows and global interaction"—and diasporic communities were a major part of these "flows" and "interaction" (Albanese 450).[107]

This disqualifying "move," a form of erasure, is central to Kerouac's novel *The Dharma Bums*—indeed, the entire mythos of the novel, which is now a canonical Beat text, is built upon this disqualification. The figure of Japhy Ryder is not only the epitome of the Maker that this chapter is attempting to outline—the ideal "dropout," Ryder draws indiscriminately from Chinese and Japanese cultural materials, ultimately and problematically (re)embodying the "dharma bum" sensibility of the Chinese poet Han Shan—he is also a figure that re-enacts and solidifies Watts's disqualification as central to the story of Beat counterculture. In his commitment to Zen, Ryder both absorbs the "Zen lunacy" of Han Shan and travels to Japan in order to bring "real," "authentic" Buddhism back to the U.S. for dissemination. In this narrative,

[107] As Catherine L. Albanese has noted in her cultural history of American metaphysical religion, of which mindfulness is a large part, it is "misleading to conceptualize the broad reception of mindfulness meditation in the West as a one-way process involving a simple move 'from East to West'" (Albanese 450).

the Beat hero brings Zen wisdom into the U.S. from ancient Chinese texts and "from the source" (the "East"), and is therefore another iteration of Watts's disqualification: this framing does not acknowledge the friendships or teaching relationships between Asian Americans and the white Beat figures.

Watts's 1952 argument, echoed in the 1967 setting of the "Houseboat Summit," suggests that the "Summit" conversation about Buddhism in the U.S. was one held solely between white cultural producers, when in fact, the Summit conversation began in (indeed, would not have been possible without) the cross-cultural exchanges that occurred both in physical settings and in Buddhist publications at midcentury.[108] This cross-cultural exchange has only recently become part of the scholarship, and its significance is that Asian American persons were actively involved in this pivotal moment of transpacific translation. Not only were Asian Americans *teaching* Buddhist practice to and befriending converts as fellow practitioners, but, in addition to being cultural producers, Makers in their own right, they theorized alongside the converts about what the future of Buddhism would be.[109] Masatsugu's work, alongside the work of David K. Yoo, shows that the "modifications" to Buddhism made by Japanese Americans from the 1890s into the postwar years should be seen as world-building actions. They exhibit what is perhaps the

[108] This is a crucial emphasis in Masatsugu's work: that there was a discussion and debate *between* Japanese Americans and white cultural producers about the future of Buddhism in America, a struggle over which Buddhism(s) were the "authentic" ones: "proponents of each vision critiqued their counterparts in public presentations, study groups, and publications, asserting that their own version was more authentic. While couched in the language of Buddhist authenticity, supporting arguments for each vision centered on the conflicting prerogatives of constructing Buddhism and Buddhist identities in relation to U.S. national culture" (Masatsugu "Beyond" 425).
[109] Masatsuguu analyzes "previously unexamined Japanese American Buddhist temple records of ethnic and convert Buddhists," as well as "memoirs, correspondence, fiction, and oral interviews." The findings demonstrate that "during the 1950s and 1960s the boundaries dividing Japanese American and white convert Buddhists were more fluid than has been assumed" and that ideas about the form and content of Buddhism in America were open to discussion and debate (Masatsugu "Beyond" 427). All of this work, all of these texts "attest to a previously unexamined history of cross-cultural exchanges between Japanese American "ethnic" and European American "convert" Buddhists during the mid-twentieth century" (Masatsugu "Beyond" 425).

far more remarkable process of the "translation" of Buddhism in this period.[110] The fact that they were part of "the conversation" in this period makes Watts's disqualification and the ongoing erasure of Asian American persons from this story all the more harmful.[111] Further, the significance of including Asian Americans like Saijo in this now-pivotal moment of transpacific crossing means that we can expand our understanding of this moment beyond merely the work of European American cultural producers.

[110] Following David K. Yoo, I want to echo that while we can certainly see the below discussion as one of *modifications*—a word which implies a certain inertia and preservative force—we should also see these modifications as world-building *actions*. The formation of Buddhist leagues for young men and women, for example, is a crucial part of religious identity that went *beyond* just religious identity; these leagues and their annual conferences were crucial to staking a life in the U.S. that was not simply circumscribed by the racist mainstream. These conferences were large and impressive, and their power extended beyond the incarceration and into the postwar years—indeed, the conferences of the Buddhist Young Men's and Women's leagues appear to be the arena in which Anglo American producers were invited "in." What is striking is that, just seven years after the concentration camps, Japanese American Buddhists were still so institutionally powerful that they could extend an invitation to interested Anglo American Buddhists to come alongside them as allies in determining the future of Buddhism in the U.S.

[111] In part due to scholarship's practice of dividing work on *either* convert *or* ethnic Buddhism, Watts's disqualification would over time coalesce and even add to the model minority stereotype. Indeed, I want to suggest that scholars into the late 1990s and early 2000s continued to replicate the misreading that Watts began: many articles from both religious studies and literary studies begin with a discussion of the "two" (or sometimes "three") "Buddhisms"—"convert" and "ethnic." Each scholar qualifies that the binary does not work, needs updating, and that it perhaps obscures, rather than illuminates, the nature of Western Buddhism in the U.S. Yet after this brief qualification, scholars move on with their projects, seemingly more excited to describe the growth of convert Buddhism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries than to engage with what is occurring in "ethnic" Buddhisms. To me, this appears to be part of the legacy of what Watts and others at midcentury began: a confusion about what Asian American Buddhists are doing; a shrug; and then a move to continue forward with the excitement surrounding the explosion of "convert" Buddhisms. First, studies of convert Buddhism have often been framed around a narrative of the transmission of Buddhism from Asian texts, monks, and teachers to convert practitioners in the United States. Second, "separate studies reinforce the notion that Asian American religious practice operated in an ethnic vacuum" (Masatsugu "Beyond" 427). This approach supports the portrayal of Asian Americans as a "model minority"—passive, silent, insular, and largely disengaged from Cold War politics" (Masatsugu "Beyond" 427). Watts and others at midcentury are partly to blame for the ongoing separation in the scholarship between white "convert" Buddhism and Other Buddhisms—not only the older, mainline Japanese American Buddhism I discuss in this chapter, but also more recent "immigrant" Buddhisms of Korean American, Thai American, and Chinese American Buddhisms, among others—Buddhisms that have come to the United States as a result of American imperialism, but more particularly as a result of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, also known as the Hart-Celler Act. See among other scholarship, Douglas M. Padgett's discussion of Thai Buddhism's unique translations and hybridizations in Florida in the early 2000s. Padgett, "The Translating Temple: Diasporic Buddhism in Florida," in Prebish, Charles S., ed., *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Conclusion

Unseeing of their whiteness and the occlusions produced by it, Euro American Makers see only the *usefulness* (or lack thereof) of East Asian and Asian/American tools and materials for their "cosmo-politics"—and while they perhaps cannot be held accountable for the fashioning part of their Making (they do not claim to know about the Other as the scholar does), they do deserve opprobrium: 1) for taking and using materials that were not available to them—as Watts's fallout with Sasaki shows, not all of these materials were actually on offer; and 2) for treating relationships with Asian Americans as tools, extracting from those relationships; and then 3) for omitting these relationships from the cultural productions of the period and the histories of those cultural productions. (Though, there is of course a fourth category here. Many of them also produced Orientalist representations of Asian Americans. This fourth category simply makes the second and third points above all the more difficult, since it means that part of their extraction was to re-present persons of Asian descent in Orientalist, stereotypical ways.)

In this chapter I have shown that the ethos of the Maker accurately describes the Euro-Americans' relationship to cultural materials—and further, that the ways they take and use East Asian and Asian American cultural materials renders the Maker ethos extractive in its effects. One lasting side effect is the dearth of writing about Asian American Beat writers—indeed, evidence of this period's Makerly extractions is visible in the simple fact that most readers and scholars do not conceive of Asian Americans *as* Beat writers, even though, as my next chapter shows, they are. In chapter four, I examine multiple Asian/American poets' uses of Buddhism-as-poetic-matter. I show how Snyder's inscriptions of Buddhism contrast with multiple Asian American inscriptions of Buddhism. This analysis shows whiteness to be a key component in the poetry itself. This is to say some of the problems with the Maker ethos have to do not just with

the usage or operationalization of cultural materials, but with whiteness's ability to produce and reproduce (willful) ignorances. Though it may be that operationalizing Buddhism in one's writing is not in and of itself problematic—Buddhism in poetry can be multi-purposed, as is clear in the Asian American poetries I discuss in the following chapter—the overwhelming evidence is that even after this midcentury moment, writers classed as figures of the American poetic avant-garde *continually* purpose "alien" tools in racist and Orientalist ways, without acknowledging—indeed, while consciously de-emphasizing—their own whiteness.

Chapter Four

Buddhism as It is Inscribed in Asian/American Poetry and Poetics

> How is it that Stein and Toklas appear in history as the iconic lesbian couple of literary modernism and historical modernity while Bình can never appear and Ho Chi Minh must wait to appear? How is it that Stein and Toklas are placed in history while Bình and Ho Chi Minh are displaced from it?
>
> –David L. Eng, "The End(s) of Race"

Introduction

The grouping of texts and cultural producers that constitute "Beat literature" has inadvertently absorbed the occlusions of whiteness described in chapter three—the occlusions that are also constitutive of some Euro Americans' utility-driven appropriations (this approach to cultural materials, as I have shown, is not quite Orientalism and is not quite strategic essentialism or cultural nationalism, but is a third thing that I believe the term "Maker ethos" is useful in describing). The occlusions following from whiteness have also informed the formation of the canon of Beat literature, the way we understand Buddhist poetry, and the parameters of the category of "American Buddhist Poetry": this is my central argument in this chapter. My contention is not primarily that Asian American writers should be classed as part of Beat literature, though Garrett Hongo and Albert Saijo *are* Beat writers (similarly, Asian American writers should not perhaps be classed as "avant-garde," either, even though their writing *is* avant-garde: more on this below). But instead of arguing "who is Beat" and "who is not Beat," this chapter contends that "Beat" as a category is overly informed by whiteness; that what constitutes "Beat" is skewed by, directly informed by, whiteness. This skewedness has meant that Asian American exclusion from the Beat canon was made illegible to many. So this problem—that Asian Americans have been excluded from Beat literature—is not my focus, though it is true that

Asian Americans *have been* excluded from Beat literature: instead, this chapter seeks to render the whiteness of the Beat category *legible*, which means we can better come to understand how Buddhism has been integral to American poetics.

My readings of how Asian American writers inscribe (or do not inscribe) Buddhism in their poetries show us that the adaptations, appropriations, and adoptions of Buddhist thought and practice in American poetry are not uniform. This is to say that the use of "tools" in poetics, whether those tools are East Asian or Euro American cultural materials, is not in and of itself "good" or "bad"; instead, what makes the use of tools extractive in one context (as when a Euro American harmfully appropriates East Asian cultural materials) can in another context be empowering (as when some Asian Americans inscribe similar Buddhist tools, but to different ends). The ethics of using these Buddhist "tools" therefore depends on who is using it and on what those tools are made for, what they are used to *do.* Asian American poetries inscribe Buddhism in various ways, for many different ends. Utilizing whiteness *as a reading practice* may allow many readers to identify, for example, how Albert Saijo's inscriptions of the poetic materials of Buddhism are directed toward different poetic ends than those of much Euro American Buddhist poetry.

In addition to the occlusions of whiteness, another obstacle to our reading of Asian American Buddhist poetry *as such* (or *as Beat*) lies in late-twentieth century canon formations. Because of the formation of the canon of Asian American literature and the contemporaneous formation of the identity of the late-twentieth century American poetic avant-garde, Asian American poetry (Buddhist or otherwise) tends not to be read alongside Buddhist poetry written by Euro Americans. Because Asian American Buddhist poetry is often read within its own canon, which tends to foreground the identity of the authors first, it is often discussed and classed

differently than Buddhist poetry by Euro Americans. My point here is that perhaps, instead of categorizing poets based on whether they are avant-garde or Asian American, we can simply study American Buddhist poetry and poetics as a broader category; and with the reading practice of whiteness, can better understand the ethics of operationalizing Buddhism in poetry—an ethics that, as I have suggested, depends on who is using it and to what end.

First, I address the problem of the erasure of Asian Americans from the Beat story, pointing to the influence of whiteness on this erasure and showing that Saijo, Leong, and Hongo would by any other measure be classed as Beat writers. I then discuss how the influence of whiteness on Beat literature extended into the late-twentieth century, when two ethnicized canons (Asian American and American avant-garde poetry) were formed. I then discuss Saijo's loud critique of Makerly logic writ large in the destructive histories of imperialism and settler colonialism. When these histories are foregrounded, as they are in Saijo's work, Buddhism is dislodged from the liberatory position that many Euro Americans have perceived it to occupy since the nineteenth century framing of "Buddhism" as a "world" religion and *returned* to the ground of history (we might say, "ruined" in time).[112] Saijo's poetry reveals the problematic ethics of tooling Buddhism in the ways the Makers did. At the same time, Saijo himself tools Buddhism toward different ends, revealing that American poetry's adaptations, appropriations, and adoptions of Buddhist ideas are not uniform. I draw out the implications of Saijo's poetics by connecting it to Kandice Chuh's recent work. Then, I examine multiple other Asian American texts' inscriptions of Buddhism, showing some of the broader contexts by which Buddhism has been integral to American poetics. I close the chapter by discussing Jack Kerouac's own seeming

[112] This framing is discussed in full in: Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (2005).

recognition that "Buddhism's" liberatory potentials, its meanings, its uses and effects as a set of tools, are not the same for everyone.

Not "who is/isn't Beat," but how is "Beat" as a category informed by whiteness?

As I have suggested, this project as a whole seeks not to ask the question of "who is/isn't Beat," but rather, works to identify how whiteness is embedded in the category of Beat and in the scholarship on this period, these texts. Albert Saijo, Charles Leong, and Garrett Hongo can be seen as Beat writers both by association and because of the nature of their interests and work. Leong, whom I discuss in full in chapter five, is Beat by association: he went to Reed College and was great friends with Lew Welch, Philip Whalen, and Gary Snyder, among other Beat-era figures. Leong, a Chinese American man, can also be seen as Beat because of his interests: he had a proud appreciation for the work of the Tang dynasty poet Han Shan and appears to have spent years translating his poetry, though it is not clear where that book of poems is, or if it was ever published. This is an interest he shared with Snyder, as their lifelong correspondence shows. Meanwhile, Albert Saijo is friends with Euro American Beat figures and his work is markedly Beat in nature, as I hope to show below.[113] Saijo was "one of the Beat poets with the most extensive Buddhist training"; as the first of the Beats "to receive formal instruction in *zazen*, Saijo helped Whalen, Snyder, and others to correct their self-taught sitting posture in the mid-fifties" (Tonkinson 18).[114] Yet I hope it is clear in this chapter's reading of Saijo's book

[113] The anthology *Big Sky Mind: Buddhism and the Beat Generation* (1995) is one of only three texts that engage with Saijo's poetry. Rob Wilson included a small section on Saijo in his article "From the Sublime to the Devious: Writing the Experimental/Local Pacific." *Boundary* 2 28:1, 2001: 121-151. The most rigorous discussion of Saijo's actual poetics so far is in Josephine Nock-Hee Park's chapter "Beats and Bandits," in *Apparitions of Asia* pp. 91-121. Masatsugu has written an excellent article on Saijo's relationship with Kerouac and Lew Welch. Michael K. Masatsugu, "Haiku on the Road: Albert Saijo's Contested Historical Legacy." *Amerasia Journal* (2013): 57-82.

[114] In the postwar years, seeking an understanding of his Japanese heritage, Saijo grew interested in practices and markers of overtly Japanese ethnic identity, and thus sought out *zazen* study. Saijo was raised Christian. Saijo's relationship with Nyogen Senzaki, his Zen master, also reveals a more ethical student/teacher relationship that is *not*

Outspeaks that his work deserves far more scholarly attention than he has received so far (and that he deserves to be framed differently, not just as a friend/guru who "taught Whalen and Snyder to sit"). Writing a bit later, Garrett Kaoru Hongo is part of Beat poetic lineages similarly to "second" and "third generation" Beat writers like Anne Waldman. We might also class Shin Yu Pai in this third, perhaps fourth, generation of Beat writers. I discuss her work below. Yet, however "Beat" these figures really are, they have not been classed as such because of the influence of whiteness on the category of "Beat."

This influence of whiteness can be seen in three ways: through the romanticization of "Buddhism" in the American imaginary, in the cult of celebrity that the Beat moment enjoyed (indeed, still enjoys), and in the disqualification of Asian American Buddhisms I described in chapter three—a disqualification still felt when people describe Asian American Buddhism as "cultural" Buddhism and white/convert Buddhism as, simply, "Buddhism," as if problematic or distracting "cultural" elements have been removed. The problem with such a description is that *all* religious expressions are cultural, but people often discount Asian American Buddhist expression by classing it as "cultural." The implication is that there is a purer Buddhism practiced by some, but not all.[115]

On the romanticization of Buddhism in the U.S., James Najarian writes:

extractive as was Watts's own relationship to his master—partly because Saijo was invited to share the cultural practice of *zazen* and was invited into the cultural communities surrounding this practice. This is to say, these tools, practices, and communities were available to Saijo in ways that they were *not* available to Watts. Senzaki was a major proponent of Zen in the US at midcentury and was a colleague of Shaku Soen, the Rinzai monk famously credited with translating Zen for Western audiences at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions (Seager 110). Saijo would later study and meditate with Senzaki for seven years in Los Angeles and would also teach Whalen to "sit," making both Saijo and Whalen indirect and informal members of Senzaki's teaching lineage.

[115] For a recent example of this problem, see *The Imperfect Buddha Podcast* episode 76 from January 18, 2021, titled "Chenxing Han: Be the Refuge, Asian Buddhism in America": https://soundcloud.com/imperfect-buddha-podcast/76-ibp-chenxing-han-be-the-refuge-asian-buddhism-in-america

> The versions of Buddhism that are valorized in North America, and that American literature both descends from and proselytizes for, are interpretations of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism that emphasize individual meditation, solo retreats, individual vision, ecstatic states, and artistic expression. Many of the most important concerns [of Buddhism], particularly ethical ones, fall by the wayside. Most importantly, *Western Buddhist literature represents and argues for* these unacknowledged romanticizations, however unconsciously. (Najarian 313, my emphasis)

Chapters two and three showed how these characteristics—"individual meditation, solo retreats, individual vision, ecstatic states, and artistic expression"—are present in Euro American Buddhist poetry and poetic communities and derive from the influence of Buddhist modernism, German romanticism, and American culture. It is hard to argue that whiteness has not been an influence on these romanticizations. (As I will show below, some of these characteristics are now present in the poetics of a few Asian American writers, too.)

Another reason for the whiteness of "Beat" as a term derives from Asian American Buddhism's disqualification, which was described in chapter three. Asian American Buddhists in the mid-twentieth century, as Masatsugu, Yoo, and Williams have demonstrated, had to adapt Buddhism in different ways, with different characteristics, as a means of survival and world-building. The disqualification of these hybridized Asian American Buddhisms meant that whiteness has suffused common ideas of "American Buddhism" generally and has specifically suffused our ideas of what "Beat" (Beat Buddhism, Beat literature) means.

Further, the impact of whiteness on the category of "Beat" is also present in the "culture of celebrity" surrounding Beat literary Buddhism. Because the larger-than-life Beat celebrities have generally been Euro American, "Beat literature," too, is informed by whiteness. This

culture of celebrity provided a stage for white cultural producers, who have since been hagiographically memorialized in both popular and scholarly understandings of Beat literary Buddhism (both in popular magazines like *Tricycle* and in peer-reviewed essays). As Carole Cusack writes,

> despite the fact that as a literary movement [the Beats were] defunct by the mid-1960s its effect, in terms of celebrity, popular transmission and the linking of Buddhism to issues of disillusionment with Christianity, rebellion against social norms and environmental mysticism, was profound. (Cusack 307)

Beat poets not interested in celebrity, like Saijo and Whalen, "have received less sustained attention," as Najarian points out, and a side effect of this lack of attention has been that scholars and readers are not only unaware that there are multiple kinds of American Buddhist poetics (this was chapter two's contention) but also may remain unaware of the great impact that Buddhism has had on American poetry and poetics (317). In other words, I am suggesting that because Beat celebrities have been white (or interpreted as white, as in Allen Ginsberg's case), "Beat literature" and its concerns and characteristics are also overly informed by whiteness. Of course, Kerouac was, of all the Beats, "the most influential in the spread of Buddhism," and this has to do both with his own romanticized search for Buddhist ecstatic states and the fact that audiences and scholars praise Kerouac for this seeking: "The amount of popular and scholarly praise Kerouac has received as a Buddhist spiritual seeker is astonishing, considering his relationship to Buddhist practice, even at its height, was difficult" (Najarian 317, 315). Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* of course also contributed to the Buddhist and literary celebrity of Gary Snyder as well, "to his chagrin," in the character of "Japhy Ryder" (Najarian 316).

The Dharma Bums contributes to the whiteness of "Beat" as a category also in the novel's culmination: "The uplift and optimistic ending of *The Dharma Bums* might be regarded as a commodification of the experience on the peak that Gary Snyder (perhaps unwisely) urged him into—which is precisely why it was so influential" (Najarian 315). As I remarked in chapter two, this state of emptied enlightenment upon a mountaintop is markedly Romantic and perhaps barely Buddhist, but is arguably *the* dominant image of Buddhist enlightenment in the mainstream American imaginary.[116] As I show below, this emptied mind can be seen as a form of enlightenment that white bodies in the United States are easily privy to; but that people of color may not be able (or do not desire) to access. Then there is the celebrity of Allen Ginsberg, who, though of Eastern European Jewish descent, must to some degree also be seen as a contributing factor to the whiteness of Beat literature. His whiteness derives not from his heritage, but from his Euro American forms of Buddhist practice and the ways audiences interpreted him:

> Ginsberg's Buddhism, with its debt to Blake, to political liberation and leftist politics, is arguably more Romantic than anything else. His literary celebrity—and sometimes canny exploitation of it—is certainly intertwined with his fame as a Buddhist. (Najarian 316)

As Najarian suggests, we might begin to address the problem of Buddhist literary celebrity—and its attending problems of whiteness—"by re-situating the claims of critics and poets within a thickened framework and reexamining what we look at"—a project that "might include consideration of other, less well-known, Buddhist poetry" (Najarian 317). This chapter attempts

[116] Najarian agrees that, despite scholarly debates over whether Kerouac's writing is Catholic or Buddhist, or both, "Kerouac was neither a Buddhist nor a Catholic": "Like all Romanticisms, Kerouac's is a fraught project. His difficulty has been understood as a conflict between Catholicism and Buddhism, but it is far more complicated than that" (Najarian 316).

to "re-situate" American Buddhist poetry in such a manner—not to remove whiteness from our understanding of "Beat literature" and "Beat literary Buddhism," but simply to show how it has affected these categories.

"Beat" as a category is therefore impacted by whiteness, which has meant that Asian American writing that is otherwise unmistakably "Beat" in nature is not seen or read as such. *The Buddha Bandits Down Highway 99* (1978), a book of poems collaboratively written by Garrett Kaoru Hongo, Alan Chong Lau, and Lawson Fusao Inada, is one text that might have been read as Beat. These three poets align themselves with "the California avant-garde of the previous generation," the San Francisco Renaissance poets discussed in chapter one (Nock-Hee Park 107). In this collection of "poetic meditations on a California highway," Snyder's legacy is visible: Highway 99 features prominently in Snyder's *Mountains and Rivers without End* (1965), from which *Buddha Bandits* draws inspiration even as it inscribes Buddhism differently than Snyder's poem "Night Highway 99."[117] I expand upon these contrasts below. This text, which has been categorized as "Asian American" because of those who authored it, *is* a formation of Beat culture and can be seen as a second, perhaps third-generation Beat text.[118] Though it inscribes Buddhism differently than Euro American Beat texts, is different in style, and is penned from a different positionality, Hongo's section "Cruising 99" has that Kerouacian romance of the road also seen in *The Dharma Bums, On the Road,* and in *Trip Trap* (1973), Saijo, Welch, and Kerouac's

[117] In a poetry reading event in 1977, where these three Asian American poets read excerpts of *Buddha Bandits,* Inada framed the work as an echo of Snyder's *Mountains and Rivers without End:* "'Above all,'" Inada said, "'it is *tradition* we are conveying and carrying on, spanning waters, mountains, memories…' (original ellipsis)" (109). Indeed, the formation of the Buddha Bandits as a group and of *Buddha Bandits* as a text is "indebted to Beat culture" (Park 109).

[118] This language of Beat "generations" is quite common when scholars and even poets themselves describe the work of later writers influenced by Buddhism or Beat social formations: for example, Waldman uses this language to describe how "both generations of peers—my own and Allen [Ginsberg's]—might agree upon" the naming of Naropa University's school of poetics after Jack Kerouac (the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics) (Tonkinson 351).

collaborative book of haikus depicting their own road trip. Indeed, by any measure, this is Beat writing.

But for the criterion of whiteness, Saijo's work is also quite clearly Beat in nature. His book of poetry *Outspeaks: A Rhapsody* includes his biography in the back, written, as is the rest of the volume, in all caps: "I MET MANY PEOPLE KNOWN AS THE BEATS – I LIVED THEN IN CHINATOWN NEXT TO NORTH BEACH WHERE THE BEAT MOVEMENT WAS HAPPENING"—and for Saijo,

> THIS WHOLE TIME WAS SUMMED UP FOR ME IN A CRAZY CROSSCOUNTRY DRIVE I TOOK WITH JACK KEROUAC & LEW WELCH THAT ENDED UP IN LOWER EASTSIDE APT OF ALLEN GINSBERG – THIS TRIP IS DESCRIBED IN A KEROUAC WELCH SAIJO COLLABORATION ENTITLED TRIP TRAP – I'M ALSO ONE OF THE HUNDREDS OF REAL PEOPLE JACK GOT INTO HIS NOVELS – I'M IN BIG SUR (Saijo 195-96)

This is not the only period of note in Saijo's biography, but Saijo is very clearly part of the Beat coterie; Park writes that *Outspeaks* is "firmly grounded in the 1960s" (104). Lawrence Ferlinghetti writes on the *Outspeaks* book jacket that "the Beat generation writers with whom [Saijo] hobnobbed have marked him indelibly, or was it Saijo who influenced them? If your taste is for Kerouac, Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, here is vigorous verse in the same vein" (Saijo). Here, again, Saijo's personhood, his life in North Beach, and his work is separated from "the Beat generation writers *with whom he hobnobbed*" (Saijo, my emphasis). Ferlinghetti cannot class Saijo *as Beat* but rather compares Saijo to the Beats: "was it Saijo who influenced them?" and "here is vigorous verse *in the same vein*" (Saijo). Though Ferlinghetti is likely trying to introduce Saijo's work to readers who are already familiar with well-known Beat poets, why not simply

state that Saijo *is* a Beat writer? It may be that Ferlinghetti has this sense that "Beat literature" has been understood to exclude Asian Americans; thus, he must draw parallels for audiences who would not consider an Asian American writer as Beat.

Recent scholarship tends to mention Sajio only briefly and completely omits Charles Leong, who would otherwise unmistakably be classed as part of the Beat coterie, from the record. A. Robert Lee's 2012 examination of Beat "multiculture" in his chapter "Tongues Untied: Beat Ethnicities, Beat Multiculture" includes Saijo in a list of "ethnic" Beat writing, but then the chapter repeats a central problem in the scholarship: Saijo is mentioned once and disappears from the chapter, his work and biography seemingly unimportant.[119] Is this because Saijo's personhood as Asian American causes scholars to class him outside of Beat literature? Lee hails Saijo *as* a Beat "person," but there is still this sense of erasure since it appears he is Beat only by association: there is no discussion of his writing or of his own contributions to American literature (these contributions are great). Similarly, in David Schneider's 2015 chapter about Reed College—where Whalen, Snyder, Welch, and Charles Leong went to school together—Saijo is again only mentioned once and again disappears, while Leong is *completely absent* from the chapter (a startling omission given Leong's lifelong friendship, begun at Reed, with these better-known poets, with whom he corresponds for the better part of the twentieth century).[120] While it is true that Leong is likely lesser known because he appears to have

[119] Timothy Gray repeats this problem in his article "Semiotic Shepherds: Gary Snyder, Frank O'Hara, and the Embodiment of an Urban Pastoral," where he notes that Saijo and another Asian American are "the only Asian Americans regularly included among the Beat legion" (Gray 541). Gray, Timothy. "Semiotic Shepherds: Gary Snyder, Frank O'Hara, and the Embodiment of an Urban Pastoral." *Contemporary Literature* Vol. 39, No. 4 (1998): 523-559.

[120] Schneider does mention Saijo, but only in passing. Saijo took care of Snyder's Marin-an zendo shack in Mill Valley, teaching *zazen* there alongside Lew Welch (though Schneider does not mention Saijo's role as a teacher). Schneider includes Saijo for this reason, noting that "For a period in 1956, after Gary had gone to Japan, Lew captained the Marin-an zendo/shack in Mill Valley. When neither Albert Saijo nor Philip could be there, Lew would open up, light the shrine, and lead meditation for those who came to practice" (Schneider 184). But Saijo also led *zazen* for practitioners.

produced no book of poetry or work of translation, which may have boosted Leong's stature in this writerly group, it is surprising that Leong is absent from this chapter.

Schneider mentions Saijo once and in passing, noting that "for a period in 1956, after Gary had gone to Japan, Lew [Welch] captained the Marin-an zendo/shack in Mill Valley. When neither Albert Saijo nor Philip could be there, Lew would open up, light the shrine, and lead meditation for those who came to practice" (Schneider 184). That is the sole mention of Saijo. But Saijo would often "manage to get out to MarinAn at least once a week for Zazen" in the 1950s, as he reflected in a 1964 letter to Snyder.[121] Given that Leong and Snyder corresponded until the late 1980s, Schneider's perhaps-more egregious omission is the absence of Leong from a chapter titled "Reed's Fine College: 1946–1951." But the brief mention of Saijo as someone who "couldn't be there" at Marin-an disregards the many times when he *was* there leading *zazen* and recenters Welch as the mainstay of Marin-an in Snyder's absence. Schneider thus downplays the role of Saijo and highlights Welch's contributions, exacerbating the problem of Beat literature as a white category that came into being because of the work of white writers and cultural producers. The Marin-an shack features in early pages of *The Dharma Bums,* in which Ray Smith (Kerouac) glows upon seeing the spare, simple way of life that Japhy Ryder (Snyder) has carefully curated in the shack. In Saijo's letters to Gary Snyder, he writes of his time leading *zazen* and taking care of Marin-an, a time that genuinely was cut short due to severe illnesses (hepatitis and TB) that brought Saijo to the Livermore Veterans Administration Hospital for months on end.[122] My point here is simply that Saijo would otherwise be just as much a Beat figure as Welch (indeed, Saijo was close to Welch himself and wrote a poem memorializing his

[121] Saijo to Snyder. 4 June 1964. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 160, Folder 24.
[122] Ibid.

death), and their relationship to Marin-an is similar—indeed, their relationship to *Kerouac* is similar, as *Trip Trap* (1973) shows.

The problem with work like that of Schneider and Lee is that they continue the erasure I described in chapter one. There is the "story" of the Beat moment and of Beat writing. That "story" comes from an accretion of texts—anthologies; books like those in which Schneider and Lee's writing is included; interviews; popular texts like the *Oracle's* transcription of the 1967 "Houseboat Summit," a meeting between major countercultural figures of the period; the larger-than-life mythos of Kerouac's novels; scholarship and book series on Beat literature; and articles published in popular contemporary periodicals like *Tricycle.* As Najarian also suggests, the "story" of Beat literature has also come into being due to a lot of "mere hagiography," the "literary celebrity" of a few Beat authors, and the fact that many Beat writers, whether first- or third-generation, "praise themselves" ("the writers affiliated with [Trungpa's] Naropa University," for example, "have turned out to be a choir who praise themselves") (Najarian 316). Beat literature is often taught based on the "story," the fame, that comes from these texts and postures. Thus, Saijo is not in the story, even though he *was* part of this coterie, wrote two books of poems, corresponded with Snyder into the late 1990s, and was "one of the Beat poets with the most extensive Buddhist training" (Tonkinson 18).[123] And because Saijo and Leong have been omitted from the story (until now, perhaps), Beat as a category continues to be suffused with whiteness and its occlusions.

[123] In addition to *Outspeaks* (1997), *Woodrat Flat* was published posthumously in 2015 by Tinfish.

Asian American and avant-garde writing: The formation of two ethnicized canons

Asian Americans are therefore writing Beat poetry and are a major part of the transpacific cross-cultural exchanges of the midcentury Beat moment, even if they are not classed as Beat. Other reasons for this separation between Asian American writing and Beat writing lie in the complex history between racialized Others and the avant-garde as a whole. The late-twentieth century divide between Asian American and avant-garde poetry can be seen as an extension of the whiteness of Beat literature and Beat literary Buddhism, given that the San Francisco Renaissance and Beat poets are part of the avant-garde lineages of American poetry. Late in the twentieth century, Language writers saw Beat writers, memorialized in Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* anthology, as their forebears in much the same way that the San Francisco Renaissance poets looked back to the Romantics and the Modernists as their avant-garde fathers. In this section, I examine how whiteness continues to inform our separation of Asian American and Beat/avant-garde writing. (In chapter five, I bring Charles Leong into this discussion, suggesting that his absence from Beat literature has meant that the avant-garde identity of Naropa University, for example, has remained overtly white and exclusionary.)

Many have written about the divide between late-twentieth century avant-garde poetry and what many call "ethnic identity" poetry (Grotjohn 35). In his examination of "Cathy Park Hong's poetry against Conceptual Whiteness," Robert Grotjohn points to a few nodes in this divide: LeRoi Jones separated from "the Black Mountain avant-garde of the 1960s, when he changed his name to Amiri Baraka and embraced Black Nationalism with the Black Arts Movement" (Grotjohn 35). In 1996, Harryette Mullen noted that "the assumption remains, however unexamined, that 'avant-garde' poetry is not 'black' and that 'black' poetry, however singular its 'voice,' is not 'formally innovative'" (Mullen 11). Houston A. Baker's *Modernism*

and the Harlem Renaissance reveals how the very roots of American Modernism (and by extension, the avant-garde tradition) are exclusionary and racist. Hong, writing of Asian American exclusion from the avant-garde, states that "to encounter the history of avant-garde poetry is to encounter a racist tradition," while Timothy Yu, whose work I summarize further below, interrogates a divide between Asian American literature and the Language poets, who (at least for a time) have stood in as synecdoche for the late-twentieth century poetic avant-garde. Yu writes that they "have now become the elders of today's poetic avant-garde, being steeped in whiteness" (Grotjohn 35, Yu *Race* 39-72). Dorothy Wang's *Thinking its Presence* (2013), an impressive examination of tensions between figures of the avant-garde and Asian American writers, focuses on the American poetry world's "inability to deal head-on and honestly with issues of race and its largely misinformed perception and reception of Asian American poets and poetry" (Wang 167). After a careful analysis of the heated exchange between John Yau, Eliot Weinberger, and Marjorie Perloff in the late 1990s, Wang persuasively notes that we can conclude, based on Yau's experience, that "'New York School' or 'innovative' or 'experimental' poetry'" are "categories [that] necessarily exclude racialized writing. This idea of what "minority" or "ethnic" poetry is is [sic] as narrow as a 'police-blotter profile,'" she writes, "and [is] based on a similar sort of racial profiling" (204). The terms "minority" and "poetry," Wang argues, "are conceived of in the academy as intrinsically opposed content versus form, sociological versus literary, and so on" (Wang 22, qtd. in Grotjohn 35). And as John Yau and Timothy Yu demonstrate, there is a far longer history of the avant-garde's utilization of Otherness as a tool of poetics.

In *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry Since 1965* (2009), Yu points to the long, complex history of race and the avant-garde, which:

> have been linked since the dawn of the twentieth century, when avant-garde artists such as Picasso, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein found inspiration in African masks, African American culture, and Asian literature. At midcentury, Jack Kerouac and other Beat writers drew energy from their identifications with blacks, Asians, and Latinos. And Charles Olson, founding figure of the Black Mountain school of poetry, famously likened his poetics to the jazz of Charlie Parker. (Yu *Race* 1)

For much of the twentieth century, racial others offered to white European and American avant-garde artists "an escape from Western aesthetics" and, as I suggested in chapters two and three, served as the cultural material for some of "the revolutionary breakthroughs that have characterized the twentieth-century avant-garde" (Yu 1). As we have already seen, "for much of the century, white avant-gardists rarely felt the need to acknowledge the presence of nonwhite artists as peers and contemporaries" (Yu *Race* 1).

But there was a moment when the avant-garde's racial dynamics necessarily shifted: avant-gardists began to see that from the late 1960s onward, "the language and expressions of revolution seemed to be the province of people of color" (Yu 3). Yu quotes from Language writer Ron Silliman's autobiographical work, in which Silliman recalls "watching Black Panther drills with a friend in 1966 and feeling that 'the Left was splintering'"—Silliman asked, "with 'no room for us in that world, how then did our Left fit together with it?'" (Silliman "Under" 325, qtd. in Yu *Race* 3). Silliman is perhaps best-known for his avant-garde formulation of the "New Sentence," which linked literary "realism" with bourgeoisie capitalism. He saw that the idea of the avant-garde itself had to be reassessed: "any avant-garde art that claimed to have revolutionary power would have to cope with the fact that the rhetoric of revolution seemed to have moved outside the province of white men" (Yu 3). Yu asks:

> What were the more immediate and local concerns that shaped the politics of Silliman's writing? As I have already suggested, Silliman's work emerges in the context of the fragmentation of the new left and the subsequent rise of groups based on ethnic, gender, and sexual identity, many of which produced new literary formations. In fact, Silliman's essays, in their justification of the politics of Language writing, often display a tension between the universal and the particular—a tension…central to the avant-garde project itself. Is the new sentence simply a historically necessary development, born from the contradictions of language under late capitalism? Or is it to be understood as the writing of a particular community, one defined not only as an aesthetic group (the "Language poets") but often as white and male? (Yu *Race* 46-47)

Consciously or not, avant-garde writers such as the Language poets therefore sensed they had to acknowledge their social and aesthetic boundaries as a group, "characterized by their own racial, gender, and class positions in a manner comparable to that of writers grouped together as Asian Americans, African Americans, or Latinos" (Yu 3). In an examination of Silliman's personal writings (Najarian has urged that more scholarship examine these genres) (Najarian 317) and of Silliman's book *The New Sentence* (1987), Yu shows how Silliman made the "'attitude toward reception' an explicit element of the composition," meaning that the "*'social composition' of an audience* determines the reception of a poem" (*Race* 48, my emphasis). In *The New Sentence*, Silliman reflects on a fellow avant-garde writer who observed differing audiences' receptions to his story about "queer-bash[ing]," which he read at a public reading (Silliman *Sentence* 24, qtd. in Yu *Race* 48). This friend, in Silliman's telling, saw that the audience "at a gay reading" responded positively and encouragingly to his reading, while the more "polite university audience" at a different reading registered the story "only in terms of form" (*Sentence* 24, qtd. in

Yu 48). In his understanding of this difference in audience, Silliman sees "gays and academics as different nationalities speaking mutually incomprehensible languages," and he "defend[s] the formalist response of the 'academic' audience" (*Race* 49).

Yet, Yu asks, what *is* the "social composition" of the formalist audience that so values the pursuit of defamiliarization? Silliman "provides a remarkable answer that seeks to locate Language writing as a social formation with respect to other social and political groupings" (Yu 49):

> It is…a major characteristic of the social codes of just those formations most often apt to attend a college reading not to know or speak their own name…This self-invisibility has parallels throughout contemporary life. It has only been through the struggle of non-whites, of women and of gays that the white male heterosexual has come into recognition of his own, pervasive presence. In poetry, there continues to be a radical break between those networks and scenes which are organized by and around the codes of oppressed peoples, and those other 'purely aesthetic' schools. In fact, the aesthetics of those latter schools is a direct result of ideological struggle…It is characteristic of the class situation of those schools that this struggle is carried on *in other (aesthetic) terms.* (Silliman *Sentence* 30-31, qtd. in Yu *Race* 49)

For Silliman, these "social codes" that guide the reception of Language writing even in the shared communal space of a "college reading" "would seem to be those of the white male heterosexual: for he is the one excluded from the codes of 'oppressed peoples,' who have developed a language all their own" (Yu 49). Yu suggests that this "formulation," common in much of Silliman's work, can be interpreted in at least two ways: "as an honest, descriptive assessment of the historical and personal forces that seem to have given rise to Language writing

(which is how Silliman likely intends it)," or as a formula that *excludes* in its suggestion that "women and minorities do not or cannot engage in experimental writing" (50). Regardless, the analogy is clear: Language writing is, for Silliman, "white male heterosexual writing" (Yu 50). Silliman himself does not, of course, stand in for the entire late-twentieth century avant-garde, but *is* a key figure in the constructed genealogies "that give Language poetry an aesthetic history, from Russian formalism and Gertrude Stein to Louis Zukofsky and Clark Coolidge"—constructions that were not just aesthetic, as the avant-garde often continues to claim, but were social and racial as well (Wang 47). Silliman's writing simply provides a remarkably cogent articulation of the specific social grouping of avant-garde writers and their (perceived) audiences.

Language writing's formation in the 1970s shows that these Language writers "understood themselves as sharing a social identification, a community. Reading series, publications, and anthologies were only the most visible manifestations of this community" (Yu *Race* 7). At the same time, Asian American activists, artists, and writers "put forward" a *similarly* "tendentious argument for cultural particularity"; in other words, *both* groups "invent[ed] a culture…as a means of organizing a specific artistic community and as a means of critiquing the larger culture" (Yu *Race* 6). Though both artistic communities held out arguments for cultural particularity, the avant-garde perhaps unconsciously (though as Yu suggests, Silliman was somewhat aware of this) embeds whiteness in their claims to "aesthetic avant-gardism," making implicit claims to being the universal arbiters and judges of what constitutes "avant-garde." I am therefore following Yu in noting that the avant-garde is not simply an aesthetic category, but a racial one—or, it is at the very least both an ethnic and social identification.

To think about this in another way, we can, as Yu does, hearken back to Renato Poggioli's *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1968), in which Poggioli argues that "what is distinctive about the avant-garde" is not aesthetics, style, or method, but rather "its emergence as a 'social fact,' a 'society in the strict sense' that positions itself against 'society in the larger sense'" (Poggioli 4, qtd. in Yu *Race* 4). Strikingly, Poggioli sees an analogy "between the position of 'ethnic' cultures and that of the avant-garde" (Yu 5). Poggioli's work contextualizes itself within similar modernist shifts in capital that I described in chapters one and three: the unity of traditional culture "is supplanted by the stylistic pluralism and eclecticism that characterize bourgeois culture, a culture that has 'broken all the links between artisan and artist' in favor of a production of culture as a commodity for consumption" (Poggioli 121, qtd. in Yu *Race* 5). In this state of things, the avant-garde claims its identity as a "critique of this eclectic and presumptively universal culture by means of 'stylistic dissent' (Poggioli 120), insisting on and agitating for the particularity and distinctiveness of its own style in order to achieve 'the radical negation of a general culture by a specific one'" (Poggioli 107, qtd. in Yu 5). (Snyder's "cosmo-political project" positions itself in this way; this is part of why late-twentieth century avant-garde writers claim him and other midcentury poets as their forebears.) As a result,

> the avant-garde becomes an analogue of that culture through its artificial construction of a community whose social being and ideology can be directly expressed in aesthetics. The declassed avant-gardist can thus be seen not as a monad but as a participant in a kind of community no longer imaginable within bourgeois culture. Poggioli's reference to such a community as a 'minority culture' (Poggioli 108) or, more cryptically, as 'an almost unforeseeable diaspora of isolated intelligences' (Poggioli 92), suggests that the avant-garde, so understood, might be organized in a fashion not so distant from that of

> the kinds of communities we now describe with the terms 'minority' and 'diaspora.' (Yu *Race* 5)

An avant-garde is thus both an aesthetic *and* a social grouping, positioned, like minoritized literatures, oppositionally to bourgeois culture. Thus, when we hear claims that Asian American poets or African American writers are "defined socially, by the race of their members," while avant-gardes "are defined in aesthetic terms," what this really means, at least for the late-twentieth century American poetic avant-garde, is that it is a social grouping that either does not see itself *as* social or that downplays the social nature of the supposedly purely "aesthetic" negation of the mainstream culture. In suggesting that "the ideological struggle of experimental writers is conducted 'in other (aesthetic) terms,'" which is how Silliman articulates the identity of the avant-garde in his theorization of "the New Sentence," he grants Language writers "access to, and indeed a monopoly over, the universalizing category of 'the aesthetic,' whereas women, minority, and gay writers are excluded from that category"—partly because avant-gardists and formalists (mistakenly) view the work of these ostensibly identity-based groupings as expressive of authentic voice and personality (Yu *Race* 50).

If the "new sentence," therefore, is "capable of incorporating all the levels of language," then Language poetry:

> arrogates to itself the ability to provide a total view of society and culture, while limiting the work of 'oppressed peoples' to communication within the codes of a circumscribed community. Silliman claims his own position as particular *and* universal, capable of registering class, race, gender, and sexuality while simultaneously transcending their limits. (Yu *Race* 50)

There are many reasons why Saijo and Hongo are not included in the avant-garde lineages that extend outward from the Beat countercultural productions already described thus far in this dissertation. One major reason, as I am suggesting, following Wang, Mullen, Poggioli, Baraka, and particularly Yu, is that Asian American "identity" (as if there were only one) and its literary canon was being constructed at the same time that avant-garde (Language) writers were re-assessing what it means to be avant-garde; indeed, as they were redefining the avant-garde as solely "aesthetic," despite the fact that it was also a social, ethnic formation.[124] Though the construction of these two groups are quite similar because both groups identify themselves as both social and aesthetic groupings, they appear asymptotic; they appear not to "touch." Yet as is perhaps clear in Silliman's writing, both the construction of the formalist Language genealogy and the defining of Language writing as solely aesthetic occurred in relationship to minoritized groups and minoritized literatures, which, as they were made more visible in the late-60s and 70s, disrupted Silliman's belief that the avant-garde was *not* a social, ethnic grouping.

These differing constructions of canons further mean that earlier experimental Asian American writers like Janice Mirikitani and Albert Saijo have to be "recovered" later, since in the early moment of the label "Asian American," Asian American writing, marshaled toward political and civic needs for enfranchisement, "came to simply signify any work whose author 'happened to be' of Asian descent, a shift that tended to exclude work that did not conform to mainstream aesthetics" (Yu *Race* 8-9). "It is no accident," Yu writes, "that the understated, apolitical, first-person lyrics of Cathy Song, which stand in sharp contrast to Asian American

[124] Yu rightly notes that "it is through literature that Asian Americans have sought to define Asian American experience… The prominent role literature has taken in Asian American discourse since the 1970s—from the poetry sections regularly featured in Asian American publications to groundbreaking anthologies such as *Aiiieeeee!*—suggests that it is, in fact, through literature that Asian Americans have sought to define Asian American experience" (*Race* 7).

writing of the 1970s, were the first poems by an Asian American to gain widespread critical attention" (Yu *Race* 9).

I suppose I am suggesting, too, that in order to survive as a category, the avant-garde in a sense "needs" to position itself as against the stable, authentic lyric voice; in order to exist, it may "need" to remain stuck in this conception that Asian American writing is simply "about" the stable, authentic Other. Such a conception allows the avant-garde to place Asian American writing *within* the bourgeois culture it opposes. Without these fairly flawed conceptions of Asian American writing, how would the avant-garde define itself as oppositional? As Silliman sensed, if the avant-garde acknowledged Asian American writing as experimental, radical, and avant-garde, the social grouping of the white avant-garde might cease to be able to claim a radical politics. It is a similar question posed by Timothy Yu's poetry collection *100 Chinese Silences* (2016)*:* without the use of the seemingly stable idea of the Other as poetic matter, what would American poetry *be* (what would be left)? *Not* acknowledging or including Asian American writing as avant-garde also means that the long history of the avant-garde's use of the Other as poetic matter can remain unacknowledged and not adequately studied by the avant-garde itself.

Because of these 1970s shifts in literary communities and the ways by which they articulated their literary-social identities, the poetic expectations of the avant-garde and of recognizably "Buddhist" avant-garde poetry has meant that readers and poetic gatekeepers are unable to see Asian American poetry as anything other than Other—a poetics that is "about" nonwhite identities and Asian/American experiences. While many Asian American authors are therefore writing experimental poetry, they are rarely hailed as avant-garde, and those who *have*

been hailed as such (usually by Asian American writers and scholars) tend to have an uncomfortable relationship to the avant-garde.[125]

While I will therefore not argue that Asian Americans should be hailed *as* avant-garde (one wonders how/if that would even occur: in the few moments where Asian American writers have drawn attention to exclusions in avant-garde spaces, they have been met with blatant hostility, hatred, social and political excommunication, and at times, a blow to their careers—Dorothy Wang and Garrett Hongo examine some of these instances), I would still like to discuss how whiteness at midcentury seems to extend into the late 20th and 21st century avant-garde poetic communities and textual formations.[126] The occlusions of whiteness extend outward, continuing to *unsee* the innovations and *actual* outsider status of Others, despite the avant-garde's heavy valuing of "outrider" and "outsider"-ness ("outrider" is a term that forms the ethos of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University. I examine this term "outrider," and the "disembodied" part of this school's name, in chapter five).

In midcentury Euro American Beat writing, as we have seen, Buddhism is an alien tool that writers bring into their poetics and thus earn themselves a place in the avant-garde because it renders much of their poetics experimental and innovative. Garrett Hongo, Lawson Fusao Inada, Alan Chong Lau, Hoa Nguyen, Shin Yu Pai, and, most arrestingly, Albert Saijo inscribe Buddhism differently in their poetry, and this difference reveals still another layer of how Euro American identities—how whiteness—is embedded in our conceptions of Beat literature and American Buddhist poetry more generally. These Asian American writers' uses and inscriptions

[125] The "exceptional exception" to this point is the Korean American experimental poet and artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, whose work was hailed *as* avant-garde by avant-garde writers and scholars.
[126] See Dorothy Wang, *Thinking Its Presence,* and Garrett Hongo, "Introduction to *Under Western Eyes:* Culture Wars in Asian America" in *The Mirror Diary* and in the Introduction to *Under Western Eyes: Personal Essays from Asian America.*

of Buddhism in their work do not enable whiteness, do not contribute to the occlusions discussed in chapter three and in this chapter. This is why I am arguing that what makes Euro American appropriations extractive does not necessarily render Asian American inscriptions of Buddhism as equally extractive or harmful: the ethics of using the "tools" of Buddhism as part of one's poetics depends on *who* is using those tools and *for what purpose*. This is to say that Asian American poets are also Makers—an important clarification lest this dissertation mistakenly cast Asian/Americans as teachers only, rather than major cultural producers/Makers in their own right.

The relationship that many Asian Americans have to Buddhism is often different than the relationship that white Euro Americans have to Buddhism, and it is not just, as some have suggested, because many Asian Americans are "raised" Buddhist (it should be remembered that Saijo himself was raised Christian and only began practicing as a Buddhist after World War II). This often-misplaced sense of "being raised Buddhist" is only complicated by the silences and absences of diaspora and diasporic identity and heritage—a heritage that is often almost totally lost to first-generation Americans who are unable to access the stories of their parents and grandparents. This is to caution against readers who, because of how we now understand the label "Asian American," might view Buddhism as a component of a stable "Asian American" identity. As Tomoko Masuzawa has noted, "in some cases, religion and identity may not relate at all"—and as Chenxing Han's 2021 book *Be the Refuge* overwhelmingly demonstrates, the diversity and heterogeneity of Buddhist practice in relation to "identity" (Asian American and otherwise) makes it very difficult to generalize about whether, or what kind of, Buddhism might

be part of "Asian Americanness" (Masuzawa 6).[127] The contrast that I want to reveal, therefore, is not a raced or "cultural" difference (unless, perhaps, we acknowledge that Euro American poetry's inscriptions of Buddhism are *also* cultural and raced); it is, rather, that "Buddhism" in Asian American poetry is often operationalized for different ends than much Euro American Buddhist poetry.

For example, Saijo's poetics places "Buddhism" within colonialist histories of expansion and extraction. One can perhaps see how an Asian American Buddhist poetry that is "grounded in history" might immediately be read as "about" identity, due to the above framing of the avant-garde. But if that is the case, so, too, is Snyder's poetry "about" identity, since it is refracted through whiteness and the white male subject's ostensibly universal position in American society. By suggesting that Saijo places Buddhism in history, therefore, I do not mean that it is refracted through images of "family" or "ritual" or is "passed down." Saijo is after all *also* a Beat poet because he was a postwar convert (though his interest in Buddhism after the war had to do with seeking out his Japanese heritage, this was a *convert's* interest since he was raised Christian).[128] But I mean, instead, that Saijo shows Buddhism's role in the Anthropocene; I mean that Hongo reveals how Buddhism was read as another marker of foreignness (alongside Japaneseness, for example) during wartime; and I mean that for Hoa Nguyen, Buddhism is a part of her *disconnection* to her Vietnamese heritage. These are inscriptions of Buddhism that are *not* refracted through whiteness and white identity. This does not make this Buddhist poetry "better" in an evaluative sense; it merely suggests that we must attend to how whiteness suffuses what has been heretofore recognized *as* "American Buddhist poetry."

[127] *Be the Refuge* (2021) includes a series of interviews with contemporary young adult Asian Americans whose practices of Buddhism and relationships to religious identity vary widely.
[128] Masatsugu, "Haiku on the Road: Albert Saijo's Contested Historical Legacy." *Amerasia Journal* (2013): 57-82.

"I AM SUDDENLY POSSESSED BY AMBITION TO TELL WORLD WHAT I THINK OF IT"[129]: Buddhism in the Anthropocene and Makerly Logic Writ Large in Albert Saijo's *Outspeaks: A Rhapsody*

> [Ichiro] wished the roof would fall in and bury forever the anguish which permeated his every pore. He lay there fighting with his burden, lighting one cigarette after another and dropping ashes and butts purposely on the floor…teeth clamped together to imprison the wild, meaningless, despairing cry which was forever straining inside of him. (Okada 12-13)

The character of Ichiro in John Okada's *No-No Boy* "fight[s] with" what Cathy Park Hong calls "minor feelings" in her 2020 book of the same title. Owing much to Sianne Ngai's theorization of "ugly feelings," "minor feelings are 'non-cathartic states of emotion' with 'a remarkable capacity for duration'" that "occur when American optimism is enforced upon you, which contradicts your own racialized reality, thereby creating a static of cognitive dissonance" (Hong 56). The literature of minor feelings, in Hong's description, is often perceived as "difficult" because its affects are "ascribed to racialized behavior that whites consider *out of line*" (Hong 57, emphasis in original). When "finally externalized, [minor feelings] are interpreted as hostile, ungrateful, jealous, depressing, and belligerent" and, since they are "not commensurate with [whites'] deluded reality," are interpreted as "*overreactions*" (57). Because the literature of minor feelings does not match up with white readers' experiences of reality, such literature is interpreted as "ethnic" literature; and because this "ethnic" literature does not gather

[129] Saijo to Snyder, on his new poetic project *Outspeaks.* 29 August 1989. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 160, Folder 33.

itself up into an emotional release or into a story of individual growth (or, in poetry, does not *render sublime* its content), it is read as a literature "about" minority identities.

The literature of minor feelings lacks the emotional release that characterizes much "ethnic fiction that supports the fantasy of Asian American immigrants as compliant strivers"—though, Hong writes, the fault of this fantasy does not lie with Asian American writers themselves, but in publishers' and readers' expectations for the "'single story' on immigrant life" (Hong 48). A further expectation in this kind of ethnic fiction is that characters "avoid any interiority" and "are understated" (48). This lack of interiority "has become a fairly typical literary affect that signals Asianness (in fact, more East Asianness than South Asianness) to readers" (Hong 48).

These reading practices that many bring to "ethnic" literature arise out of a broader "ethnic literary project," one that has also "always been a humanist project in which nonwhite writers must prove they are human beings who feel pain" (Hong 49). This is to say that, not dissimilarly to the justifiable emphasis of the 1970s Asian American Movement on rights, citizenship, enfranchisement, and identity of Asians in America, the literature of "ethnic" Asian Americans, like the formation of Asian American identity, was formulated under the rubric of the liberal humanist subject. The "multiculturalist" framework, under which "Asian American" as a label came to be categorized, therefore retains "a liberal conception of subjectivity while simultaneously claiming to take seriously radical critiques of precisely the liberal subject" (Chuh *Imagine* 6). This is a "kind of multiculturalism" that "manages at once to:

> sediment Asian Americanness in a narrative of otherness that achieves cohesiveness through an emphasis on (previous) exclusion and powerlessness, and [manages] to erase

> the continuities of the materialities underwriting such positions by insisting on the irrelevance of the past. (Chuh *Imagine* 6).

As a result of "Asian Americanness" being couched in a multiculturalist framework, therefore, the effects of racism, settler colonialism, and imperialism are *effaced* as "technolog[ies] through which the United States, also contradictorily, has perpetuated a self-stylization as the achievement of the universalist Enlightenment values of equality and liberty" (6). This multiculturalist framing has informed readers' and publishers' approaches to "ethnic" literature as well, and "supports the fantasy of Asian American immigrants as compliant strivers" because this "fantasy" aligns with the fictions of liberal humanism itself (Hong 48). In contrast, the literature of minor feelings does not strive to prove one's humanity (under the rubric of liberal humanism, that is) by avoiding interiority; in this literature, "there is no immediate emotional release" as in work that "us[es] racial trauma as a dramatic stage for individual *growth*" (Hong 56, 48).

Where Ichiro and many other Japanese American characters in *No-No Boy* struggle with raw, contained minor feelings, Saijo's *Outspeaks* releases those feelings, not perhaps through an "emotional release" so much as a loud, sustained *YELL*. We might characterize his work's affect as "major" feelings. Further, Saijo's work potently undermines the liberal humanist underpinnings of Asian/American literature in favor of what Kandice Chuh calls "illiberal humanisms," which I expound upon below.

Outspeaks: A Rhapsody (1997) is a series of poems in rhapsodic form, where "rhapsody" is defined, both by the OED ("I LOOK UP RHAPSODY IN MY OED") and by Saijo himself, as:

> AN EXULTED OR EXAGGERATEDLY ENTHUSIASTIC EXPRESSION OF SENTIMENT & FEELING – AN EFFUSION MARKED BY EXTRAVAGANCE OF IDEAS & EXPRESSION BUT WITHOUT CONNECTED THOT OR SOUND ARGUMENT – THIS DESCRIBES MY STYLE TO A T I THOT – AMONG OTHER MEANINGS OF THE WORD ARE – THE STRINGING TOGETHER OF POEMS – A MISCELLANEOUS COLLECTION – A CONFUSED MASS OF THINGS – A STRING OF WORDS SENTENCES TALES ETC – A LITERARY WORK CONSISTING OF MISCELLANEOUS OR DISCONNECTED PIECES – A WRITTEN COMPOSITION HAVING NO FIXED FORM OR PLAN – ALTOGETHER THIS APPEARS TO BE MY WORD I THOT – I THOT IF EVER I STRING TOGETHER A BOOK IT WILL BE A RHAPSODY (Saijo 18)

Readers may immediately register the intensity of reading poetry in ALL CAPS: this is an avant-garde practice of his poetics that serves to *overwhelm,* perhaps stupefy, the reader. Indeed, it is likely that this overwhelming wall of ALL CAPS text (page after page) has kept many scholars of poetry from engaging with Saijo's work.[130] These are *major,* not "minor," feelings that are "EXULTED OR EXAGGERATEDLY ENTHUSIASTIC"; the incredible energy and spillover of the text point to this "major" quality, as does the razor-sharp critique we shall see in the poems' content.

Saijo's opening manifesto on the "RHAPSODE" suggests he is aware of Hong's point that Asian Americans are expected to write about "Asian things," while white poets can write about anything because of the invisibility and seeming universality of whiteness. Choosing *not* to

[130] As I have noted, there are only three texts that engage with Saijo's work. See Tonkinson, Wilson, and Park. Masatsugu discusses Saijo's relationship with Kerouac and Welch, but does not provide literary criticism on his poetry.

write about "Asian things," he "WOULD NOT BE PUT INTO ANY LITERARY CATEGORY" and the speaker "[HA[S] NO LITERARY CONCERN" (19). He differentiates himself from the "INDIGENT PERSONS WHO GAINED THEIR LIVELIHOOD BY RECITING THE HOMERIC POETRY"; instead, "I AM INDIGENT EVEN WHEN I HAVE MONEY"—a line that suggests he is destitute even when material needs are met. Why this destitution "EVEN WHEN I HAVE MONEY"? Saijo's poetry registers a *lack of* structural, racial, and economic change reminiscent of the literature of "minor feelings"—"I LACK & AM IN CONSTANT WANT"—even as it also pointedly reveals that "LACK" to be a result of settler colonialism and imperialism.

Outspeaks scathingly excoriates both the *effects* of settler colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism, and the harmful logics that sent those "isms" *into motion*. I therefore see his work as part of the late-twentieth and early twenty-first century reassessment of Edward Said's *Orientalism:* like many have suggested, colonialism did not arise *from* Orientalist thought; rather, Orientalism was useful to colonial projects because of those projects' material, extractive interests in others' resources. Saijo's poetics loudly underscores the *material interests,* and the logics that informed those interests, as the culprit, rather than a transhistorical problem of Western ideas about the Other. *Outspeaks* directly indicts ideologies that enable the harmful extraction of tools that we saw in chapter three's idea of the Maker. The book unswervingly criticizes the extractive impulses—seen in "SCIENCE," the "RATIONAL MADNESS" of empiricism, and the violent ways that governments "FORCE" individuals into conformity—that have built the world that keep Japanese Americans and so many Others *in* place or *dis*placed. *Outspeaks* is widely critical of the impositions of science—the "FUCKING GREEK IDEA

THAT HUMAN MIND THINKING SYSTEMATICALLY CAN IMPOSE RATIONAL ORDER ON NATURE"—of which anthropocentrism is a symptom:

> BIBLE SEZ WE GOT DOMINION – BUDDHIST SAY LUCKY YOU BORN HUMAN & NOT A LESSER ANIMAL SO IT'S OK YOU TURN EARTH INTO INDUSTRIAL SITE…ANYWAY LIKE HUI NENG SEZ SINCE ALL IS VOID WHERE CAN THE DUST ALIGHT – EVEN THOREAU AT WALDEN WITH HIS I WANT TO MAKE THE EARTH SAY BEANS – RATHER THAN WHAT IT WAS SAYING BEFORE HENRY – WE LOOK AT PANORAMIC SCENERY & SAY IT LOOKS LIKE A PAINTING IN A GALLERY – WHATS OUR TRIP – CONTROL – DOMINATION – CAUGHT IN A TRULY MONSTROUS INSTANCE OF PATHETIC FALLACY – ANTHROPOMORPHIZE EARTH (Saijo 44-45)

Here, he is critical of Buddhists who privilege a liberal humanist, Judeo-Christian-informed ("BIBLE SEZ WE GOT DOMINION") view of the "rightness" of "Man's" extractive relation to "Nature," a relation that has gone to form what we now call the Anthropocene. The above excerpt suggests that such a view of "Man" and "Nature" is now, "IN A TRULY MONSTROUS INSTANCE OF PATHETIC FALLACY," racially rearticulated as part of Buddhism, allowing one *not* to assess "the dust" by simply ascribing to the view that "all is void." One must be careful with Huineng's insight that "ALL IS VOID," as contemporary scholars of Buddhism and whiteness have shown.[131] Thoreau's "I WANT TO MAKE THE EARTH SAY BEANS" is an

[131] Sharon A. Suh explains how many well-meaning "good Buddhist" practitioners dismiss complaints of "bad Buddhists," who "give lie to the rhetoric of the emptiness that many white Buddhists allude to when abdicating any responsibility to speak up and out about injustices" (Suh 3). Rhetorical appeals to "ultimate reality" erase embodied difference and allows whiteness to "recenter itself through the language of emptiness. Such recourse to emptiness belies an equivalence drawn between whiteness and oneness that makes no room for the particulars of race, gender, and sexuality" (Suh 3-4).

imposition upon nature, a vignette of anthropocentric "MADNESS," which Saijo excoriates page after page, as in his poem "SCIENCE":

> WHY DOES EXACTNESS CONSISTENCY PREDICTABILITY FALSIFIABILITY RATIONALITY LEAD TO POLLUTION FEAR & MASSIVE PARANOIA & MAKE EARTH AN UNSAFE PLACE TO BE – LIKE SOME ROMAN SAID I FEAR NO MADNESS LIKE RATIONAL MADNESS (Saijo 53)

A valuing of "EXACTNESS CONSISTENCY PREDICTABILITY" and "RATIONALITY" comes from an emphasis on empirically verifiable positive facts, and yet such seemingly innocuous values lay waste to the Earth and its peoples. The answer to the "WHY" of the above lines is that these seemingly benign principles, these positivist facts of science (or of "scientism," Timothy Morton's term for the range of beliefs within science itself), have embedded within them the telos of harnessing, an aim to *use, deplete,* or *extract* from the earth, as in Thoreau's "I WANT TO MAKE THE EARTH SAY BEANS" (Saijo 44). The "Buddhism" of Saijo's time and place, therefore, registers the problem of "Man": in which the subject is the origin and agent of history, author of meaning and action, who is enabled to unquestioningly extract from the earth in whatever ways he sees fit ("I WANT TO MAKE THE EARTH SAY BEANS"). We might therefore further say that Saijo's poetry is critical of the Maker ethos when it extracts harmfully, treating all cultural materials as unproblematically available for whatever uses it sees fit. And Buddhism is implicated within this, as it is one of the forces of the Anthropocene: "BUDDHIST SAY LUCKY YOU BORN HUMAN & NOT A LESSER ANIMAL SO IT'S OK YOU TURN EARTH INTO INDUSTRIAL SITE" (53).

Saijo sees the problem: that the Maker approach to poetics—indeed, the Makerly approach to Buddhism—is part of the broader collection of forces that have laid waste to the

Earth. It is inseparable from the broader project of liberal humanism's centering of "Man" and from liberal universalism's emphasis on reason ("RATIONAL MADNESS") as the basis of human agency and choice (out of which, multiculturalism is simply an outgrowth that serves to underscore the centered universalism of liberalism). Given the very specific Americanized "Buddhism" or "Buddhist modernism" with which Saijo was engaging, it is hard to disagree that this historically specific Buddhism (which I described in chapters two and three) is indeed imbricated in the "RATIONAL MADNESS" of settler colonialism and imperialism.[132]

In *Outspeaks,* the "tools" and philosophies of Buddhism are not what the Euro American Beat figures see them as. Saijo's poems indict Makerly extraction writ large, seen in the line "TO BE ABLE TO USE SOMETHING IS NOT NECESSARILY TO KNOW IT" (57). This is a line that considers the problems with approaching materials that are not one's own with the aim to use/harness it, a consideration also present in his poem "KARMA LOLLIPOP." "KARMA" imagines a reversal of colonialism in which "WHITEMAN CENTRAL" becomes "MORE POOR THAN A 3RD WORLD COUNTRY"; meanwhile, "ELFIN & YELLOW" people from "AN ADVANCED HYPERTECH CIVILIZATION ACROSS THE GREAT WATER TO THE WEST" take up "WHITEMAN" as their burden. The poem unravels Rudyard Kipling's poem and envisions a world where it is whites who are enslaved and stolen from: "ADVANCED NONWHITE NATIONS ARE DIVIDING UP WHITEMAN'S LAND INTO WHAT THEY CALL SPHERES OF INFLUENCE" and "THEY MAKE WHITEMAN'S LAND INTO

[132] To give just one example, Japan weaponized Buddhism as part of its culturally nationalist imperialism in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Here I am referring to what Jonathan Stalling has called the "Bodhisattva burden" and what Robert Sharf has called "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism." These terms refer to the ways Japan weaponized Buddhism in the creation of an imperial ethos toward East Asia, in a manner parallel to the European imperialist use of the Christian salvational technology that they deemed themselves the lone protectors of. This deployment of Buddhism heavily informed many "translations" of Buddhism in American culture, too, and greatly influenced Euro Americans' understanding of Buddhism in the midcentury.

BATTLEGROUND FOR THEIR WARS" (Saijo 116-117). And Saijo registers that Buddhism has to some degree been absorbed into the "MADNESS" of these many settler colonial, extractive logics; again in "KARMA LOLLIPOP," the "ELFIN & YELLOW" missionaries utilize Buddhism as part of their colonization ("THEY SAY BUDDHA LOVE WHITEMAN EVEN IF WHITEMAN BACKWARD DIRTY & HEATHENISH") even as the missionaries claim the technologies (tools) of "WHITEMAN": "WE WANT THAT – THEY GIVE WHITEMAN A MESS OF CHEAP BEADS & A TIN MIRROR & THEY TAKE HIS VICE GRIP" (116). Here, Saijo declares Buddhism to be a religion susceptible to racial rearticulation, to use Joseph Cheah's phrase—a religion that is just as easily weaponized as Christianity.[133]

In addition to the logic of "SCIENCE" and the "RATIONAL MADNESS" that have informed "Man's" approach to Nature ("LEAD[ING] TO POLLUTION FEAR & MASSIVE PARANOIA & MAK[ING] EARTH AN UNSAFE PLACE TO BE") (53), *Outspeaks* also comments upon how these logics affect individuals. The poem "PROCRUSTES: A RANT" draws inspiration in part from "THE PRACTICE OF AN ANCIENT GREEK ROBBER PROCRUSTES WHO FORCED HIS VICTIMS TO FIT A CERTAIN BED BY STRETCHING OR CUTTING OFF THEIR LEGS" (109). "PROCRUSTES" is a poem about how governments "VIOLENTLY FORCE" citizens "INTO CONFORMITY WITH OR SUBSERVIENCE TO SOMETHING AS A SYSTEM POLICY DOCTRINE" (109).

[133] Joseph Cheah defines "racial rearticulation" as "'the acquisition of the beliefs and practices of another's religious tradition and infusing them with new meanings derived from one's own culture in ways that preserve the prevailing system of racial hegemony'" (Cheah *Race and Religion* 59-60, qtd. in Gleig 25).

The speaker complains, “I HAVE COME TO MIND BEING GOVERNED – I HAVE COME TO MIND LIVING UNDER A REGIMEN I HAD NO SAY IN JOINING OR NOT JOINING” (110). Saijo’s speaker, though it feels very much like Saijo himself, asks:

> WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE WHO ACTUALLY BELIEVE THEY KNOW BETTER THAN ME WHATS GOOD FOR ME & … MAKE LAWS ABOUT IT THAT THEY BACK UP WITH GUNS & CAGES (Saijo 110)

The poem ends with what seems to be a waking dream in which an “IMITATION OF A SHINY BEETLE” approaches him, out of which “A CREATURE STEPS OUT” (112). With a shock of recognition, the speaker sees that “THE CREATURE IS MY KIND” (112-113). The speaker approaches, “STEP[S] OUT INTO THE OPEN SHOWING THE PALMS OF MY HANDS,” but suddenly the man/creature:

> GRABS ME & BINDS ME UP & THROWS ME ON A BED THAT’S TOO SHORT FOR ME – HE DRAWS A SWORD & CHOPS OFF MY FEET SO I FIT THE BED – MY DISSEVERED FEET FALL TO THE GROUND AT THE END OF THE BED & MY STUMPS GUSH BLOOD – IT IS GHASTLY & ENTHRALLING (113)

In this gory scene made more violent by the ALL CAPS, Saijo illustrates the harm he and so many others have undergone due to “THE POWERS THE U.S. CONSTITUTION GIVES WHAT ARE CALLED THE EXECUTIVE LEGISLATIVE & JUDICIAL BRANCHES OF GOVT OVER ME & MY PRIVATE ANIMAL FATE” (110). Here, the containment of the “ANIMAL IN A CAGE…BARKING TO BE LET OUT” of the poem “ANIMAL RHAPSODE” is a violently imposed containment, and Saijo implicates actual actors and institutions in the

forced "governance" of obsessively making citizens "fit." These are the side effects of "RATIONAL MADNESS," too.

But the poetry also pushes past the horrifying containment and mutilation of the above excerpt:

> THEY'RE ASSHOLES BECUZ NOBODY BUT ASSHOLES WOULD SET THEMSELVES UP AS ARBITERS OF SOMEONE ELSE'S BEHAVIOR – I DECLARE MYSELF TO BE FREE OF THEM – I DECLARE MYSELF TO BE A FREE ANIMAL ON EARTH – LET ME TELL YOU WHO I AM (111)

Such lines echo (or perhaps prefigure, given that *Outspeaks* was written over the course of at least a decade) Saijo's August 1989 letter to Snyder, in which he wrote (again in all caps): "I AM SUDDENLY POSSESSED BY AMBITION TO TELL WORLD WHAT I THINK OF IT."[134] "TELL[ING] YOU WHO I AM" and "DECLAR[ING] MYSELF TO BE A FREE ANIMAL ON EARTH" takes Ichiro's stuckness, in-betweenness, and contained rage, and "TELLS IT" *to someone else*, ensures that someone *hears*.

Indeed, I want to suggest that one effect of the ALL CAPS is *sound*—the jarring loudness of this poetry stuns readerly expectations, both expectations of lyric poetry and expectations of what "Asian American poetry" is. Emmanuel Levinas has suggested that speech and sound signify the absent other's presence, an other "whose alterity exceeds and remains outside of 'my vision,' and is irreducible to representation" (Levinas 296). Indeed:

> "speech refuses vision," Levinas argues, because the speaker "is personally present in his speech, [but] absolutely exterior to every image he would leave." He adds, "This

[134] Saijo to Snyder. 29 August 1989. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 160, Folder 33.

presence whose format exceeds the measure of the I is not reabsorbed into my vision." (*TI* 296, qtd. in Zhou 220)

The ALL CAPS are *loud* in volume to a reader's ear and also present a wall of sound that is irreducible to the reader's vision. As we saw in chapter two, one of the poetic elements that makes lyric poetry familiar to twentieth- and twenty-first century readers is its often-tidy placement on a page. The walls of text in *Outspeaks*—page after page of ALL CAPS that fill all the white space—disallow what Levinas would term a "reabsorption into my vision." This loud, "walled" quality disallows the reader from forming a stable conception of the Other; it exceeds conceptions of Otherness readers might bring to the poetry in seeing that the author is Asian American. If the LOUD sound of Saijo's poetry presents an other whose composition does not owe its logic, its "format" or "picture" to the centered "I," then the presence of this other *in sound* may also exceed the boundaries of Otherness imposed by the centered (white) subject of the avant-garde, of liberal humanism.

For the avant-garde *does* impose boundaries of "I"-ness and otherness, despite the fact that it regards "the elision of the I in postmodern poetry as the marker of real poetic invention" (Zhou 6). The idea of the postmodern subject *is itself* a totalizing account, because "the postmodern subject" as fragmented and shattered was conceived in relation to a stable lyric "I," which is evident in "[Marjorie] Perloff's focus on the decentering of 'persons' and the replacement of a primarily autobiographical narrative by fragmented, dislocated, and nonsensical narratives as characteristics of postmodern poetry" (Zhou 7). Such a focus on the "decentering of 'persons'…casts the lyric I into a fixed category," meaning that "the autobiographical lyric poems by minority poets, such as Asian American poets," are excluded "from her consideration of the transformation in American poetry" (Zhou 7). But, as Shelley Sunn Wong asks, "'was the

Asian American subject ever not 'fragmented'? Was, then, the lyric 'I' ever available to the Asian American writer?'" (Wong 138, qtd. in Zhou 9). Or, in other words, "the postmodern subject" simply reinforces the ideological inertias that have erased the subjectivity of the marginalized other:

> poststructuralist theories about subjectivity and difference, "understood as an abstraction separate from the context of the specific conditions of racism and sexism," Yamamoto contends, "will always modulate into the absurdity of privileging precisely that which has been used to deny subject-status and agency to the marginalized and oppressed." (Yamamoto 80, qtd. in Zhou 9)

Assumptions "underlying *both* the concept *and* dismissal of the lyric I" (so foundational to the idea of the "postmodern subject" and the avant-garde, as seen above) "are grounded in a homogenized concept of the self and its relation to the other and the world" (Zhou 7). Sound is thus a major component that disrupts the unified "I" that is centered *even* in poststructuralist theorizations of the fragmented subject. Sound in Saijo's work may be seen as a technique of signifying otherness in ways that do not reinforce the constructed Othernesses of the avant-garde or of "Man."

Saijo's inscriptions of Buddhism also come up against other "universals" of Buddhism itself, universals that have been embedded in its (Western) construction as a "world religion" since the nineteenth century. This was a construction of nineteenth-century European Orientalists and comparative religion departments that in turn shaped Buddhism's framing in American contexts. Buddhism's construction as a "world" religion was motivated by the similarly I-centered "vision" of Europe (T.S. Eliot called it "the mind of Europe"), which saw Christianity

as *the* universal religion until it was able to frame Buddhism as still another universal religion.[135] Yet in understanding Buddhism as a "universal" religion, European scholars from the nineteenth century into the mid-twentieth century detached "Buddhism" from cultural and historical particularities (more on this below). Though Saijo in the midcentury was privy to a more complex, layered "Buddhism" (a Buddhism co-constructed by the Japanese New Buddhists and Meiji-era cultural nationalism; by his own teacher Nyogen Senzaki; and by figurative and actual "translations" of Zen Buddhism as in the work of D.T. Suzuki), his poetry addresses this history of *detachment* and instead grounds Buddhism in the violences of the Anthropocene, returning it, not to specific localities from which Buddhist practices derived or may have "originated," but to the stage of history as a key force of violence, since it is so easily marshaled under the "RATIONAL MADNESS[ES]" that follow from the idea of "Man."

In this effect of Saijo's poetics, therefore, I believe we can hear echoes of Benjamin's championing of the genre of allegory in German Tragic Drama. German Tragic Drama is itself the literature of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), which transformed (by means of ruination) the set ideas of Europe. Such a "ruination" is not unlike the decay that the two World Wars wrought in Benjamin's and Saijo's own time—and in addition to seeing the decay of war, Saijo of course saw the "ruinations" of internment, as well. In returning Buddhism to the stage of history—not as a liberatory set of transcendental truths, but as a harmful technology of empire—Saijo's poetics has a similar effect as that of Benjamin's allegory, which is a mode expressing an experience of a world in fragments, where the passing of time does not mean progress, but rather, disintegration (Buck-Morrs 18). Benjamin disagreed with critics' celebration of

[135] T.S. Eliot, "Essay on Poetic Theory: Tradition and the Individual Talent." 19 October 2009. *Poetry Foundation.* 25 January 2022. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69400/tradition-and-the-individual-talent >.

symbolism, whose totalizing nature disallows viewers from seeing history as "a petrified, primordial landscape"; in contrast, allegory is a *mode* (not just a genre) in which things are laid bare to uncover truths "buried beneath layers of false romantic aesthetics" (*Origin* 64). *Outspeaks* therefore holds what Benjamins calls "an allegorical way of seeing":

> Everything about history which, from the beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful expresses itself in a countenance - no, in a death's head … in this, the figure of man's most extreme subjection to nature, is pronounced the enigmatic question not only of the nature of human existence as such but of the biographical historicity of the individual. This is the core of the allegorical way of seeing, of the baroque, secular account of history as the passion of the world, a world that is meaningful only in the stations of its decay. The greater the significance, the greater the subjection to death, because death digs most deeply the jagged line of demarcation between physical being and significance. (Benjamin *Origin* 166)

In Saijo's time, and in his own experience, one can locate an example of a "most extreme subjection to nature," registered in the above poem "PROCRUSTES." In the poetic form of *Outspeaks,* which does not attempt to render its content (Buddhist or otherwise) sublime or symbolic; and in its railing against the ways that "SCIENCE", nation-states, and those in power have harmed individuals, forcing them into compliance or dismemberment or displacement, this poetics removes the smooth surface of the map of history and renders it *topographical*, where we can see the pockmarks, bomb craters, hollowed-out mountains, dead bodies, and the "*facies hippocratica"* of the decayed Earth itself ("in allegory," Benjamin writes, "the *facies hippocratica"*—the changes visible in a human face that is close to death—"of history lies before the eyes of the observer as a petrified, primordial landscape") (Benjamin *Origin* 166).

Saijo broadly suggests that even if Euro American cultural producers were right about Buddhism's liberatory potentials, there is something wrong with the anthropocentrism of Buddhism as it exists in mid-to-late twentieth century Western culture. The group consensus at the 1967 "Houseboat Summit" was that Buddhism holds logics and philosophies that are contrary to American consumerist society; but *Outspeaks* suggests that Buddhism in the mid-to-late-twentieth century United States is utterly complicit with other violent forces, including those of American empire, that have produced the Anthropocene tragedy through which we are currently living. The reasons behind Saijo's "difference" in his inscriptions of Buddhism lie in the above excoriations of the modes of thinking that allow one to extract materials from another culture (the same modes of thinking that operate like "PROCRUSTES," violently forcing individuals into specific physical forms and behaviors).

Outspeaks' view of Buddhism, in other words, is that it is part of the "*facies hippocratica"* of history. This is a view starkly different from David Hinton's conception of Buddhist enlightenment as "empty" and "open to the cosmos," as in the image of Thoreau atop Mount Katahdin that we saw in chapter two. Saijo is suggesting that even if it *were not* implicated in the destruction of the Anthropocene, these Buddhist ideas may not be all that liberatory. In her chapter on Ruth Ozeki and Leslie Marmon Silko, Kandice Chuh shows how their work involves an "illiberal aesthetic rationality," which, when placed alongside such "defining characteristics of liberalism as…insistence on progressive enlightenment through the accumulation of a putatively disinterested knowledge and individuated self-consciousness," render these characteristics "patently if potently nonsensical" (Chuh *Difference* 75). I want to suggest that this is also what Saijo's work does. It is what "BODHISATTVA VOWS," Saijo's best-known Buddhist poem, unmistakably registers in its humor and cynicism.

Liberalism's "insistence on progressive enlightenment through the accumulation of a putatively disinterested knowledge and individuated self-consciousness" (Chuh *Difference* 75) has been part of Western understandings of "Buddhism" since at least the nineteenth century. As Tomoko Masuzawa suggests, one of the fictions of liberalism was the framing of "Buddhism" itself as a "world religion." This is (still) a deeply ingrained idea of "Buddhism" as a "universal" religion that:

> had in the course of its long history gained a great number of adherents in many nations and thereby had transcended its original boundaries of race, language, and culture…[and whose] essential nature derives from the singular intention of its founder toward something like a spirit of individual freedom and universal humanity soaring above the particularism of national tradition. (Masuzawa 144).

The above framing was an early twentieth century, pre-WWI conception of "Buddhism," but it was drawn from at least a century of largely European religious and Orientalist scholars who had not only constructed the neologism of "Buddhism" itself but had also worked to understand it as a universal(ist) world religion. "From the early days of European scholarly investigation into the matter," Masuzawa writes, the "origin of Buddhism was…uniquely and exclusively tied to one individual and to his reputedly revolutionary spiritual vision" (134). One of the ways European scholars made sense of Buddhism was to match its story to two major criteria by which "world" religions were defined in the nineteenth century: 1) that the religion had a founder, that there was *an* initiator of an ongoing tradition; and 2) that the religion had recognizable ancient texts that held a canonical status (Masuzawa 131). Therefore, the story of "Buddhism" as it was brought into being by European scholars (as a *discourse,* rather than a series of locally-situated religious practices), held that "the origin of Buddhism was an exemplary case of a great man heroically

standing up against the faceless collective power of society and tradition, thus evoking an image that the modern West has come to champion and idolize" (Masuzawa 136). Few other texts express this more "sharply" than "the words of Germany's leading Indologist, Albrecht Weber (1825-1901), professor of Sanskrit at the University of Berlin":

> Buddhism in its origin is one of the greatest and most radical reactions in four of the universal rights of man, as belonging to the individual, as opposed to the crushing tyranny of the so-called divine privileges of birth and rank. It is the work of an individual man, who at the beginning of the sixth century BC rose up in Eastern India against the Brahmanical hierarchy, and by the simplicity and the ethic power of his teaching, brought about a complete split between the people of India and their past. (Weber qtd in P.D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, *Manual of the Science of Religion* (1891), 564; qtd. in Masuzawa 131).

In the late-nineteenth century moment of Weber's writing, Masuzawa writes, "the Vedas on the one hand and the institution of the caste system on the other, of course, ha[d] been the twin pillars by which Europeans came to understand what it meant to be Indian" (Masuzawa 137), and thus when the historical figure of the Buddha ostensibly rejected this spiritual tradition and its social manifestations in the caste system, "what more direct and succinct way is there for shedding the specifically Indian…character of a religion than knocking down these pillars?" (137). From the beginning, therefore, the scholarship on Buddhism was "constructing—or 'discovering', as one might prefer to put it—a decidedly non-national religion, a qualitatively universal(istic) religion, that is to say, a *Weltreligion,* or world religion" (Masuzawa 137). Put simply, as "Buddhism" became framed as a "world" religion that was universal(istic) in nature, it became increasingly detached from cultural particularity, from the specific persons who

practice(d) it in any given historical moment. The above language's focus on *origins* and ancient texts, too, submerges Buddhism's "living" quality, the fact that real persons in the same historical time in which Weber was writing were practicing "Buddhism," even if they might not have recognized the term itself.

This framing, combined with the tradition's wealth of ancient, canonical texts, meant "Buddhism" was ushered into European systems of knowledge creation as a religion that earned its "universal" status partly because its origin story echoed European values. This does not mean that Europeans did not wrestle with what "Buddhism" as a world religion meant for Christianity and Christianity's relationship to European identity—on the contrary: as Buddhist texts were more thoroughly understood and translated, scholars began to wonder, for example, whether Christianity was perhaps even derived from Buddhism—whether Christianity's "universal" posture might have been borrowed from Buddhism.[136] But these are the early ways by which "Buddhism" was separated from local, historical, specific contexts and refracted through liberalism in an overvaluing of individual struggle, which shows in Snyder's "cosmo-political" emphasis on "the lonely individual working out his path by lonely self-enquiry and meditation" (Morgan 55)—an emphasis that Thanissaro Bhikku would undoubtedly see as a manifestation of Buddhist Romanticism, as well.[137]

One of the primary ways that Buddhism was brought into American contexts was due to the development of the field of comparative religion, which, by the early twentieth century, had developed "the idea of the fundamental unity of religions—or what may be reasonably termed

[136] See Masuzawa chapters 4 and 8.
[137] Thanissaro, Bhikku. "The Roots of Buddhist Romanticism." *Purity of Heart: Meditations on the Buddhist Path*. Valley Center, CA: Metta Forest Monastery, 2012. <www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/rootsofbuddhistromanticism.html>.

liberal universalism" (Masuzawa 316). This idea had "been in evidence in much of the comparative enterprise since the nineteenth century" and was echoed by key twentieth-century exponents of history and phenomenology of religion" (Masuzawa 316, 315).[138] This "liberal universalism" is the idea that all religions essentially "represent the different angles at which man looks at God" and "are no longer judged by their supposed accordance with the letter of the Bible [or other sacred texts], but by their ability to minister to the wants and fulfil the aspirations of men" (qtd. in Masuzawa 316). This "liberal universalism" "recognizes as Divine all the creeds which have enabled men to overcome their bestial appetites with visions of things spiritual and eternal" (316). Masuzawa suggests that Buddhism was interpreted in this "liberal universalist" frame at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions; I would suggest this framing was later echoed in D.T. Suzuki's specific critique of Western society, which focused attention away from actual "outward forms" of Zen practice and emphasized "the unique, transcultural experience of Buddhist awakening in language that his American audiences could understand" (Brown "Zen of Anarchy" 215). Suzuki accentuated the *competence or ability* of Zen to "save the West," emphasizing the "universality of the enlightenment experience, unencumbered by cultural particulars, at the core of Buddhist practice" (Brown "Zen of Anarchy" 218).

Soen Shaku, Suzuki's mentor and teacher also framed Buddhism in this "liberal universalist" way: "his *Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot* (also known as *Zen for Americans*), published first in 1904 and still in print, minimalized Zen rituals to offer ethical guidelines

[138] Evidence of this universalism is heard, for example, in the following anonymous statement quoted on the opening page of *Religious Systems of the World* (1891): "'a new Catholicity has dawned upon the world. All religions are now recognized as essentially Divine. They represent the different angles at which man looks at God…religions are no longer judged by their supposed accordance with the letter of the Bible, but by their ability to minister to the wants and fulfil the aspirations of men. The individual, what can it make of him? As it raises or debases, purifies or corrupts, fills with happiness or torments with fear, so is it judged to accord with the Divine will…the new tolerance of faith recognizes as Divine all the creeds which have enabled men to overcome their bestial appetites with visions of things spiritual and eternal'" (qtd. in Masuzawa 316).

surrounded by a gentle Buddhist theism that nonetheless did not use the term 'God'" (Najarian 312). This book "attractively packages Buddhism as a useful alternative for modern industrial life"; meanwhile, D.T. Suzuki "contributed in his many works both to the popular conception that Zen "is not a religion at all" but "pure experience" and the "unmediated experience of life itself untainted by cultural accretions … the ultimate source of all religious teaching, both Eastern and Western" (Sharf, qtd. in Najarian 312). One can see how such arguments for the value of Buddhism would become indelibly hybridized with Romanticism, as David McMahan argues ("for McMahan, Buddhism in modernity combines with literary Romanticism in its support of spontaneity, personal freedom, the demotic, and avoidance of bookishness and education") (Najarian 311, McMahan 197). In Bernard Faure's case, this accretion of rhetorical framings of Buddhism should be seen as "Western 'neo-Buddhism,'" which "represents itself as a recovery of the "real" or "true" Buddhism, unencumbered by long-held beliefs and practices, in order to make Buddhism more appealing to modernity" (Faure 7, Najarian 311).[139] (We saw this "neo-Buddhism" in Watts's argument that the convert, "ashram" Buddhism was more authentic or purer somehow than what he termed the "temple" Buddhism of midcentury Japanese Americans.)

Since I have used the term "liberal" in many phrases in the paragraphs above, perhaps it is best to clarify: first, I am suggesting that Saijo's poetics comments upon the liberal humanist subject of "Man" in couching Buddhism in the "RATIONAL MADNESS" that follows from that subject's centering as *the* agent on the world stage of history. I am also suggesting that *Outspeaks* criticizes the "world religion" status of "Buddhism"—i.e., the idea of Buddhism as

[139] "Probably in its most distasteful form," Najarian writes, "[neo-Buddhism] involves Europeans or European-Americans "purifying" Buddhism of its "Asian" traditions, a movement that has its roots in the brief nineteenth-century vogue for emphasizing the Buddha's "Aryan" heritage. At its most extreme, of course, Buddhist modernism reduces Buddhism to a form of self-help or a mere style of life" (Najarian 311).

simply another way of "looking at God," a religion that allows "Man" to transcend "the human condition" and focus on things spiritual—which has in part come down to us from the "liberal universalist" framing of European scholars.

For, despite the arguments for Buddhism's "liberal universalism" and the Romanticist claims of its popularizers that it would "save the West," Saijo is skeptical of the enlightenment that Buddhism offers:

> WHO NEEDS ENLIGHTENMENT THIS BASTARD DEATH THAT ONLY MAKES SUFFERING EXQUISITE – WHO WANTS TO BE GURU IF EVERYONE ELSE IS CHELA (Saijo 37)[140]

And, suggesting that the "awareness" one might reach in Buddhist practice remedies very little, the speaker complains:

> IS IT TOO MUCH TO ASK TO BE AWAKE AMONGST THIS VARIED WORLD IN BROAD DAYLITE & BE COMPLETELY PAIN FREE (29)

When his best-known poem "BODHISATTVA VOWS," often published as a stand-alone poem, is placed within the pages of the RHAPSODE that is *Outspeaks*, the poem's poetics shift. When read as a stand-alone poem, it can be read as a lighthearted, if cynical, take on the suffering of a bodhisattva. Yet when it is not simply excerpted, but part of *Outspeaks'* full rhapsody, placed within pages of ALL CAPS that take as their target "SCIENCE" and the extractive "MADNESS" of settler colonialism, the poem is sharply critical, even fatalistic about what it means to be a Bodhisattva—an approach to living that in this poem appears naïve at best, masochistic at worst. The poems "PROCRUSTES," "KARMA LOLLIPOP," and "SCIENCE"

[140] A "chela" is variously understood as a slave, servant, or disciple.

that exist on all sides of "BODHISATTVA VOWS" *place* Buddhism in specific settler-colonial contexts and also refract the meaning of "BODHISATTVAHOOD" to be, not soteriological nor salvific, but on the thankless receiving end of endlessly extractive effects. In this poetics, to be a Buddhist is to embody a harmful relationship to "THE EARTH" that derives from the liberal humanist subject of "Man"; or, one can be a bodhisattva, a figure who, though capable of actually reaching nirvana, suffers endlessly.

Because of the scene that it depicts, "BODHISATTVA VOWS" can be seen as a poem that asks similar questions as Audre Lorde's poem "Power" (which asks where power or agency might lie when choices seem totally determined) or Erica Hunt's poem "The Voice of No." Hunt's lines ("in place of a raft / we paddle / ladders past the / litter of drifting bodies") are reminiscent of Saijo's version of a bodhisattva, his understanding of the uselessness of enlightenment. Here, though Saijo himself uses Buddhism in his *poetry,* Buddhism does not hold any saving graces useful in daily life; it is not a religion that reaffirms the "Divine" in each soul as in "liberal universalism"; and there are no "LIFEJACKETs"—instead, Buddhism simply reinforces one's endless suffering.

A bodhisattva is generally understood as a figure who is able to reach nirvana but delays attaining that state so as to help other suffering beings; as such, a "BODHISATTVA VOWS TO BE THE LAST ONE OFF THE SINKING SHIP," Saijo writes. This is a figure who "SIGN[S] UP AND FIND[S] OUT IT'S FOREVER" (127). With an "ENDLESS" list of passengers, the "SHIP NEVER EMPTIES"; instead, it KEEPS SINKING" but rather than achieving some sort of end point, culmination, or resting place, it "DOESN'T GO QUITE UNDER" (127). Because of this,

> ON BOARD ANGST PANIC & DESPERATION HOLD SWAY – TURNS OUT BODHISATTVAHOOD IS A FUCKING JOB LIKE ANY OTHER BUT DIFFERENT IN THAT THERE'S NO WEEKENDS HOLIDAYS VACATIONS NO GOLDEN YEARS OF RETIREMENT – YOU'RE SPENDING ALL YOUR TIME & ENERGY GETTING OTHER PEOPLE OFF THE SINKING SHIP INTO LIFEBOATS BOUND GAILY FOR NIRVANA WHILE THERE YOU ARE SINKING – & OF COURSE YOU HAD TO GO & GIVE YOUR LIFEJACKET AWAY – SO NOW LET US BE CHEERFUL AS WE SINK – OUR SPIRIT EVER BUOYANT AS WE SINK (Saijo 127)

"BODHISATTVAHOOD" does not allow one the spaces of mind of Snyder's "Piute Creek"; nor does it allow one nirvana—that is reserved for the "OTHER PEOPLE" that the bodhisattva is helping get "OFF THE SINKING SHIP INTO LIFEBOATS" (127). The passengers aboard this SINKING SHIP take and take without giving anything back to the bodhisattva. There are no resources here ("OF COURSE YOU HAD TO GO & GIVE YOUR LIFEJACKET AWAY"), only suffering and "SINKING." In Saijo's work, there are no poems about being in nature or meditating (when he does write about nature, he examines specific birds or weather patterns so as to glean a sense of what the world would be like if humanity were eradicated, lending a dark overtone to Chuh's book's subheading: "The Humanities after 'Man'"). Saijo's poems do not register Buddhist Romanticism because his work registers, instead, the *actually* universal condition of the majority of people in the Anthropocene (rather than the seeming "universality" of the liberal humanist subject).

"The universal of global history is coloniality": *Outspeaks* and the "Humanities after 'Man'"[141]

The stakes of Saijo's poetics and its implications for the field of American literature are perhaps best illustrated by Kandice Chuh's argument in *The Difference Aesthetics Makes* (2019). In Chuh's book, which won the 2021 Association of Asian American Studies Book Awards, she not only examines "the centrality of the aesthetic to the philosophies and practical structures of liberal humanism…exemplified by Kant's work and its impact, and by the discipline of English and the field of American Literature"; Chuh also "brings to bear the subjugated or disavowed humanisms" that are generated through work that is "disidentified from bourgeois liberalism and its cognate onto-epistemologies" (Chuh *Difference* xi-xii). The "reigning" humanism of bourgeois liberalism, as Chuh rightly notes, "sorts people into the fit and unfit, the rational and the unreasonable, Man and other, Man and woman, and Human and racialized subject" (xii). These effects of the "common sense" of liberal humanism are precisely those that Saijo describes and rages against—and, in so doing, he brings chapter one's poetics of "timely" uncertainty a step further, "ruining" the transcendent truths of liberal humanism by revealing them to be "institutional" facts. The fact that Buddhism is part of his critique means that we might consider Buddhism to be a "cognate onto-epistemology" of modernity, particularly given German Romanticism's embeddedness in the importation of Buddhism into Western contexts; particularly given the ways in which Buddhism has been "racially rearticulated" to support the racial hierarchies of the United States.

Indeed, David McMahan, who according to James Najarian has penned "probably the greatest critique of Western Buddhism," argues that "what many Americans and Europeans

[141] The "humanities after "Man" refers to Chuh's book's orientation in "arguing for the emancipation of the human from liberalism's grasp" (Chuh *Difference* 4). One can find this phrase, "the universal of global history is coloniality," on page 114 (*Difference)*.

understand by 'Buddhism' is actually a hybrid of a number of Buddhist traditions that have cross-fertilized with the dominant discourses of Western modernity, especially those rooted in Enlightenment rationalism, Romanticism, and Protestant Christianity" (McMahan 3). The historicized Buddhism that McMahan studies—one based in the "North American cultural assumption that Buddhism is a religion in which you don't really have to believe anything in particular or follow any strict rules"—is modernist because "it emerges out of engagements with modernity" (Najarian 312, McMahan 6). Buddhism in modernity "combines with literary Romanticism in its support of spontaneity, personal freedom, the demotic, and avoidance of bookishness and education" (Najarian 312). One can find these "combinations" in many autobiographical and poetic Beat texts, as in Philip Whalen's explanation of how he found his way into Buddhism. After reading a series of Western texts *about* Eastern religions, Whalen felt "it was very satisfying that this system was really there, and it made sense to me; the Christian religion never did" (Meltzer 341).[142] After joining a Vedanta society and reading R.H. Blyth's translations of haiku poetry, "whose first volume is almost entirely devoted to commentaries and great revelations about Zen" (Meltzer 343), "the next thing that happened was":

> that we started reading the essays in [D.T. Suzuki's] *Zen Buddhism.* That converted me, I think, pretty much to the idea that Buddhism, and certainly Zen, was a much more free and unbent kind of operation. That one could live in the mountains and be crazy and be fine. Nobody would care. I thought that was a swell program. Of course, misunderstanding the whole point. (Meltzer 343)

[142] Whalen was reading the writings of theosophist Helena Blavatsky, translations of the Vedanta writings, and Lin Yutang's anthology *The Wisdom of China and India* (1942).

Though Whalen admits he "misunderst[ood] the whole point" of Zen Buddhism, he does register the combination of Buddhism and Romanticism that he and others absorbed in the period, including "a support of spontaneity, personal freedom, the demotic, and avoidance of bookishness and education"—seen in his idea of Zen as a "free and unbent kind of operation" (Najarian 312, Meltzer 343).

Liberal humanist notions, including the more Romantic "spontaneous, uncontaminated self" (McMahan 197), are embedded into how many interpret and practice Buddhism. But because of the "relationships among the senses and the processes and structures of value-making by which certain sensibilities become common sense"—because of the "common sense" of liberal humanism—*other* sensibilities, such as those present in Saijo's work, have been "disavowed, subjugated, or otherwise obscured" (Chuh *Difference* xii).

For Saijo's work reveals the violent effects of paradigms and theories that emerge from such emphases on "progressive enlightenment" and "individuated self-consciousness" and the supposedly "disinterested knowledge" of "SCIENCE." These are the underpinnings of liberalism, which show up in the neoliberal era as the "affirmation of meritocracy as a neutral metric and corollary disavowal of the sociality and historicity of the individual" (Chuh 76). Accordingly, Chuh writes, "dominant rationalism serves as the explanation for, rather than being understood as a condition of, the success of a few and the failure of most"; meanwhile, the seeming evidence of the freedom of individual choice "is found in the success of those few who heroically surmount history to achieve individual success" (76). It is not just that Saijo is critical of liberalism, as Ozeki and Silko are; it is that his work shows how Buddhism, which appears to be and is still considered by many to be *itself* critical of this "role of rationalization—the production and legitimation of what counts as reasonable" (Chuh 76)—is *implicated* in these

liberal values. We already know that the popularized, mainstream branding of Buddhism known as "mindfulness" "reiterate[s] the long-lived tradition of self-help bolstered by U.S. nationalist ideology" and is part of the "bootstraps and meritocracy" that "have since the nation's founding been integral to its privileged imaginary" (76-77). But Saijo is showing how even the Buddhisms of his Beat counterparts, which are generally viewed as more rigorous than mainstream iterations of mindfulness, are implicated in the "RATIONAL MADNESS" that has structured the Anthropocene. In this regard, Saijo holds out a similar criticism as Silko and Ozeki, who "deflate the authority of the (neo)liberal not so much by mounting arguments against it, but instead by showing that violence and devastation of and against the well-being of both people and planet are its logical conclusions" (77). His work shows that abstract ideals of freedom and happiness, or even just "SCIENCE," which are held out by modernity as "humanity's horizon," are not only untenable, but dangerous, wreaking violence (77).

The "general and persistent reminder" of minoritized discourses is "that modernity and its cognates largely fail to produce peace or proliferate freedom or stability for the majority of the world" (Chuh 21). This is Saijo's critique of Buddhism as well. For Buddhism is, at least within the American context in which the Beats wrote and lived, a "cognate of modernity"—it is framed as such by Shaku Soen in the late 19th century *and* by D.T. Suzuki later. Dominant discourses of "Western modernity" include, as Arif Dirlik has suggested, modern and contemporary cultural nationalisms, some of which have marshaled Zen Buddhism as part of their logic and identity (see Sharf, Ketelaar, and James Brown). Dirlik rightly notes that though these cultural nationalisms "make claims to the uniqueness of essentialized national cultures, [they] all have one thing in common: that the unique national culture is a force of modernization, more precisely, capitalist modernization" (Dirlik 117). Buddhism is part of this cross-fertilization, and

"Zennist" Euro Americans were largely attracted to Zen Buddhism because they saw it as such: as a cognate of modernity (and, as we have seen, a cognate of German Romanticism, which is perhaps unsurprising given the many nineteenth-century German scholars who were translating ancient Buddhist texts and forming what was then called the "science" of religion).[143] And what Saijo registers is that, because of these liberal humanist, and liberal universalist, logics embedded in Zen Buddhism—because of the ways in which it informs the capitalist underpinnings of modernity, which we can see in what Dirlik might call the "self-orientalism" of Meiji-era Japan—it "fail[s] to produce peace or proliferate freedom or stability for the majority of the world"—*even when* it is an environmentally-conscious Buddhism (Chuh *Difference* 22).[144] In fact, Saijo's critique essentially notes that some, but not most, benefit (a critique perhaps also accidentally registered in Jack Kerouac's account of his visit to Saijo in the Veterans Administration hospital, which was memorialized in Kerouac's novel *Big Sur* and which I describe in this chapter's conclusion).

Though Saijo and Snyder were friends and corresponded for years, Saijo's work shows Snyder's "cosmo-political" project, whose *first* ingredient is "the individual *working out his path* by lonely self-enquiry and meditation" (Morgan 55), to be based in the fictions of liberalism:

[143] Many, like Thanissaro Bhikku, have demonstrated that Euro American attraction to Zen Buddhism in particular was motivated by its "modern" ability to be a religion that did not counteract or contradict "science." Its modern character was a major part of its attraction. On the influence of German scholars on the European understanding and study of Buddhism, see Masuzawa Chapter 5. Early nineteenth-century Germans (though Germany was not unified yet) were most interested and had the greatest regard for the East: "in various principalities and kingdoms of the Germanic world, particularly in the emergent state of Prussia, the leading men of science and of the affairs of state made concerted attempts to become conversant with Orientalist scholarship" (Masuzawa 156).

[144] Saijo's poem "NO SHIT" yells that "ECO MOVEMENT IS PURITANISM APPLIED TO NATURE—IT'S EUROCENTRIC IN ITS MISSIONARY ZEAL…EUROCENTRAL TELLING NATIVES HEY YOUR WAY NO GOOD ANYMORE CATCH ON WE GOT THE ANSWER…TRUST US WE KNOW BETTER THAN YOU WHATS GOOD FOR BIOME THAT MEANS ALSO WHATS GOOD FOR YOU—NO SHIT" (121).

> self-knowledge and intentionality go hand in hand to enliven a mimetic relationship between political and individual sovereignty—or so the story goes according to liberalism. That state of identification is not only grossly unevenly distributed (this is what minoritized discourses have shown over and over again) but is also dependent on a *willfulness* difficult if not impossible to sustain. Contrary to the pedagogies of (neo)liberalism, individuals cannot overcome the accidents of birth simply by dint of sheer will. (Chuh *Difference* 21, my emphasis)

Snyder's "cosmo-political" project views this "mimetic relationship between political and individual sovereignty" as *real*—remember the other ingredient of his cosmo-politics, alongside the individual, was "a kind of social-sexual communal breakthrough, aided by dance, drugs, music, (meditation), etc. Now if we can reconcile these two and use them we can *remake society* utterly" (Chuh *Difference* 21, Morgan 55, my emphasis). "BODHISATTVA VOWS," even in its very title's emphasis on "VOWS," shows the liberal humanist "mimetic relationship between political and individual sovereignty" to be wholly "dependent" on this "*willfulness*" that is "impossible to sustain" (Chuh *Difference* 21).

A side effect of the dominance of "Man" as the subject of liberal humanism is the oppositional construction of "Nature," which, in addition to the idea of an Orientalized "East" outside of time, is where Buddhism is "placed" by Euro Americans. Following from the long history of Buddhism's framing as a "universal," "world" religion, this is another iteration of how Buddhism is removed from cultural specificity; it is a rhetorical move that stems from liberal humanist conceptions of Man's relation to the world. If the "reigning" humanism of bourgeois liberalism, as Chuh rightly notes, "sorts people into the fit and unfit, the rational and the

unreasonable, Man and other, Man and woman, and Human and racialized subject," it also sorts "Man" and "Nature" into disparate categories (Chuh *Difference* xii).

In many Beat texts, Nature is a realm of freedom outside of capitalism; it is the space to which one "drops out" and relearns the techniques of survival outside of a consumerist society. Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* holds some of the most well-known, vivid narrative descriptions of the importance of Buddhist practice performed in nature, away from consumable objects—alcohol being the "consumable object" that "Ray Smith" has the most difficulty leaving behind on his Romantic, sublime hikes with "Japhy Ryder." As Nock-Hee Park and Iyko Day have shown, Snyder's re-envisioning of whiteness as "native," which was partly based on his primitivist understanding of Native American culture and history, means that "Nature," for Snyder and many other Beats, is a realm of freedom that does not owe its wisdoms to capitalism. "Nature" in this conception is thus capable of revealing the cosmic truths of Buddhism, as we saw in the poem "Piute Creek." Positioned within an environmental frame like this, Buddhism appears as an anti-consumerist set of ideas and tools that can mount a liberatory critique of then-contemporary American culture. (Indeed, Buddhism positioned as "outside" of American culture may go to form and stabilize the conception of avant-gardism as an "outsider" social formation and artistic commitment, as well.)

Perceiving Buddhism as "outside" of consumerist society is similar to Watts's perception of Buddhism as "Eastern" or "ancient," and therefore untainted by American society's consumerism (this is another iteration of Faure's "neo-Buddhism," which can itself be seen as a version of Buddhist modernism). These are a theoretical positionings to some degree. Beat conceptions of "East" and "Nature" are also conceptualizations that exist outside of historical time: remember that Watts places what he conceives to be the "real" Buddhism in the distant past

while also claiming to be its heir, inheriting it/bringing it into his own (though not his Asian American colleagues') present time and reinforcing his own position as knower. In so doing, he collapses the *relationality* he might have seen in his own time (i.e., the fact that he partly learned Buddhist practice from Asians in America). In placing Buddhism in these "outside" theoretical positions (the "East" and "Nature," outside of historical time), Watts disregards racialization, colonialism, and imperialisms of all kinds, including Japanese imperialism; meanwhile, he more overtly fashions Zen Buddhism into a "modern epistemology" that centers the liberal humanist subject of his own thinking, his own time (his own person):

> the occlusions and erasures effected by and operational in modern epistemology ensures that racialization, colonialism, and biopolitics (collectively, Walter Mignolo's body-politics) remain outside of history, disqualified from the 'historical sensorium.' (Chuh *Difference* 108)

This is what Watts ensured in his disqualification of Japanese American Buddhism as "too Protestantized": that "racialization, colonialism, and biopolitics (collectively, Walter Mignolo's body-politics) remain outside of history"—outside of American Buddhism (108).

The discourse of religious pluralism used by Europeans to understand and taxonomize Buddhism as a "world" religion—a discourse still present today in primary, secondary, and higher education textbooks—creates a similar effect. This discourse of religious pluralism "spiritualizes what are material practices and turns them into expressions of something timeless and suprahistorical, which is to say, it *depoliticizes them*" (Masuzawa 20). To depoliticize is to erase not only cultural particularity, but also the "illiberal" forms of knowledge that such "material practices" might offer. Might we take this rhetorical positioning as something complicit with "force[s] of modernization, more precisely, capitalist modernization"? (Dirlik

117). Many have written on the ways that recent iterations of what Faure calls "neo-Buddhism" are complicit with *late* capital, but this Buddhist modernism (particularly in its Orientalist or self-Orientalized manifestations) appears complicit with capitalist modernization.[145]

But *Outspeaks,* in which "Man" is itself revealed as the problem that has mobilized colonialism to extract from "Nature," brings that "outside of history"-ness into the present, re-qualifying it as the *now*. In addition, the book brings forward a different kind of knowing subject, as opposed to the liberal humanist subject, by showing the presentness of settler colonialism and imperialism. Saijo's "PROCRUSTES"—his poem about how governments "VIOLENTLY FORCE" citizens "INTO CONFORMITY WITH OR SUBSERVIENCE TO SOMETHING AS A SYSTEM POLICY DOCTRINE" (109)—describes the effects of liberal humanism; it registers the "sorting" of people into "fit and unfit" that follows from liberal humanism.

We might bring Edward Said's legacy further into this discussion of liberal humanism. As Vivek Chibber, Hussein Omar, and Arif Dirlik have recently explained (though Dirlik wrote in 1996), Said removed Orientalism from materialist inquiry. That removal was a result of Said's humanist approach to scholarship, and what follows from his contradictory arguments about Orientalism is the sense that "the West" simply colonized the world because of its own racism and xenophobia—that Orientalism was *causal to* colonialism. But colonialism occurred because of material and ruling class interests. And Saijo brings us back to that fact of historicity. We can see this in his poem "KARMA LOLLIPOP": in its reversal of colonization where it is whites who are enslaved, the poem registers that *all* cultures essentialize (Chibber writes, "there was nothing unique in the West's highly parochial understanding of the Orient. The same

[145] See Arif Dirlik, "Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism" for how "self-Orientalization" has played a role in transforming forces that *appear* anti-colonial into phenomena that are *complicit* with colonialism.

essentialized and ethnocentric conceptions were typical of Eastern understandings of the West") (Chibber). In showing this reversal of colonization, Saijo's poem echoes Chibber's question: what *did* cause the process of colonization to develop so egregiously and violently? Saijo's poems answer this:

> I MUST BE APOSTATE FROM HUMAN BECAUSE IT LOOKS TO ME LIKE CIVILIZATION IS BASED ON INVIDIOUS DISTINCTIONS WHEN WE ARE SAME WHERE IT COUNTS—CIVILIZATION CONSISTENTLY FAILS TO DELIVER COMMON GOOD EQUALLY—AND NOW SCIENTIFIC CIVILIZATION BRINGS OUT ALL THE WORST IN CIVILIZATION—IT EXAGGERATES OUR PSYCHOTIC PRESENCE OVER THE EARTH LIKE A SPECTER OF BROCKEN (Saijo 123)

"Invidious distinctions," Thorstein Veblen's term for the class markers one can obtain by gathering, consuming, and obtaining objects that arrogate wealth or value to oneself, provide the foundation of "CIVILIZATION," a foundation exacerbated by "SCIENTIFIC CIVILIZATION," which in *Outspeaks* appears synonymous with what others call the military-industrial complex. This is to say, Saijo's poetry grounds colonialism in *material* interests, the impulse to extract value from others and from the Earth.

In her book, Chuh works to elaborate the principles and concepts of an "other" humanities "derived from what [she] provisionally refer[s] to as 'illiberal humanisms'" (2). These illiberal humanisms "have long existed and percolate institutionally largely within and through minoritized discourses" like *Outspeaks* (2). Read alongside Chuh's recent work, therefore, we can see that Saijo writes from what Chuh calls a "more human/illiberal humanist position":

> From this more human/illiberal humanist position, knowledge and modes of knowing are recruited toward the aims of 'the regeneration of life,' rather than, by contrast, the ideal of civilization or the salvation of the economy. This knowing subject is radically different from the universal subject, *not as universalism's particular*, but instead as *that standpoint formed by the compulsory imposition of a particular universalism* and the radical relation to its governing epistemology" (Chuh *Difference* 116-117, my emphasis)

Outspeaks as a whole "RHAPSODY" emerges from this knowing subject; it is a "speaking out" from a very specific standpoint that tells us ("LET ME TELL YOU WHO I AM") its makeup was formed "by the compulsory imposition of a particular universalism" (117). This poetry tells us, both, *about* this imposition—"I AM AN ANIMAL IN A CAGE & I AM BARKING TO BE LET OUT" (19) and tells us that the speaker's rage arises *from* the "compulsory impositions" of liberal humanism, which:

> [ARE] MARKED BY COMPLETE DISREGARD OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES OR SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND THAT ARBITRARILY OFTEN RUTHLESSLY OR VIOLENTLY FORCES INTO CONFORMITY WITH OR SUBSERVIENCE TO SOMETHING AS A SYSTEM POLICY DOCTRINE…WE GOT ALL OUR LEGS CHOPPED OFF OR STRETCHED TO SIZE AVERAGE & WE ARE ALL HOBBLING ALONG LIKE WE DON'T MIND IT – I HAVE COME TO MIND BEING GOVERNED – I HAVE COME TO MIND LIVING UNDER A REGIMEN I HAD NO SAY IN JOINING OR NOT JOINING – NO SOONER WAS I BORN THAN IM AUTOMATICALLY RECRUITED INTO CITIZENSHIP & ALL THE GOD AWFUL DUTIES THAT GO WITH IT – I HAVE COME TO MIND THE WEIGHT OF GOVT ON MY ANIMAL NATURE (Saijo *Outspeaks* 109-110)

Here, the values of "individuality and autochthony" are revealed to be characteristics that work only for the privileged subject of liberal humanism; all other subjects are "FORCE[D] INTO CONFORMITY" in violent ways, their differences "COMPLETELY DISREGARD[ED]" (109). This excerpt articulates a "sensibility" that is "incommensurate to the epistemologies and common sense of liberal humanism"—the angry, ALL-CAPS poetry displaces the "sensibilities" of the ostensible "common sense" of "THESE PEOPLE WHO ACTUALLY BELIEVE THEY KNOW BETTER THAN ME WHATS GOOD FOR ME…THEY GOT NO HUMAN – THEY GOT NO RESPECT FOR ANYTHING BUT RULING BY THEIR FUCKING LAWS" (Chuh *Difference* xii, Saijo 110-111). Instead, Saijo illuminates "uncommon, illiberal sensibilities" as in the perspectives of:

> A REED THAT CEPHALIZED & GREW LIMBS…THE ANIMAL THAT I AM & NOT A BIRD OR FISH…UP ON MY HIND LEGS (111)

or as in the statement that:

> I BELIEVE THE HUMAN RACE INDIVIDUALLY & IN AGGREGATE IS A RACE GONE TOTALLY PSYCHOTIC AND I BELIEVE THE LEADING SYMPTOM OF THIS ABERRANT CONDITION IS WHAT WE CALL CIVLIZATION (122)

Such "sensibilities," in "apprehend[ding] the damage resulting from [the] potent fictions" of liberal humanism or "CIVILIZATION" "radically disidentify from the teleological narrative of progressive development that gives texture to liberal humanism" (Chuh xii). *Outspeaks* fundamentally refuses "to be defined or disciplined by them": "I DECLARE MYSELF TO BE FREE OF THEM – I DECLARE MYSELF TO BE A FREE ANIMAL ON EARTH – LET ME TELL YOU WHO I AM" (Saijo 111). In this, Saijo:

> establish[es] the falsity of and damages done by [liberal humanism's] claims to universality and resoundingly decrie[s] its uses and dissemination toward the ends of imperialism and colonialism, White supremacy and capitalism, environmental devastation, patriarchy, and compulsory normativization of multiple kinds. (Chuh *Difference* 3)

To put it plainly, "in their interarticulation," Saijo's work and a host of other "illiberal humanist" texts, "submit that the universal of global history is *coloniality*," *not* the centered subject of liberal humanism (Chuh 114, my emphasis).

Buddhism in Some Asian American Writing

> My interrogations now…approach a third kind of conversation that I'm interested in having—one that goes beyond artwork and maker to include the larger dialogue with the social circumstances under which a work of art exists.
>
> –Shin Yu Pai, *Enso*

In this section, I examine multiple other Asian American texts' inscriptions of Buddhism, showing the broader contexts by which Buddhism has been integral to American poetics. These inscriptions, adaptations, and adoptions of Buddhism are not uniform, but show us, as Saijo does, that the ethics of using Buddhism as a tool of poetics depends on who is using it, and for what. As the above excerpt also suggests, the poets I discuss below (Hoa Nguyen, Shin Yu Pai, and Garrett Hongo) inscribe Buddhism in ways that open the work of art or poem outward in such a way as to "include the larger dialogue with the social circumstances under which a work of art exists" (Pai 49). I find especially resonant the idea of "going *beyond artwork and maker*": the fact that the scholarship and other interpretative communities (Buddhist practitioners, sanghas,

and popular Buddhist discourse) have not always gone "beyond artwork and maker" is, I am arguing, at least partly due to the ways that whiteness has impacted the category "Beat." Here, I want to expand from Saijo's poetics and broaden this chapter's conclusions so that we can perhaps talk authoritatively about how (some) Asian American writers inscribe Buddhism in their work. Their work is not necessarily representative of "Buddhism in *Asian* American poetry," but shows that American poetry's inscriptions of Buddhism are not uniform.

Josephine Nock-Hee Park suggests that Buddhism in Asian American writing has always had a "vexed status." Park summarizes this "vexation" in two Japanese American texts:

> John Okada's *No-No Boy* devotes a chapter to the 'mumbo-jumbo' of a Buddhist funeral service which transforms the protagonist's father, already a weak man, into an unsympathetic character whose Buddhism is only a simpering pose; similarly, Hisaye Yamamoto's short story about internment, "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara," sketches a portrait of an otherworldly Buddhist priest who stifles and ultimately destroys his daughter because he simply does not notice the outrage of the camps. (Park 101-02)

In Yamamoto's story, the Buddhist priest's "religious fulfillment in the debased condition of internment" drives his daughter to debilitation and madness; she "refuses to adjust to camp life and goes mad as a result" (Park 101-02).[146]

But this vexation has not been limited to Japanese American Nisei texts, families, and communities. As Chenxing Han's *Be the Refuge* (2021) suggests, many contemporary Asian American Buddhists view their Buddhist religious identities and practices uneasily and are wary

[146] "Though the overhaul of immigration legislation in 1965 brought a range of Buddhisms from different parts of Asia," Park writes, "by the end of the twentieth century, Japanese American Buddhism found itself hemmed in on two fronts because of its unique status as 'neither convert nor immigrant'" (Nock-Hee Park 102).

of calling themselves "Buddhist" because white cultural representations of Buddhism are so dominant and masquerade as cultureless. *Be the Refuge* counters the erasure of Asian American Buddhists by displaying the complexity and nuance of contemporary Asian American Buddhists' stories and experiences. The book also, quite simply, reveals how difficult it has been for many Asian/Americans to understand their religiosity, given that "Buddhism in America" is so incredibly white in its manifestations, whether in the makeup of Buddhist religious communities or in the images and articles in popular magazines like *Tricycle. Be the Refuge* contains in-depth interviews with a pan-ethnic, pan-Buddhist group of 89 young adults, who together reveal a complex, culturally-engaged Buddhism.

Chenxing Han has noted that many interviewees hesitated to even call themselves Buddhist because of the ways that mainstream representations of Buddhism often "whitewash and invisibilize" the diversities of Buddhist practice and religious identity, often through tropes of the "Orientalist monk" in popular culture (Han 29, see also 82-83 and throughout).[147] One can find a literary example of this unease in Hoa Nguyen's brief biography that frames her section of poetry in *The Wisdom Anthology of North American Buddhist Poetry* (2005). The editor Andrew Schelling explains that Nguyen wrote the following "in a letter," and he later included this excerpt in the anthology itself:

> My mother was raised Buddhist but was a non-practicing adult. Buddhism as a practice/body of thought was something I had to recover as an adult, which also coincided with my study of poetry/practice. I think of myself as Buddhist at least in

[147] See also Jane Iwamura's 2011 book *Virtual Orientalism.*

> thought/life approach but don't feel I can claim myself as a Buddhist since I have no formal sitting practice. (Schelling 183)

The range of experiences recorded in Chenxing Han's book might answer Nguyen, saying, "you *can* claim yourself as a Buddhist, even without a formal sitting practice." Nguyen's unease is, it seems, partly a result of the difficult navigation between Asian American diasporic heritages and the white Buddhism/Buddhist Romanticism with which most Asians in America have had to contend, since the latter is defined or represented, simply, *as Buddhism*. Because many parents and grandparents remain almost totally silent about their histories, diasporic identity and heritage often must later be carefully constructed (often imaginatively, in fiction or poetry) by the children of those who migrated or were displaced. Garrett Hongo, on whom I write more below, encountered this intergenerational silence because of the harms Issei and Nisei experienced before, during, and after internment. Such silences impact people like Nguyen's sense of their "Buddhist" heritage, which in many cases must be constructed many years after displacement and migration, if it is possible to (re)construct at all.

Where, then, is Buddhism in Nguyen's work? Or, we might ask, if Nguyen's poems are included in Schelling's overtly Buddhist anthology, what marks those poems *as* Buddhist? There are Buddhist references here and there in her poetry, and "Buddhist" content shows up in Nguyen's work similarly to some Euro American practices of inscription, as we might perhaps see in her poem "Buddha's ears are droopy" (I provide a reading of this poem below). These references show a poetics that is in dialogue with Buddhist thought. However, her statement that "Buddhism as a practice/body of thought was something I had to recover as an adult, which also coincided with my study of poetry/practice" suggests that the cultural materials of Buddhism are also part of her recovery of her diasporic heritage. Though "Buddhism… coincided with [her]

study of poetry/practice" (Schelling 183), it cannot uncomplicatedly come into her poetry: it is connected to the silences of diaspora that she has lately begun to fill in, as in her recent work *A Thousand Times You Lose Your Treasure* (2021).

I want to examine some of Nguyen's poetry in light of these points, and additionally, want to ask: what does it mean that Nguyen's poetry is in a Buddhist anthology but does not always appear Buddhist? (It may be that my own arguments are present in *my* reading practices; i.e., that our understanding of Buddhism is so suffused with whiteness and Romantic qualities that we cannot "see" it in Nguyen's work.) In asking this question, this chapter may be attending to some of Najarian's concerns: "we cannot simply accept a writer's description of him- or herself as "Buddhist" but must instead examine the tensions and inexplicabilities inside the writing, the life, the training, and, yes, even the behavior, of any writer who makes claims to spiritual achievement" (Najarian 317). As we move away from "the reification of the Buddhist Poet as celebrity" (Najarian 317), which as I have suggested exacerbates the problem of whiteness in Beat literature (and which I continue examining below in my discussion of Shin Yu Pai's work), we should examine poets like Nguyen, attending to her Buddhist practice, her poetics, and her life writing—a category that includes her recent telling of the story of her mother's "bad ass" life in *A Thousand Times*. Nguyen does not "make claims to spiritual achievement," as may be clear in her disclaimer above, but her poetics often thinks about, or is "in dialogue with," Buddhism. We can register this "Buddhism" in her poetry, in her "page mother" Joanne Kyger's influence (Nguyen "Interview"), in poems that reference Buddhism or the Buddha, and in her recent project—in which Buddhism is not necessarily visible or tangible but is present as part of the broader telling of her mother's life.

Though *A Thousand Times You Lose Your Treasure* is a book of poems, it is a recovery project in which I want to suggest traces of her mother's "Buddhism" and her own "Buddhism" are also to some extent recovered (some have called it a "verse biography" of her mother). Writing the book, Nguyen has said, "was kind of like being in a dialogue with difficulty, which includes many things…it's the difficulty of seeking to understand someone else's experiences and stories when those are remote to you" (Nguyen "Interview"). This is a difficulty with which Grace M. Cho's *Tastes Like War* (2021) and Garrett Hongo's poetry—from *Yellow Light* (1982) to more recent collections like *The Mirror Diary* (2017)—also engage.

In an interview, Nguyen explains the feeling of disconnection from her mother and her family history. As a graduate student in San Francisco, Nguyen turned her interest to learning Vietnamese and to "figuring out how I might make it possible for myself to visit Vietnam" (Nguyen "Interview"). But the obstacles to these interests reveal the difficulties of diaspora:

> The country had just opened to Westerners and U.S. passports; travel there up to that point was prohibitive. Even so my mother was not interested in going back, and since I didn't speak Vietnamese and we didn't have any kin left back in Vietnam or connections to a diasporic Viet community. I felt cut off in an unbridgeable way. I was just talking to my other good poetry/writer friend here in Toronto, Barbara Tran, about this, about the different diasporas of the Vietnamese diaspora. I am also mixed race which can function as another form of distancing and marking of difference. (Nguyen "Interview")

She therefore "would always ask [her] mother about her life"—and yet even in that endeavor, her questions encountered obstacles because:

> with other diasporic people or other children of parents who'd lived through genocide or war…there's a certain pattern among those that I've spoken with whose parents lived through say the Holocaust which is you just don't speak of it. You don't speak of it because there's guilt and inchoate pain and it's better just not to examine any of it, especially if you don't have a way to manage what comes up with it. (Nguyen "Interview")

Her mother's history, grandparents' history, was unavailable: "[her mother] would literally say, *That was a long time ago.* And so, it was sort of very not available to me" (Nguyen "Interview"). Getting to know her mother's story was "very mysterious"; she was "really opaque about it, and typically she'd be very brief"; indeed, "any attempt to record something would immediately fail because she would just say two sentences" (Nguyen "Interview"). When, in this more recent project *A Thousand Times,* she was able to write poems about her mother, "including a poem about a story she had told me about her naming," Nguyen presented to her a suite of twelve poems "and she was very moved. She said, *You remember more of my life than I do*" (Nguyen "Interview," emphasis in original).

Again, if we return to Nguyen's bio in the 2005 anthology, where she noted that "my mother was raised Buddhist but was a non-practicing adult. Buddhism as a practice/body of thought was something I had to recover as an adult," *A Thousand Times You Lose Your Treasure* is certainly part of this recovery—and "Buddhism" does not seem immediately present in the book itself. Nguyen was not "raised" Buddhist, but it is part of her heritage, even if not part of her family's voiced memory. This has meant that many of her inscriptions of Buddhism share characteristics with Euro American practices of inscription, since the "Buddhism" that Nguyen *has* had access to is American, is perhaps characterizable as the "literary Buddhism" we might

find familiar in other texts. Yet her 2021 poetry collection is perhaps the much larger engagement with "Buddhism," even if "Buddhism" does not directly appear within the pages of the book itself.

Some of my thoughts as we examine non-Euro American, less familiarly Buddhist poetry align with questions that my colleagues from a writing group asked when I was writing this project's second chapter: "Why is Whalen's poetry Buddhist? Why is Kyger's poetry Buddhist?" These questions seem to have registered the expectation, a) that "Buddhist" poetry will include common conceptions of Buddhism, use Buddhist terminology, or provide familiarly "Buddhist" images; or b) that Buddhist poetry is recognizable as such. My colleagues may have been expecting to find something inherently "Buddhist" about the poems (likely this "something inherently Buddhist" is similar to the Romantic, sublime Buddhism of Snyder's work, about which, interestingly, my colleagues did *not* have questions). Whalen's and Kyger's work, as I have noted, contains some Buddhist references, but much of it does not seem Buddhist in the least. Similarly, some of Nguyen's poetry is "in dialogue" with Buddhist thought; other poems by Nguyen take up a similar "relationship to storytelling inside of the space of a poem" as Kyger's poems, which, are as we have seen, "attentive to place and also the environment as alive around her" (Nguyen "Interview").

Nguyen's poem "[BUDDHA'S EARS ARE DROOPY TOUCH HIS SHOULDERS]" immediately registers that it holds some Buddhist content. How, though, are we to read this poem?:

> Buddha's ears are droopy touch his shoulders
> as scarves fly out of windows and I shriek
> at the lotus of enlightenment

Travel to Free Street past Waco
to the hole in the Earth
wearing water

I'm aiming my mouth
for apple pie
(Schelling 184)

The grammar of "Buddha's ears are droopy" suggests the speaker is looking at a Buddha, perhaps in a temple, perhaps on a personal altar; or perhaps this Buddha is just a figurine on a bookshelf. "Droopy ears" are a silly thing to notice—is the speaker meant to be meditating? If so, she is likely not focusing her mind as one is meant to when praying or when meditating. "Touch his shoulders" both tells us what to do and seems to describe what the Buddha's "droopy ears" are doing. This perhaps childish, playful line is followed by an ostensibly serious "lotus of enlightenment"; however, the "lotus of enlightenment" is also rendered silly: following the detail of the Buddha's ears, this "lotus of enlightenment" seems absolutely ridiculous, a ridiculousness heightened by the fact that the speaker is "shriek[ing]" at it.

Because the speaker is shrieking at it, the Romanticized meaning of "the lotus of enlightenment" is undercut. The lotus flower is often regarded as a symbol of purity, enlightenment, self-regeneration, or rebirth, with characteristics often connected to ideas of beauty from ashes (even when living in polluted, dirty water, the lotus produces a stunning flower). One is not meant to "shriek" at something as seemingly serious as "the lotus of enlightenment"; in another poem, the "lotus of enlightenment" might be read as a thing of beauty. Similarly, in the second line, things are not where they are meant to be: scarves are flying

out of windows; meanwhile, “shrieking at enlightenment” also seems totally out of place, all wrong.

The poem then puts things in place, though in an unexpected place:

> Travel to Free Street past Waco
> to the hole in the Earth
> wearing water
>
> I’m aiming my mouth
> for apple pie
> (Schelling 184)

The poem brings us from this overly clichéd “lotus of enlightenment,” to a hole in the Earth, to the anticipation of a simple enjoyment: “I’m aiming my mouth / for apple pie” (184). It moves from drama (scarves flying) and angry detachment (shrieking at enlightenment), which is all happening at once (note the grammar: “[you] touch his shoulders / *as* scarves fly out of windows *and* I shriek / at the lotus of enlightenment”). But those lines turn to simple actions: do this; travel here; here is what “I’m aiming” for. In this, it moves from cliché to more concrete things, from a Romantic, silly-sounding “lotus of enlightenment” (imagine attempting to say this out loud in a serious manner) to the anticipation of eating apple pie. This movement, similarly to Kyger’s poetry, removes the reader from the drama of “enlightenment,” which is great in scale and perhaps confusing in its abstract, romantic metaphors (what *is* a lotus of enlightenment?), to the anticipation of eating spiced apples and buttery crust—this is a much more readily grasped sensation than the “lotus of enlightenment.”

This poem shares some of Kyger's poetic sense that writing Buddhist poetry does not mean one must take on the immense stakes of a Snyder poem or of David Hinton's anthology, which readers may recall was framed by a dramatic, romanticized image of Thoreau himself atop a mountain, his emptied mind open to the cosmos. Here, the heights of the "lotus" are reduced to an anticipation of eating apple pie (both are *anticipations,* of course: in writing "the lotus of enlightenment," or in thinking about it, one has not *achieved* such enlightenment: one is only anticipating what that might feel like; similarly, in "I'm aiming my mouth / for apple pie," the "aiming" part shows the anticipation). Nguyen's poem turns from a lighthearted consideration of the Buddha to thinking about what to eat next. And in Nguyen's work as a whole, Buddhism is "inscribed" and coded variously: as a silence in her recovery of her mother's life; and as what we might see as a more familiarly Euro-American mode of inscription like Kyger's, in the poem "BUDDHA'S EARS ARE DROOPY TOUCH HIS SHOULDERS."

Again, our interest here is to examine inscriptions of Buddhism in poetry by Asian Americans so we can broaden our sense of how Buddhism has been inscribed in American poetry. A secondary interest is to understand the extent to which whiteness has suffused our ideas of literary Buddhism and the "Buddhist Poet" as celebrity. A fascinating poet to examine in light of these concerns is Shin Yu Pai. A former student of The Naropa Institute, where she "studied, among other things, Japanese tea, meditation, and translation," Pai has said that "Buddhism provides me with the framework that has always been part of my experience, growing up as a child of Taiwanese immigrants" (Schelling 209). Pai's poetry, poetics, and practice may appear closer to the literary Buddhism of the Beats and of famous Naropa figures like Anne Waldman, but "religion for [her] family," she states, "was highly syncretic and socialized, a blending of Taoist, Buddhist, Confucian, and folk beliefs that was impossible to

articulate" (209). The Buddhist practice and study Pai developed in the U.S., therefore, is a "framework" for this "religion…[so] impossible to articulate" (Schelling 209).

Some of Pai's poems are collected in Schelling's 2005 anthology, which overtly marks itself *as* Buddhist with its title *The Wisdom Anthology of North American Buddhist Poetry*. But how are we to read this poem by Pai, collected, like Nguyen's, in Schelling's anthology?

> "FRUIT THEY HAD IN COMMON"
>
> He was convinced that you had to eat the entire thing in one sitting. A condition of childhood and a grandmother who served watermelon to the grandchildren entrusted to her care, as meal (breakfast, lunch, *and* dinner), in between her requests of stirred martinis and service in bed. He remembers reading a haiku by a Japanese poet in which a farmer invokes a spell upon his watermelon patch. When thieves approach at night to steal the fruit, the watermelons transform into frogs and escape. As a boy, he often wished that the watermelon on his plate would come alive and hop away.
>
> She had her own memories of summer fruit—an ama who educated her in maintaining a balanced diet of hot and cool foods. During the hot season, Grandmother insisted she rub the white of the rind over her face until sticky and wet. She had a theory concerning cool foods and their absence in the diet of prominent government leaders—for instance, if the Chinese would only eat more carrots it would cool their ardor for conquering foreign nations and erasing history.
>
> (Schelling 220)

Is this a Buddhist poem? It would seem to be, given the biography that frames her section in Schelling's anthology and given the anthology title itself. Yet what makes this a Buddhist poem?

Though I can provide a close reading of the poem, I do not know how to make my reading of this poem "Buddhist" in nature. I do not believe I could produce a Buddhist reading of "FRUIT THEY HAD IN COMMON" without simply reading my own understanding of "Buddhism" onto it, as "most Buddhist writers, and the critics who write about Buddhist writers," tend to do: most, Najarian writes, "are far too invested in their beliefs and practices to look at literature and Buddhism with any kind of critical distance" (313). This has resulted in a problem of literary criticism, where there are volumes and articles, for example, "written about early nineteenth-century authors and their relationships to the Dharma, yet most of these go no further than proclaiming how an individual author's work 'seems like' or 'parallels' a scholar's own Buddhism" (Najarian 313). Though I myself do not identify as Buddhist, it is likely that if I needed to find Buddhism in "FRUIT THEY HAD IN COMMON," my reading would represent my own understanding of Buddhism, rather than articulating a strong reading of the poem itself.

Pai's recent book of art/poetry *Enso* clearly signals it is Buddhist in some way. The book is titled, and each section is framed by, the calligraphic figure of the enso, which reflects a daily Buddhist practice of drawing this circle in one single movement (Figure 1).



Figure 1: An “enso,” a Japanese word meaning “circular form” that is usually translated into English as “Zen circle.” The “symbol supreme of Buddhist enlightenment” (Stevens).

The enso is both something concrete that one can contemplate and is also a visual expression, or act of, enlightenment—a meditation aid or teaching vehicle *and* a symbol of enlightenment itself. Drawing enso is meant to be a daily practice. Each enso will look differently, but it is a practice that brings to the fore the sense of ending and beginning; it is a finished product that also opens up to multiple questions. “Some enso paintings,” John Stevens writes, “are naked and mysterious, but most have an accompanying inscription to serve as a “hint” as to the Zen meaning of the circle” (Stevens). We might therefore see Pai’s book as the very expansive inscription of her enso Buddhist practice. Or perhaps her life is the enso itself, and the use of the image of the enso as a frame for the book simply reveals that fact.

Enso merges what might be recognizably Euro American Buddhist practices and experiences with an exploration of what the practice of enso might mean in life and in multiple mediums. The book holds, in other words, a series of nuanced artworks (not just poetry) that reflect the merging of Buddhist practice and poetic practice. It merges enso with Pai's broader meditations, over the course of her life, on creative thinking and production; and how those two things arise from artistic, material practices—practices of travel, re-visiting, and writing. Pai writes:

> Practice is an aspiration—something that I attempt to realize from day to day. In this way, it's a vow that's meant to be renewed. It evolves, as we test out ideas on ourselves, and the consciousness expands to encompass more than we previously thought we knew about ourselves or the world. (Pai 18)

This is a book in dialogue with Buddhist thought and practice, but it is attentive to how art is transformed through her lived experience, including her new roles as mother; poet laureate of the city of Redmond, Oregon; and a bereaved friend. Similarly, one's daily practice of drawing enso might reflect transformations and changes in lived experience.

Pai is easily placed within avant-garde/Beat lineages as a former Naropa student and she has been influenced by the Beats. Those of her poems that "flow from the present moment" or are "compression[s] of words and sentiment into a few imagistic lines" are, she writes, "loosely grounded in an appreciation for Beat poets like Jack Kerouac, who experimented with Japanese verse" (37). Indeed, not dissimilar to Hongo's experience (see the essay "In the Bamboo Grove" in his collection *The Mirror Diary*),

> In what might seem a strange cultural exchange, it was through my exposure to the Beats—so wild and different than my life as a teenager in Riverside, California—that I began my own study of Asian literary classics and forms. It was through these uniquely American voices that I found there could be something to recover in the cultural origins that I turned away from. (Pai 37)

Pai's recovery of these cultural origins occurred intertextually, but not solely through literary texts: she "composed poems that took their cues from visual not literary culture," and this is an outgrowth of her virtuoso mother's work as a watercolor artist and painter. Pai writes that she "hid [her]self behind the surfaces of these early," visually-inspired poems, "convinced that in those early days of coming into my identity as an Asian American writer that taking a position or expressing a perspective about my experience could not possibly serve me" (Pai 49). This conviction is perhaps made legible by Timothy Yu's explanation of the sharp divide between avant-garde and Asian American canons. Because her poems often took their cues not from literary culture, but from visual culture, this has meant that much of her poetry may not be read as similar to or within the lineages of Beat poetry, since she focuses instead on:

> hybridity, parallels between processes, and the ways of seeing that are unique to visual and poetic practice. This dissociation was an inherited approach. When it came to having earnest conversation with my mother about creative decision-making, we could never get far, in any language. (Pai 49)

The "syncretic" Buddho-daiost, Confucian heritage, which she noted in Schelling's anthology is "impossible to describe," therefore, comes through in ekphrastic poems and in poems that "take cues" from visual arts. This may mean that readers and scholars do not quite "see" the Buddhism in such poems because so much of our understanding of Buddhist poetry has been built from

poets who "take their cues" not from visual arts, but from literary texts—and therefore hold textual cues and references more recognizable than a "visual" cue.

In reading *Enso,* it strikes me that those whom we think of as Buddhist poets are often simply self-announced and/or hailed as such by the poetry and religious communities that praise their work. In other words, Buddhist poets are not just "Buddhist" for the content of their poems: the Buddhistness of "the Buddhist Poet" comes from life writing; interviews; and secondary texts that assume or reaffirm this idea that they are a Buddhist Poet. And then, scholars or readers who praise their work tend to participate in "the reification of the Buddhist Poet as celebrity" (Najarian 317). I have pointed to the problems of this "celebrity" Poet, and its attending problems of whiteness, above. I am interested in examining Pai's oeuvre and particularly *Enso* in light of this "self-announcement" of the Buddhist Poet.

Pai's work *is* autobiographical in nature *and* it is a collection of poetry. It answers Najarian's call for more discussion of the "life writing" of Buddhist poets ("scholars tend to emphasize the poetry but the bigger contribution to Western literature," Najarian suggests, "may be in life writing") (317). Though autobiographical writing is not "immune to the reception of Buddhism as the valorization of visionary states"—the "construction of a conversion narrative, and even of the autobiography in the West, almost demands them"—autobiographical genres often show the "seams that other kinds of writing seem to elide": the difference between "the imagined religious culture and the real one, the inconsistencies of modernist Buddhism, and the actualities of Buddhist practice"; moreover, these genres also are able to "elid[e] or criticiz[e] celebrity religious culture" (Najarian 317). Though *Enso* does far more than this and deserves far more analysis than I am able to produce here (its generosity to the reader alone is remarkable; for example, it provides a removable booklet of haikus that are as charming as they are devastating),

Enso also does these things for which Najarian argues. In its serious examination of the relationship between art and the artistic process (a key element of which is community/audience), *Enso* does implicitly criticize celebrity religious culture—and certainly elides some of the problems with this culture.

Enso announces itself as Buddhist in the title and also in its prose/autobiographical elements (paragraphs of often-autobiographical prose frame each section of the book), and thus, because of the references to Buddhism in the prose, one may look for the Buddhistness of the book's *poems* (even if, read alone, those poems might not have appeared/been read as "Buddhist" at all). And it has always been this way. What I mean to say is: we have always read Buddhist Poets' work in this way: alerted to the "Buddhist" character of the poet or book, we then look for the Buddhist resonances of the poetic lines. Might it be the case that scholars and readers rarely thought to question the Buddhistness of the poet? At the very least, it seems that much of the label Buddhist Poet comes, not from strong, reliable, persuasive readings of poems, but from poets' claims to religiousness or their placement in religious/Buddhist literary communities (or, in Nguyen's and Pai's case, from their placement in anthologies like Schelling's). Of course, I am arguing that Nguyen and Pai do inscribe Buddhism in their work—it is just that Buddhism is often a larger presence in their oeuvre, rather than something we can directly close-read in a concrete line of poetry (though Pai's poems "s t a r s h (r) i n e" (Pai 58), "MILKSTONE" (Pai 59), and her final poem "Enso" are stunning, metaphysical "Buddhist" poems and deserve close readings).

We must therefore, as Pai does, "go beyond artwork and maker to include the larger dialogue with the social circumstances under which a work of art exists" (Pai 49). One such social circumstance is the factor of audience and personhood in a poetry reading event (a factor

Silliman himself recognized as crucial to the placement of a poem in categories like "avant-garde" versus "identity" poetry, as Yu showed above). I am interested in Pai's poetry that removes her own physicality and presence from it—particularly since, as I am suggesting, what often animates and informs our reading of Buddhist poems by Buddhist Poets is the sense of the (celebrity) poet herself. Pai writes:

> I surrender my attachment to the control afforded by the written page to bring poems into a world they can inhabit, while being shaped by chance. Some of my recent projects ask how poems can be presented without me delivering their reading—I explore what it feels like to take my physicality offstage. To remove myself as go-between or vehicle of connection in order to encourage direct experience. (Pai 123)

Her phrase "being shaped by chance" is precisely what the celebrity Buddhist Poet, over time, may give up because their work will likely be increasingly overdetermined by their celebrity Buddhist Poet status. This phrase (being "shaped by chance") may call to mind the work of Jackson Mac Low, who seems to have been generally uninterested in celebrity and in the celebrity of his peers. One wonders whether a poet can in good faith engage in "chance operations," as Mac Low did, and still retain the celebrity status that mainstream American culture granted Snyder and Ginsberg.

Pai's interest in "tak[ing] [her] physicality offstage" is also interesting to me since she is Asian American and will register as such to an American audience (see Pai's section "SAME CLOTH" for prose and poetry on her visibility as Asian American and ruminations on hate crimes) (Pai 111-115). This interest in removing her personhood is, in the section of *Enso* titled "ANIMATING THE TEXT," related to her interest in the vocal performer Pat Suzuki (1930—), a Seattle-area vocalist who, after the internment camps, went on to a career on Broadway. Suzuki

was “cast in the *Flower Drum Song* as Linda Low, a stripper” and “before that, she played a part in the touring *Teahouse of the Autumn Moon* as a minor ‘Oriental type’” (her songs “I Love Being a Girl” or “How High the Moon” are available for listening/viewing on YouTube) (133). These roles clearly bring forward Suzuki’s identity markers as Asian American and female as perhaps the most important part of her performance (other than her incredible voice). Suzuki ultimately left that career, choosing “to return to a less prestigious life that would allow her to perform on her own terms” (Pai 133). Her later choice to return to Seattle as a cabaret performer suggests an unwillingness “in the long-term to embrace the limited roles that were available to her as an artist” (Pai 133).

For Suzuki, it seems, returning to Seattle as a cabaret performer meant that to some degree, her public “identity” (what she was *read as*) was removed from the equation; she no longer had to contend with caricature, but could instead be “exactly who she was.” This might bring us to more closely examine the fact that the white artists of this dissertation, in contrast, are *read as* the figures they conceive themselves to be. No doubt that parallel, that synchronicity, that ease—in which one’s public persona is not so different from “who one really is”—might be related to the fact that they benefit from whiteness being more legible to the American public and to readers of Anglophone poetry. But for Suzuki, performing onstage in these limited roles meant filling in a caricature, or at the very least, a persona that felt unlike herself. As Pai explains (by way of her friend and dramaturg Sally Ollove), cabaret and musical theater differ greatly:

> The space of the cabaret is an extension of the artist in real time; the focus becomes the connection between the artist and her audience. There is no need to inhabit a character, as with musical theater or Broadway. You are exactly who you are. (Pai 132-33)

How might Pai's delivery of a poem shift as a result of such a notion of authenticity? How might her delivery of a poem shift as a result of her personhood completely disappearing? Is it possible for Pai, who is generally seen to be a Buddhist poet, to *be herself* rather than inhabit the character of the Buddhist Poet? These are questions of interest in *Enso.* But this notion of authenticity, which Pai saw in Suzuki's life and artistic choices, "deeply appealed" to Pai "in helping me to understand how my delivery of a poem need not be a persona or performance so much as a practice of vulnerability" (Pai 133). Most interestingly, Pai writes that her earliest models of performed poetry were:

> watching Anne Waldman sing/scream 'Skin Meat Bones' on stage at Naropa and seeing old footage of Allen Ginsberg sing Blake poems on harmonium while accompanied on guitar by Steven Taylor (Pai 133)

In contrast, she overtly states that her work in *Enso* "needed to be something different from that"—something closer to Suzuki's practices of vulnerability (133). What is it about these performances that Pai is trying to avoid? What I hear in her description of the enormous presences of Ginsberg and Waldman is their *celebrity* presence. This is the Buddhist Poet she is trying to avoid, even though she clearly has very great respect for these artists. Waldman and Ginsberg's performances are public instances of them as Poets. Their readings perform an identity easily described to another person as "Buddhist" or "Buddhist-inspired." But is the story told by these poetic performances real? Could we compare them to Suzuki's performances on Broadway?

Pai's "Buddhism" does not do the heavy lifting that Ginsberg's or Waldman's did. It instead frames this generous series of thoughts on the relation between art, life, and creativity with the figure of the enso. If the art therein is not *explained by* the figure of the enso, it is at

least made more legible by the parallels to the Buddhist calligraphic practice of the enso. The "Buddhism" here is not *im*perceptible—it is indeed "there," as I have said, in some poems that do feel somewhat Euro American in the ways they inscribe Buddhism. And, as we have seen, "Buddhism" is also present in Pai's own description of her "coming to" Asian art through the Beats. But Buddhism is not marshaled in Pai's work to help her become a Buddhist Poet. One cannot read Pai as one reads Snyder. In one totally unhelpful take on Snyder—quoted by Najarian, in his attempt to demonstrate the problems of reading poets *as* Buddhist Poets—a scholar wrote:

> Snyder's writing poses questions and offers solutions about the most critical questions facing human culture today and the global relationship between humanity and the rest of the planet. He offers possibilities and defines potentials for humanity's development of a balanced relationship with the rest of nature, as well as criticizing and analyzing the errors of past and present ways, not only of Western societies, but also of Eastern societies as well. (Murphy 19, qtd. in Najarian 319)

As Najarian writes, "not even the Buddha himself made these claims," and "this kind of treatment shuts off rather than encourages discussion" (Najarian 319). We will not be able to come to these grandiose conclusions from Pai's work (at least at present—who knows; it may be that Pai's future work allows for this sort of reading). Instead, Pai is incredibly careful with the implicit claims of her poetry, perhaps because of the last section of her work, "ENSO." The section was written as a response to the death of her teacher Bill Scheffel, who "left the world through self-immolation on July 8, 2018" (Pai 141). Pai's artistic practices, some of which are Buddhist, must take great care because, as is clear in this section of *Enso*, part of what has brought these lines into being is both the painful passing of a close teacher and the question that

followed; i.e., "what needed to be examined within me to evolve towards a different understanding of devotion" (Pai 141). The last poem of the book is titled "Enso"; it is a "death portrait" that takes inspiration from a gyotaku, a "'fish rubbing,' the traditional art of making prints from the body of a (dead) fish" (141).

"The Buddhist Poet" can be a story of identity and celebrity that is then connected to poems, sometimes by way of persuasive, credible readings. But we should be skeptical of the Buddhist Poet. In Pai's work, Buddhism is somewhat imperceptible at the same time that she herself shows that her practice (of poetry, of Buddhism) does owe much to the Beats and to Naropa. But the "Buddhism" of *Enso* does not do the same work as the Buddhism of Snyder or of Kyger. This is because much of Pai's poetry is written in response to visual art; it is also because of the serious ethical demands involved in the writing of her last section, "ENSO." Shin Yu Pai's Buddhist poetry does not come from her heritage per se; Buddhism is not necessarily more "hers" than it was Snyder's (as in the assumption that Buddhism is more unproblematically available to or more justly claimed by Asian Americans); but *Enso* shifts away from individual sublime Romantic experiences of transcendence and brings its poetic process further into community, even moving away from the persona of the poet at a poetry reading. Pai came to Buddhism through family and through the Beats, but she developed her Buddhist poetics from hybrid practices throughout her life—from the meditative gallery spaces she visited as a child (see *Enso's* first section) to the Japanese tea practice she sought out in Chicago as a graduate student. These are accretions of practice that, together, like *Enso* itself, gather into the sense of a Buddhist poet of some kind, but not the Buddhist Poet that Najarian describes ("the reification of

the Buddhist Poet as celebrity").[148] Pai's *Enso* is therefore, in my reading, a broad inscription of Buddhism. Buddhism is "there" but also sort of absent; her book uses the figure of the enso to consider the relationship between art and environment, between practice and creation; but Buddhism, though referenced occasionally within the work, is more absent than present; it is a framing device that opens up the many pages of thoughts on creative process and community.

Buddhism Along Highway 99

Asian American poetry, whether "Buddhist" or not, tends to be read as a poetry of identity. I have suggested that, instead of categorizing Buddhist poetry within predetermined canons like "Asian American" or "avant-garde," it is important to examine the many inscriptions of Buddhism in American poetry broadly. With the reading practice of whiteness, we can better understand the ethics of operationalizing Buddhism in poetry—an ethics that, as I have suggested, depends on who is using it and to what end. In *The Buddha Bandits Down Highway 99* (1978), Buddhism appears as a major marker of racialized violence. I contrast *Buddha Bandits* with Snyder's poem "Night Highway 99" to emphasize how whiteness can be brought to the fore as a reading practice. My aim in this contrast between Snyder's "Night Highway 99" and *The Buddha Bandits Down Highway 99* is not to vilify Snyder's elegant poetry, but to demonstrate differences in these texts' inscriptions of Buddhism. To do so, I borrow some of Nock-Hee Park's own contrasts between Snyder's poetry and that of the Buddha Bandits, though I add a difference of interpretation.

[148] Najarian writes that "we cannot simply accept a writer's description of him- or herself as "Buddhist" but must instead examine the tensions and inexplicabilities inside the writing, the life, the training, and, yes, even the behavior, of any writer who makes claims to spiritual achievement" (316). We should take Pai's claims to spiritual practice and enlightenment seriously and assess these claims, even if they are not explicit, but are rather suggestive/suggested through the many layers of *Enso.*

Snyder's speaker in "Night Highway 99" is a "we" and a "man"; the poem opens in this way:

> We're on our way
>
> man
>
> out of town
>
> go hitching down
>
> that highway 99 (10)

Snyder's poem shifts from "the 'man' who opened the poem" to a plural pronoun that, in "extrapolat[ing] from Snyder's singular experience" as a hitchhiker, fashions a "'we' which carries many different voices" (Park 108). The path of the highway brings the speaker to meet workers, families, and other drivers, who are signaled as others through quotation marks, which make some poetic lines appear as dialogue:

> "I was working in a mill three weeks there
> then it burned down & the guy didn't even
> pay us off—but I can do anything—
> I'll go to San Francisco—tend bar—" (20)

The highway in Snyder's poem is thus a path that brings the speaker to meet new people and see new landscapes. Snyder's speaker can travel along the path of the highway and not feel pulled, trapped, by the highway (as are the people he meets along the journey). Snyder's speaker encounters many Others, including "Indian hitcher[s]" (20), an "ex-bartender from Lebanon" (19), a "sawmill worker" (17), "a passed-out L.A. whore" (16), "five Mexicans" (14), and "fifty weary Indians" (11). The highway is exhausting, frustrating, to the speaker: "where are the Sierras," the speaker asks, and: "I'm sick of car exhaust" (20, 21).

The encounters with other hitchhikers build toward moments of "abandon," as is represented in the following lines:

> Jumpoff Joe Creek &
>
> a man carrying nothing, walking sort of
> stiff-legged along, blue jeans & denim jacket
> wrinkled face, just north of
> Louse Creek
>
> --Abandon really means it
> the network womb stretched loose all
> things slip through (Snyder *Mountains* 18)

Though the highway is a "network womb," bringing together "a web of people and memories," it is an unspecific web that has "'stretched loose all' and inspired the moment of complete abandon": "all / things slip through" (an image perhaps comparable to the lines in "Piute Creek" where "Words and books" are "gone in the dry air") (Tonkinson 173, Park 108). Zen awareness, perhaps Zen "abandon," is here, in the American landscape, but it is a "stretch[ing] loose" motivated by "the illumination of letting go"—a mode of enlightenment which, as we have seen, Saijo believes totally unavailable even to a bodhisattva, for whom the illusion of "letting go" is a cruel irony because s/he cannot but remain stuck on a "SHIP THAT NEVER EMPTIES" but "KEEPS SINKING" even as it "DOESN'T QUITE GO UNDER" (Park 109, Saijo 127). I mean to suggest that though Snyder's poem itself records a series of encounters with people who have been dispossessed by hardship, capital, labor shortages, and settler colonialism, the poem builds to a moment of forgetting. In so doing, it registers a Buddhism that does not deal with, indeed may be totally disconnected from, these dispossessions, these Others.

Later in Snyder's poem, the distinction between first and third person collapses, while "what remains is not even the path that connects the different points of this constellation: total abandon means that the existence of 99 itself wavers" (Park 109):

City
gleaming far away
we make it into town tonight
get clean and drink some wine—

SAN FRANCISCO
NO
body
gives a shit
man
who you are
or what's your car
there
IS no 99

Those lines, "there / IS no 99," are perhaps read best in terms of whiteness: for the Others who are "seen" and encountered in Snyder's poem, Highway 99 is a very real place that they cannot simply "abandon" (Snyder *Mountains and Rivers* 21). "For Snyder," Park writes, "Highway 99 was just a road and finally nothing at all" (Park 109).

But the poets of *The Buddha Bandits* cannot journey down the highway without encountering the traumas of imperialist violence. Their journey along Highway 99 brings them to Tule Lake, the largest of the 10 War Relocation Authority camps. In encountering this site, the three poets' emotion is not a detached enlightenment, but a grounded emotional and physical

reaction to the violences of that key site of internment. For these writers, Highway 99 will never be "nothingness" because Tule Lake haunts it—or, perhaps, the highway *is* nothingness, but not the ontological nothingness of Snyder's "there / IS no 99" (Snyder *Mountains* 24).[149] Park's reading of Snyder's poem and *The Buddha Bandits* argues that the Buddha Bandits are drawing from the Dharma Bum Beat ethos even as they insist upon a raced unity in the political moment of the Asian American movement. To be sure, in writing *The Buddha Bandits,* Hongo, Lau, and Inada certainly "argue that Asian Americans are not only a part of America but also active participants in its culture"—and *Buddha Bandits'* publication in 1978, within the context of the Asian American Movement, makes it part of the literature "about" Asian American identity and politics (Park 110).

But I want to suggest that the difference between Snyder's "Highway 99" and the Buddha Bandits' Highway 99 is "about" more than just the political needs of the Asian American movement. It may be that Nock-Hee Park herself assumes that "Buddhism" is "not central to" *Buddha Bandits* because she looks for a Buddhist Romanticism, or perhaps, a Buddhism overly informed by whiteness, liberal humanism, and/or the lyric form. Perhaps the markers of Asianness in *The Buddha Bandits* mean, in her view, that the "Buddhism" of *Buddha Bandits* is downplayed in favor of a focus on Asian American identity. Indeed, perhaps for Park as a reader, Buddhism is refracted through Asian American identity, seen as a part of the whole Asian American ethos of the piece.

[149] Jonathan Stalling has written of the great "semiotic cavern" of notions of emptiness and/or nothingness in Western and East Asian discourses (*and* in texts that "displace" either the Western or East Asian resonances of the idea of emptiness). We can certainly say here that Snyder's "nothingness" is a specific transpacific "transformation," to use Stalling's word, of ideas of nothingness/emptiness. This means that Hongo, Lau, and Inada's Buddhism may *also* point to the "something that is nothing"—it is just that this is an other nothingness. This is a fruitful area for future research.

Whatever the reasons, in my reading, Buddhism is central to *Buddha Bandits*: the poetry's inscriptions of Buddhism mire the reader in the traumas in which Buddhism has been imbricated and acknowledge the presentness of these traumas. In a section of *Buddha Bandits* written by Garrett Hongo, an undead Buddhist hermit approaches the three poets, crawling out of the Tule Lake internment camp barracks to remind these poets of the dispossessions of internment—dispossessions of land, property, years of health, of life. The three poets commune with the undead hermit and return, utterly shaken, to their car. This section "Pilgrimage to the Shrine" begins by noting it has been "six hours since / the Paradise Cutoff" and their car is "running on empty" (Hongo *Buddha Bandits*). All they see is "miles of straight road / and a long double-yellow / unrolling in front of us." Readers, like Lau, who is of Chinese descent, might "recognize nothing"; "Lawson pops the glove" to locate where they are on "the map" and, seeing the significance of this place, "pronounc[es] a few mantras." As they approach the camp, a scarecrow appears in their headlights and then "disappears / into the pale / grey darkness." There is a certain amount of danger here: there are "no gas stations or rest stops, / no weigh stations, no cops," just "miles of straight road." They are accosted by "blindness":

> But our eyes
> go blind, fill
> with tears and ashes
> as we stumble
> down the offramp.

The three poets are confronted with a shared emotion, their bodies made weak ("we stumble"). Death finds a landing place in their eyes, which fill not just with "tears," but with "ashes." Further weakened, they pass out and "come to" at the "smell of / frying trout / and steamed rice."

They are served tea by an “old hermit” who, “dressed like the scarecrow, / crawls out of his barracks”:

> “Drink! He says,
> “It’ll pick you up!”
> and so we drink
> feeling drugged.

The hermit is figured as undead: he is “dressed like the scarecrow” and wears around his shoulders a “wreath of chrysanthemums,” a flower symbolizing death and rebirth. “Feeling drugged,” they commune with this figure who has “crawl[ed] out” from the tomblike “barracks” of internment. The air itself is “suffocate[d]” by “soft blues / in the key / of sleep.” “The sound of obsidian,” which is volcanic glass, “flake[s] in the wind.” Clouds “of black glass / waltz around” the three poets. They wrap themselves in the materials of the lake, of the concentration camp:

> We dress ourselves
> in shrouds of tule reeds
> stitched with barbed wire,
> stained with salt and mud.
>
> We refuse to cry.
>
> We drift back
> to the highway,
> holding our fists
> like rattles,
> shaking them

like bones.

"Drift[ing] back" to the highway and its centering "long double-yellow" that will take them elsewhere, their emotion is dammed up, held tight like their "fists" even as they shake them "like rattles," "like bones."

Highway 99 as a pathway of trade and tourism leads them to a site of violence where ghostly hermits crawl out and commune with the living. The hermit is a reminder that Buddhism was a dangerous marker that caused many to be forcibly removed to Tule Lake. Where Snyder's speaker asks, "where are the Sierras," as if angling to disappear from the highway altogether (*Mountains* 20), here, there is no chance of "abandon[ing]" the highway in a moment of Zen enlightenment. Indeed, "Nature" as a realm outside of capitalism does not exist here. One cannot simply "let things go" when affronted by violences that were imposed specifically because of markers of otherness like Buddhism *itself.* In this "pilgrimage to the shrine," the hermit, the site, is where Buddhism "is"; this is how it is inscribed in Hongo's poetry and felt on the poets' road trip. The poets must therefore "grapple with the United States from which Snyder gleefully described being ejected" (Nock-Hee Park 110).

In a way, the poem answers Hongo's series of questions in *The Mirror Diary:*

> If there is a "geography of the self," that theory from Romanticism that says that the forms of one's own gravitate to items of the natural world, humanizing the landscape as a personal history as Wordsworth did the Wye Valley as a child, as Thoreau did with Walden Pond, then what happens when the landscape changes or is degraded or when a person migrates or a people are removed from homelands? What happens when the

> foreigner becomes American? When there is diaspora? What do we do when the self is estranged from lands? (Hongo *Mirror Diary* 102)

Hongo's inability to write himself into the kind of Buddhism we see in Snyder's poems is related to Asian Americans' inability to simply step into the position of the liberal humanist subject, the position of the Romantic individual. Nguyen and Pai have incorporated Buddhism into their artistic practice in ways that might seem more recognizably "convert," but they, too, cannot "humanize the landscape as personal history" nor transform Highway 99 into a space of transcendent emptiness.

I have been curious about why someone like Hongo does not avail himself of Buddhist "tools" of poetics in the same way that Kyger does (for example). Why not bring Buddhism into his poetry in what would be recognizably avant-garde ways? The answer in Hongo's case (though not in the case of all Asian American Buddhist writers) is that he first has to establish a lineage for himself, one that includes the Buddhism that has been his cultural heritage (rather than a Buddhism that is "imported" as initially alien, but then transformed via transpacific flows, into the Western canon). Buddhism therefore is not a tool for *breaking down* and innovating a canon of poetry; it is instead a major part of the identities of the persons, the Others, whom Hongo brings *into* the canon:

> I write from Kahuhu, the plantation village on O'ahu in Hawai'i where I grew up as a child, remembering its Buddhist temple, tofu makers, rows of shotguns, and sandy village square, remembering the fields of sugar cane, the tractors and trailers hauling burned and cut cane down the Kamehameha Highway to the smoking mill at the center of everything. I write from the rocky beaches and sandy promontories where the separate graveyards were for Filipino, Chinese, and Japanese workers…I write from this world I left at the

> age of six, returned to when I was ten, that was lost to everyone as the capitalized world of Hawai'i itself turned from sugar to tourism. (Hongo *Mirror* 103)

Buddhism is part of these memories, part of the traumas of Japanese American internment, and part of his history as a descendant of Japanese indentured laborers in Hawai'i ("I write from Kahuhu…remembering its Buddhist temple") (Hongo *Mirror* 103). His is a practice of inscribing Buddhism that somewhat aligns with Saijo's poetics, since it registers Buddhism's place in histories of migration and imperial dispossession. Is Hongo's inscription of Buddhism an *Asian American* mode of inscribing Buddhism in poetry? Yes and no: Asian Americans inscribe Buddhism in many different ways and for different ends.

Conclusion: "I guess all the Dharma talk about 'everything is nothing' is just sorta sinking in my bones"[150]

We have seen how Saijo inscribes Buddhism in his poetry, but I want to further comment on Saijo's increasing sense, over the course of his life and writing, that Buddhism's liberatory potentials had soured. The line I have used as the heading of this subsection, "I guess all the Dharma talk about everything is nothing is just sorta sinking in my bones," is drawn from Kerouac's narrative impressions of Saijo when Saijo was ill at the Veterans Administration Hospital, recovering from a bout of TB and dealing with hepatitis (Kerouac *Big Sur* 81). In *Big Sur,* the narrator, standing in for Kerouac, notes that "'Little old George Baso [Albert Saijo] is probably dyin of T.B. in hospital outsida Tulare'" and that "we gotta go see him" (56). The narrator drives with friends out to "the T.B. hospital" which is "about two hours away through Tracy and down the San Joaquin Valley" (75). In Kerouac's portrait of Saijo, the narrator sees

[150] This is a line taken from Keraouc's *Big Sur,* in which the character George Baso, based on Albert Saijo, says this in answer to some of the narrator's questions: "His answers come like an old man's (he's only 30)—'I guess all the Dharma talk about everything is nothing is just sorta sinking in my bones,' he conceded, which makes me shudder—(On the way Dave's been telling us to be ready because George's changed so)…" (Kerouac 1992 81).

Saijo's embodied difference, his Japaneseness, and understands that because of this embodied difference, Saijo's "Buddhism" is not the same "Buddhism" as that of Japhy Ryder's playful "Zen lunacy" in *The Dharma Bums*. Upon seeing "George"/Albert, Kerouac's narrator reflects:

> I cant believe old Zen Master George is going to allow his body to die just now tho it looks like it when we pass through the lawn and come to a ward of beds and see him sitting dejected on the edge of his bed with his hair hanging over his brow where before it was always combed back—He's in a bathrobe and looks up at us almost displeased…He sighs and comes out to the warm lawn with us and expression on his face says 'Well ah so you've come to see me because I'm sick but what do you really want?' as tho all the old humorous courage of the year before has now given away to a profoundly deep Japanese skepticism like that of a Samurai warrior in a fit of suicidal depression (surprising me by its abject gloomy fearful frown). (*Big Sur* 78-79)[151]

Readers might first compare the sprawl of Kerouac's lack of punctuation and grammar to similarities in Saijo's poetry; nevertheless, the "profoundly deep Japanese skepticism like that of a Samurai warrior in a fit of suicidal depression" surprises the narrator by "its abject gloomy fearful frown" (*Big Sur* 79). It is as though the Orientalism through which Kerouac has always seen Saijo ("little neat George, just 5 feet 5 and a few pounds over that and so clean, with his soft feathery hair like the hair of a child, his delicate hands") (80-81) is unsettled (though replaced with still other Orientalisms):

[151] The "all the old humorous courage of the year before" is a reference to Kerouac, Lew Welch, and Saijo's road trip that is the subject of *Trip Trap,* a volume of haiku poetry they co-wrote (1998). Part of *Trip Trap* includes a section from Lew Welch's unfinished novel describing the trip and the return.

> I mean it was like my first frightened realization of what to be Japanese really meant—to be Japanese and not to believe in life any more and to be gloomy like Beethoven yet to be Japanese in gloom, the gloom of Basho behind it all, the huge thunderous scowl of Issa or of Shiki, kneeling in the frost with the bowed head like the bowed-head-oblivion of all the old horses of Japan long dust (*Big Sur* 80)

Saijo's serious ailments, combined with his deep skepticism, shock Kerouac into perhaps seeing Buddhism as a burden that informs "what to be Japanese really meant" (80). In these excerpts, "'to be Japanese' is altogether different from the Beat longing for alienation and derangement; this racialized dejection casts the Japanese American into 'Japan long dust'" (a remarkably bleak image given the dust and desert that is now associated with internment) (Nock-Hee Park 104). Kerouac's narrator is overwhelmed by the encounter and ultimately seems to reduce its specificity, writing that it "adds to that darkness in my mind, all these DEATH things piling up suddenly" (79). But he is shaken by Saijo's changes:

> he just stares at the ground—His answers come like an old man's (he's only 30)—'I guess all the Dharma talk about everything is nothing is just sorta sinking in my bones,' he conceded, which makes me shudder… (*Big Sur* 81)

In these excerpts, "Baso" bears a different relationship to Buddhism not just because of the scars of American empire (he had TB as a result of the camps and contracted hepatitis as a result of fighting as an American GI), but also because the Beat "Dharma talk about everything is nothing" does not function to help him "let things go"; instead, as we have seen, it simply reveals, again and again, the "FUCKING JOB" of the bodhisattva (Saijo *Outspeaks* 127). Here, he describes Buddhism as something that ages him, "sinking in [his] bones." Saijo's cynicism in the TB ward is echoed in *Outspeaks,* which was published years later, but certainly feels drawn

from the serious illnesses he dealt with over the course of his life: "IS IT TOO MUCH TO ASK TO BE AWAKE AMONGST THIS VARIED WORLD IN BROAD DAYLITE & BE COMPLETELY PAIN FREE" (Saijo *Outspeaks* 29).

Kerouac's episode here registers a racial difference perhaps similarly to how Silliman appears to have first seen whiteness as a component of his poetic identity. Kerouac himself is pointing to why Buddhism is inscribed differently in work by Asian Americans: "Buddhism ages and debilitates [Saijo]," just as it was Buddhism that, as a marker of Japaneseness and foreignness, contributed to the arrest and incarceration of Hongo's undead hermit at Tule Lake (Nock-Hee Park 104).[152] In Hongo's poetry, Buddhism is embodied in the undead hermit, a reminder of the foreignness Buddhism symbolized, the danger it held, in wartime America and in the camps. In other words, what enables Kerouac to avoid this "profoundly deep Japanese skepticism like that of a Samurai warrior" (79) is his whiteness, and he "shudders" to see that Buddhism is part of Saijo's "bowed-head-oblivion," part of his burden as a Japanese American man.

The "Dharma talk" that Kerouac's character "Baso" references is indeed a "talk"—a story spun by the figures who are now memorialized as celebrity Buddhist Poets—and it is often paired with poetic and religious practices that have gone to form some of the most remarkable American Buddhist poetry. Yet this "Dharma talk about everything is nothing…sinks in Saijo's bones" because this version of Buddhism does not serve Albert Saijo; or, it does little more than the Buddhism of "BODHISATTVA VOWS," which simply reinforces suffering, over and over, endlessly, weighing him down. The Buddhism of the "Dharma talk" is implicated in the other

[152] Japanese American Buddhist religious figures, especially Zen masters and priests, were among the first to be relocated after Executive Order 9066 was made by Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1942.

large forces of imperialism and empire that have landed Saijo at the VA hospital. What are the differences between Saijo, Pai, Nguyen, and Hongo's work and the work of Snyder, Ginsberg, and Waldman? To answer this, one must examine each poet's life, life writing, interviews, claims to spiritual practice, claims to spiritual enlightenment, behavior, and, of course, their poetry, too. All inscribe Buddhism differently; our reading of Buddhist poetry depends on who is using it, and why. But one thing in common between Snyder, Waldman, and Ginsberg is that their identity, their claims to religiosity, and their celebrity statuses as Buddhist Poets are rarely questioned. Readings of their poetry as Buddhist are thus fairly easily produced. Reading poetry in the life and writing of Saijo, Pai, Nguyen, and Hongo requires more attentiveness and perhaps a letting-go of the idea that we will be able to produce, from their poetic lines, similarly robust close readings as my own reading of "Piute Creek," for example. As we produce stronger readings of the work of Asian American writers who engage with or are in dialogue with Buddhism, we can begin to remedy the whiteness of the Beat canon, which has made the exclusion of these same Asian American Buddhist writers illegible until now.

Chapter Five

"Your seeing has a way of sharpening mine"[153]: Seeing Charles Leong

"Study is a slow process when no immediate discussion is possible. My only recourse in the Portland desert is the occasional trip to the remnant of Chinatown calling on one of the few remaining old scholars of the classics. I always get recharged after one of those visits…They are happier that someone still loves what they loved. Maybe it is only in this slow and trying manner that anything that is good earns the right to survive."[154]

—Charles Leong to Gary Snyder, 21 December 1965

Situating Chapter Five

In examining, first, the postwar poetics of "timely" uncertainty in chapter one; the "prehistory" of mindfulness in the "spaces of mind" (dispersed and spatialized) of chapter two; and the false story that the transmission of Buddhism into Beat literature was solely a *textual* process (thereby erasing the contributions and translations of Asians in America); this dissertation has presented a range of interactions and relationships with East Asian and Asian American persons and cultural materials in postwar America. By showing that our earlier models of understanding these transpacific "translations" were not precise enough, it has attempted to clearly delineate how we might better understand the appropriations and adaptations of East Asian cultural material in American poetry. I have suggested that the idea of the Maker ethos allows us to more precisely assess a given cultural producer's *relationship to* and *uses of* cultural material (not all Makers, therefore, are using East Asian materials *un*ethically). Because of this rubric of the Maker ethos, which involves using whiteness as a reading practice, we have been enabled to see *other* poetic and literary uses, adaptations, and appropriations of East Asian cultural material beyond those of Euro Americans (beyond what whiteness found valuable in

[153] Leong, Charles. Letter to Gary Snyder. 17 December 1958. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 32. Archives and Special Collections at Shields Library, The University of California, Davis. Davis, California.
[154] Leong to Snyder. 21 January 1960. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 38.

Buddhism, for example), thus broadening our understanding of Buddhist American literature beyond the work of midcentury literary celebrities.

But beyond these specific arguments, this project examines many cultural producers' relationships to cultural materials that were not "theirs." This period of transpacific exchange is remarkably varied and layered in its many borrowings from East Asian, Asian American, and American cultures. Everyone is interacting with stuff and people who are "foreign" to them. This was true in chapter one, where we saw how a vague "Asianness" was new and exciting to Ginsberg; it was true in chapter two, where Buddhism helped Whalen produce a new poetics and thus place himself in the modernist/avant-garde lineages he so desired to be within; it was true in chapter three with Watts, who saw the usefulness of Buddhism for counterculture; it was true of Japanese American Jodo Shinshu Buddhists, who saw in mainstream American religious and cultural practices a means by which to camouflage themselves and their communities from xenophobia; and it was true of Albert Saijo, who sought out the (to him) "foreign" religion of Buddhism once it had become a less dangerous marker. In this last chapter, I examine one more iteration of this period's relation to Otherness. Similar to chapter one, we will travel back into the institution of the American university to examine a version of positivism in the University of Washington (UW) Far East Department's approach to the study of Other cultures.

Introduction

In Philip Whalen and Joanne Kyger's "gender-bending" correspondence in the early period of Kyger's poetic career (1959–1964), Kyger was able to imagine herself becoming a poet. Linda Russo shows how Whalen's letters "provided an alternatively gendered social site that broke down the boy-gang barriers so that poetics, gender, identity, and genealogy could be enacted and discussed" (Russo "How You Want" 24). This imaginative process was therefore

quite a feat considering the "boys' club" gendering of poetry at the time. If the letters are the social site where Kyger imagines and discusses eschewing the role of the female muse and taking on the formerly male role of the poet, it is through her poems' publication that she *enacts* this identity. After this, it took a few taste-makers and interested contemporaries and critics to gesture toward her acceptance into the ranks of the avant-garde.

But what if Kyger had not published her poems or produced books of poetry? Lacking the published artifact of the book and its positive reception, how would we see her status in the Beat and San Francisco Renaissance coteries? She would not be classed as part of the Beat canon, certainly. We undoubtedly would have a deficient sense of how gender worked in the social sites and poetries of the San Francisco Renaissance. Presumably, she would have all but disappeared from this period's literary movements, and would likely have faded into the background like Dorothy Wordsworth, for example—a figure barely present, overshadowed by the fame of great male writers like her former husband Gary Snyder. She may have been recovered later with the rise of feminist literary criticism and recovery projects. Without a book, Kyger almost certainly would not have been invited to teach at the bastion of experimental Buddhist poetry and thought, Naropa University's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics (a role that cemented her place as an elder in the avant-garde poetic lineage). In order to reckon further with the problems of literary celebrity discussed in chapter four, it is this idea of a "barely present presence" that this chapter is interested in.

This chapter examines the "absent presence" of the unpublished, private letters of the Chinese American translator and scholar Charles Leong. These are letters written to Gary Snyder from 1955-1986; Snyder saved them for reasons unknown to us (though the nature of these letters suggests that Snyder may have drawn from them as a resource in his translations of the

Tang dynasty poet Han Shan/Cold Mountain 寒山子). Leong's letters articulate a criticism and "ruining" of positivist approaches to Other cultures and in their "absent" quality (no published book/artifact exists, making Leong *un*canonizable), offer us a conduit for examining the avant-garde's rhetoric of being "outsiders" and "outriders" to American taste-making institutions like the university and the Iowa Creative Writing Workshop.

Leong's letters to Snyder are now housed in the University of California-San Diego archives—available to interested readers, but not to the public. In saving these letters, Snyder helps us "see" Leong, a person who, through years of correspondence, performed and later began to articulate his identity as elder (in his word, a "grandpappy") to the Beats.[155] However, unlike Kyger, it appears Leong never produced a book of translated poems—there is no artifact to consider, no work to analyze (I have not been able to locate a book of poems by Leong, and the Master's thesis mentioned in his letters does not appear in the Archives of the University of Washington, where he studied and worked). All we have are these letters, written to an audience of one. Leong has thus never been present in the Beat moment because he did not produce his own text for public consumption (unlike the *erasure* of Albert Saijo, therefore, Leong might be seen as an *absent presence*, rather than a figure *erased* from the Beat canon). Below, I ruminate on the absence of Leong and what this absence might mean for the "disembodied" rhetoric of the late-twentieth century avant-garde.

As we saw in chapter four, Shin Yu Pai's work acknowledges the problem of the book-as-artifact in *Enso's* revelation that her poetry, the art(ifacts) within *Enso*, are connected to communities and generated through relationships. She further explores the problem of the poetic

[155] Leong to Snyder. 21 May 1967. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 58.

commodity as she removes her own personhood from the performative space of the poetry reading. The fact that Leong's letters remain *unpublished* may be a benefit, opening us up beyond the avant-garde need to enact one's poetic identity and step onto the stage as part of these poetic lineages. Leong's letters beg the question one of my students recently asked: can something be innately avant-garde if there is no audience to see it? Ron Silliman seemed to think that being avant-garde depended on audience; in fact, he defined the late-20th-century avant-garde based on communities of reception, based on how audiences react to one's work (recall that he identified as avant-garde the work that polite university communities praised, *not* the work that a minoritized audience composed of LGBTQIA persons found valuable). In literary Modernism and in this era, it has been communities of white men who have historically gotten outsiders published: this was true of H.D., whom Pound championed, and of Kyger, whom Whalen (and eventually Donald Allen) championed.

Unlike Kyger, then, Leong did not attempt to contend with "entering into the lineage," which involved gendered (and racial) boundaries and binaries that "worked in favor of [white] men who could find their corollaries in the past and turn each other into poets" (Russo "How You Want" 26). Leong participated in some of "the social rituals of poetic synchronicity—learning the craft, giving readings and collaborating on performances, publishing in little magazines—" all of which "reinforc[e] a sense of currency, of belonging" (Russo "How You Want" 26). These are "how one realizes their 'part' in a group" (26). And Leong did some of these: though he was uninterested in "being" a poet, his crafts were calligraphy and translation; and he attended readings and collaborated with these Beat figures, even if he did not publish in little magazines. There was some sense of belonging. But, as Russo notes, "entering into the lineage inducts one as a poet quite differently"—and that is what Leong lacked (26). It took

Kyger years to be "inducted," no matter how often her place in the community was "verbally conferred"; indeed, as I have suggested, it took *publication* for her to become "'of' this lineage" (Russo "How You Want" 26). Leong therefore stays on the vestiges of literary community, a participant but not an inductee.

As is clear in Kyger and Whalen's correspondence, letter-writing occurs within distances of space and time and thus allows Kyger to reconfigure her relationship to the male-dominant *communities* of San Francisco and to the male-centric *act of writing* poetry itself. Leong and Snyder's correspondence allows something similar, though Leong does not get the chance to *enact* a new identity as writer and Beat elder, since he did not publish. Yet precisely because there is not an artifact like a book or Master's thesis, Leong is a conduit allowing us to consider Beat literary celebrity; the "disembodied" ethos of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics; and the seeming "disappearance" of whiteness into the late-twentieth century avant-garde identity. If Leong and Snyder's correspondence allowed Leong a liberatory space of "disembodiment," a space where two minds could meet (as opposed to the difficult strictures Leong encountered in his Far East Studies department), we might then ask what is going on with a school of poetics that positions itself as "disembodied" even as it is known for literary celebrities who are white.

Below, I will discuss Leong's experience in the University of Washington Far East Department, discussing how both Leong and Snyder are "outsiders" to the American academy, though for different reasons. Their "outsider" status derived partly from their own choices and partly from their unique approaches to translation, which diverged from the then-dominant approaches to Chinese-English translation in the academy at the time. Though both Leong and Snyder benefited greatly from their cross-cultural, transpacific, friendly correspondence, it was

only Snyder who reaped international fame for his translations of Han Shan. Toward the end of this chapter, I ruminate on how the absence of Leong, contrasted with the great acclaim of Snyder's translations, appear to have impacted/informed the late-twentieth century avant-garde, particularly Naropa's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics. Leong's absence may provide a key to understanding how and why an avant-garde institution can continue to claim its "outrider" and "disembodied" status even as it has historically excluded writers of color. And yet in the University of Washington, Leong was far from "absent"—in fact, he was loudly belligerent, frustrated with the positivist, "porthole" approach to culture by which his colleagues operated. The institution of the American university did not listen to Leong, of course; that is why we still have the problems Kandice Chuh has recently illuminated in *The Difference Aesthetics Makes*. But the avant-garde did not have an opportunity to really listen to Leong's experience, and that is because he brings us to the lived, ruined ground of history in a manner not unlike Benjamin's understanding of the genre of the allegory.

In championing the allegory as a genre during the Thirty Years' War, Benjamin criticized his own colleagues' preference for the symbolic because classical symbolism "seeks to transcend time and history, thereby displacing the anguish of life with images of stabilized harmony and eternal perfection" (Stead 54, Koepnick 68). (In these words, we might recall the ending of Snyder's poem "Night Highway 99": "there / IS no 99" transcends time and history). But as Benjamin writes:

> In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting. And in this guise history does not assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay. Allegory thereby declares itself to be beyond beauty. (Benjamin *Origin* 178)

Subverting the transcendent trappings of symbology like "eternal life," the allegory offers, instead, "irresistible decay" (Cowan 112). In this chapter, I, too, want to start from this focal point of "irresistible decay" in examining the life of Leong, whose biography presents just that: sadness, decay, a seeming failure, and the ruinous details of human aging and physical ailing. To "see" this decay is to consider not just *ontology* ("the enigmatic question…of the nature of human existence as such,") but also to see the "biographical historicity of the individual"—to subject ontology to time (Benjamin *Origin* 166). It was the allegory's emphases on transience—most arrestingly illustrated by Benjamin in the image of the *facies hippocratica,* the changes visible in a human face that is close to death—that enabled it to "represent the frailty and finitude of human life" (Stead 55). This chapter's interests are more unwieldy than others: what do we gain from looking into Leong's personal letters? It is in the contrast between what is probably the most famous Buddhist image in American literature—Kerouac's transcendent religious experience atop a mountain in the Sierra Nevadas (enabled by Kerouac's encounter with the "spirit" of the Chinese poet Han Shan, problematically embodied by Ryder)—contrasted with Leong's life in letters that I hope that the chapter's stakes become clearer.

Readers might wonder what we gain from examining another person of Asian descent who was part of the midcentury transpacific moment but is not present in the histories and texts generated from/about this period. One can perhaps anticipate some of this chapter's conclusions, and examining Leong might simply reveal what has already been made obvious: that the Asian American friends and colleagues of the Beats were not valued as equals, nor adequately represented, nor rightly remembered in the accretion of texts that constitute "Beat literature." What, then, will an examination of Leong add to what we have already discovered from Albert Saijo's experience and poetry? First, examining these two Asian Americans simply reiterates

what many scholars have already shown: Asian American experiences, even in the small social coterie that we now call "Beat" or "San Francisco Renaissance," are vastly different and not generalizable, except perhaps in the ways that whiteness similarly impacts their absences and erasures. Charles Leong and Albert Saijo's specificities *outside of* their seemingly shared Asian Americanness are in fact the interesting part, as I hope this dissertation shows.

Second, Leong's correspondence with Snyder reveals that Asian Americans were not just teachers of *zazen* nor fellow practitioners of Zen Buddhism, but were also scholarly colleagues, fellow translators, fellow students of East Asian culture. In fact, Leong was barely interested and certainly not well-schooled in Buddhism, but was instead a Daoist scholar of Chinese language and culture who collaborated with Snyder as they both translated poems from Tang dynasty-era China (618-907 C.E.). (These poems, likely written by many unnamed poets, had been collected under the constructed authorial ethos of a "man" named "Han Shan"). Leong, in other words, reveals a different instance of Asian American absence from Beat literature. Even if Snyder may have disregarded some of Leong's advice (like learning Cantonese so as to more accurately translate Han Shan's southern Chinese poetry), he appears to have benefited from Leong's expertise and then neglected to credit him. And unlike Saijo, Leong did not address his exclusion from the Beat "story" by publishing (by, as Saijo did in *Outspeaks, speaking out*)—instead, Leong notes his rightful inclusion in the Beat lineages in these private letters. This is why I see the *unpublished* nature of his letters as worth considering.

Third, the "irresistible decay" of Leong's letters "ruin" the transcendent, seemingly liberatory Buddhism circumscribed and repackaged by whiteness (the letters, and Leong's personhood itself, also ruin the mythified image of China that the "scientific sinologists" of the time had constructed and for which they sought out evidence in their work). It is in Leong's

criticism of the university and in his choice to leave academia and instead learn within the Chinese communities of Portland and Seattle Chinatowns that I see a reflection of Benjamin's own valuing of allegory, vividly captured in the image (the "institutional fact") of the ruin.

Charles Leong: A Brief Biography

Charles Leong, a Chinese American man of Cantonese heritage, was a key figure in the romanticized Reed College coterie and a fast friend of Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, Lew Welch, Allen Ginsberg, and Lloyd Reynolds (he corresponded with Whalen, Reynolds, and Snyder for over 30 years). Leong appears to have grown up in San Francisco. He fought in Italy in World War II, returned to the West coast, and went to college on the G.I. Bill. His letters refer to "sojourns at UO Extsn, Museum Art School, Reed [College], & UW [University of Washington]."[156] It was at Reed College, a liberal arts institution in Portland, Oregon, where Leong met Snyder, Whalen, and Welch.

In 1956, Leong began a Master's thesis on the Tang dynasty poet Han Shan/Cold Mountain 寒山子. He examined and translated roughly 100 poems as part of his Master's degree in Far East Studies at the University of Washington, though I have been unable to locate this thesis in the UW Thesis and Dissertation Archives (it may be that he did not finish this project). He seems to have been quite a talented scholar and was on full fellowship for three months in 1955 and in other years as well. It appears this fellowship, like others that he earned, lasted a few months and was dependent on "how much can be done toward presenting substantial groundwork for the powers-that-be to look over."[157] During this brief 1955 fellowship, he

[156] "UO Extsn" refers to a continuing education program that he had been a part of at the University of Oregon. I am unsure of which Museum Art School he is referring to. Leong to Snyder. 4 November 1983. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 108, Folder 10.

[157] Leong to Snyder. 4 May 1955. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 23.

developed a dictionary with Dr. Erwin Reifler, an Austrian comparative philologist. Also in 1955, Leong sends Snyder a paper that his advisor, the sinologue Dr. Hellmut Wilhelm, saved for reasons unknown to Leong (who wrote: "it must be of some value, don't you think? I just have a hunch that my reading of the Chinese filled some gaps for him. Ah, these 'scholars'!").[158] Aside from the odd fact that Wilhelm "insisted on keeping the original" while not explaining his rationale to Leong, what this means is that Leong sent his own translations, as well as evidence of Leong's translation process and translation philosophy, to Snyder. In 1957, Leong and Snyder made plans to collaborate in translating Han Shan; in 1958, Snyder published his first translations of Han Shan in *The Evergreen Review* with no mention of Leong (He 45).[159]

Leong was quite a bit older than Whalen and Snyder; he was closer to Kenneth Rexroth in age, probably about 20 years Whalen's and Snyder's senior.[160] In 1965, Leong left academia, frustrated with his inability to make a living from fellowships, and in a career choice common to veterans, began a career as a civil servant with the United States Post Office. In 1970 around the age of 65, Leong retired with a pension from the Post Office.[161] In 1972, he was asked to lead, though not in a university setting, projects and discussions based on his expertise in Chinese language and culture. In a 1976 letter, he describes a new two-year position as a consultant on Chinese culture at the "SF based American Academy for Chinese Culture."[162] During these later

[158] Leong to Snyder. 1 December 1955. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 24. In a later letter, he adds: "should tickle you to know that Prof Wilhelm here is quite a fan of yours through reading Kerouac's Dharma Bums." Leong to Snyder. 26 February 1961. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 47.
[159] Yuemin He provides a timeline of Snyder's publications: he "translated twenty-four of Han Shan's three-hundred-odd classic Chinese poems, publishing them first in *Evergreen Review* in 1958 and then including them with a 1965 reprinting of his 1959 collection *Riprap*" (He 45). Yuemin He, "Gary Snyder's Selective Way to Cold Mountain: Domesticating Han Shan," in *The Emergence of Buddhist-American Literature*, ed. John Whalen-Bridge and Gary Storhoff (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009), 45–62.
[160] He notes "dropping out" in 1932 in the midst of the Great Depression (May 21 1967, Box 107:58); he also notes in a later letter that Philip Whalen had just turned 60. A few letters after this, he notes he has recently turned 80.
[161] Snyder would have been around the age of 40.
[162] Leong to Snyder. 19 January 1976. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 86.

retired years, he continues to provide advice, encouragement, and expertise to Snyder, who increasingly appears to neglect to respond to Leong's letters. In the late 1970s, he married a woman named Ludmila and also ailed considerably, at one point nearly dying of a brain aneurysm. His letters cease in 1986. He appears to have passed due to colon cancer and/or emphysema.

A large portion of Leong and Snyder's correspondence "talks shop" about "our boy" Han Shan ("Why does Han Shan hit one so?", Leong writes in a November 1960 letter as he provides feedback, advice, and praise for Snyder's latest translation).[163] Han Shan, or Cold Mountain, was made famous as a mythic Beat figure thanks to Snyder's translations and thanks also to Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums,* which is in no small part about Snyder's genius as a reader and translator of the "dharma bum" "poet monk" Han Shan (though Han Shan appears to remain for Chinese readers "a relatively obscure Asian poet") (He 48, 46).[164] Both Snyder and Leong are readers, translators, and admirers of his work. Though Snyder's interest in Han Shan was guided by his own "cosmo-political" project and interests in Zen Buddhism, Leong was a scholar of classical Chinese literature and passionate about using southern Chinese dialects in Chinese-English translation: it seems that since Han Shan was a Southerner, Leong was interested in working with his poetry.

[163] Leong to Snyder. 11 November 1960. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 45.
[164] Though, as I noted above, the figure "Han Shan," though he may be based on a real Han Shan, is largely seen as a constructed authorly ethos under which poems, probably written by many, have been gathered. See Yuemin He, "Gary Snyder's Selective Way to Cold Mountain: Domesticating Han Shan." She writes, "whenever Han Shan lived, we have to bear in mind that no agreement exists except that he probably lived in the T'ang dynasty. As far as Han Shan's identity is concerned, Lu Chi'u-Yin believed he was a poor man, whereas later in *Zu Tang Ji*, he is portrayed as a recluse" (He 47). "Scholars Yoshikawa Kojiro, E.G. Pulleyblank, Stephen R. Bokenkamp and Jia Jinhua have suggested that the Han Shan poems probably came from more than one hand. Given such conflicting background information, Han Shan "remains unknowable" and is perhaps nothing more than "a figment." (He 48)

Leong celebrated each new success with Snyder in these letters written from 1955-1986. The letters are both collegial and friendly in nature. Leong recommends calligraphic techniques and technologies, guiding Snyder's calligraphy practice; Leong complains of the Far East Department's devaluing of his own expertise, frustrated that his colleagues will not consider southern Chinese dialects as a valid part of translation. Further, Leong provides information about Han Shan and appears to aid Snyder in accessing southern Chinese dialects, including Cantonese, which as Leong frequently notes, contain many of the old classical Chinese usages and vocabularies that would be useful to someone translating Han Shan.

Despite Leong's generous, copious emotional and intellectual support—from congratulating Snyder on a particularly moving translation, to encouraging Snyder's calligraphy practice ("your ideographs show additional nuances of excellence. Your accomplishment on the graphic side completely refutes the sour grapes of the incompetent sinologues"[165]), to recommending books for his "Chinese library" so as to more intuitively translate Han Shan's writing ("a last suggestion; don't pass up the chance to get hold of a fine edition of the 13 classics...they are the fountainhead of all later literary allusions")—Snyder reaps the benefits of this transpacific, cross-cultural yet familial relationship.[166] When Leong receives a mailed copy of *Cold Mountain Poems* from Snyder, he glows—"I've gone over some of the lines again and again – they were so well put"—and his only regret is "that I can't bring up various excerpts for discussion face to face."[167] This regret, which at times morphs into frustration with or outright scolding of Snyder for neglecting to write, tends to grow louder with time as he sees his own ideas, opinions, and talents showcased by the much more famous Euro-Americans ("it might

[165] Leong to Snyder. 30 December 1958. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 33.
[166] Leong to Snyder. 30 December 1958. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 33.
[167] Leong to Snyder. 16 November 1959. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 36.

interest you to know that I've been bleating and blatting somewhat along the lines of your panel discussion [here referring to the "Houseboat Summit"] within the Chinese community since the late '30s").[168] The letters reveal a very good friend and generous colleague in Leong, who records his reactions to Snyder's growing fame and prestige even as he himself retreats into obscurity, retirement, and old age.

In a February 1957 letter, Leong scolds Snyder for neglecting to send news of Snyder's current project, reminding him that "mine is not an idle curiosity"—Leong's own scholarly projects are at stake.[169] Leong had received word of Snyder's project from another pen pal, Philip Whalen; "however," Leong complains, "this is still not like getting the goods from the star of the show."[170] In this, the first letter Leong wrote to the "Old Tiger" after Snyder had settled in Japan, Leong registers the imbalanced relationship that will remain characteristic of their letters for years:

> Since my acquaintance with the campus scene I've been depressed more and more by the waste being shown (as I view it) of the perversion and misdirection of talent…I ask whether I should not discard my initial sadness…there is so little that is sound for us oldsters to cheer about today. Perhaps in that understanding, you can tolerate this 'looking-over-your-shoulder' type of interest on my part.[171]

Here, Leong calls himself an "oldster," an identity he explores and expands through the years to rightfully include his status as an elder, a "grandpappy" to the Beats. He also presciently sees where he himself will be placed: *behind* Snyder, "looking over his shoulder" with great curiosity

[168] Leong to Snyder. 21 May 1967. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 58.
[169] Leong to Snyder. 19 February 1957. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 27.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Ibid.

which, though not "idle," will not bring him forward as Snyder's equal. Third, the letter records a lifelong sadness of Leong's, a depression about the "waste" and "misdirection of talent" on campus. This "regret" would at times manifest as outright belligerence. Because of these complaints, these sadnesses, recorded over years in this correspondence, we can characterize Leong's letters as part of what Cathy Park Hong calls the literature of "minor feelings," which are "'non-cathartic states of emotion' with 'a remarkable capacity for duration'" that "occur when American optimism is enforced upon you, which contradicts your own racialized reality, thereby creating a static of cognitive dissonance" (Hong 56). I explain what he means by this "waste being shown" on campus and reveal Leong's "minor feelings" below.

"You fellas have the advantage over me of being in a more congenial environment"[172]: Leong's Frustrations with the Far East Department

Leong's letters to Snyder can be seen as part of the serialized literature of "minor feelings" because of Leong's ongoing frustration with what were then called "Oriental" or "Far East" Departments in the academy. Such departments frustrate Leong because of their overtly Orientalist, scholarly, short-sighted ideas of "Asian" and "Eastern" cultures—and Leong complains of this to Snyder, who in one letter calls this approach to academic study "scientific sinology." Leong responds:

> you don't realize how responsive the chord you touched in me when you put 'scientific' sinology thus. The high priests of Egypt (& everything else) did not die with the last dynasty. Perhaps it is for that reason that "s—", whatever the noun, stinks a little, it's just that the corpses still are around.[173]

[172] Leong to Snyder. 1 December 1955. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 24.
[173] Leong to Snyder. 4 May 1955. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 23.

I believe in mentioning "the high priests of Egypt," he may be referring to disciplines that studied the Other (archaeology, anthropology, Orientalism) that were informed by colonial interests. "Whatever the noun" we use to describe "s—" (sinology), therefore, it will "stink a little" because the aftereffects of colonialism and imperialism "still are around."[174] As we shall see below, Snyder later suggests another, perhaps more appropriate term for the work that Leong is trying to do: the "Oriental humanities." Leong responds with frustration, wishing it were the case, but noting that the Far East Department is in fact far closer to the above "scientific" sinology he so detests.

One can therefore imagine (though I will present quoted examples of some of Leong's praise) why Leong might appreciate Snyder's work, since it is different than that of the "corpses" mentioned above. Yet this appreciation for Snyder's approach to culture does not make Leong's own work any easier. In an October 1958 letter, as he encourages Snyder in his translation work, Leong writes, "but in the back of my mind, something still nags at me. Is there really a sincere desire to know and to understand the thoughts and values of the East in existence at all?" He is skeptical: "my plaintive skepticism at this late date is but a result of years of silent observation of the scene on and off campus" (later in the letter, he refers to a microaggression he had experienced that day, hence his note about "silent observation…off campus").[175] His work as a translator and scholar of Chinese literature and culture is constantly deflated by the Orientalism of the department and the (at times subtle) racisms he experiences. When he complains that "you fellas have the advantage over me of being in a more congenial environment"—these "fellas" being Whalen and Snyder—he is correct: Leong's department and the university as an institution

[174] Leong to Snyder. 4 May 1955. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 23.
[175] Leong to Snyder. 6 October 1958. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 31.

continually disregards his heritage and expertise, in a sense gaslighting him and making for a toxic environment in which to work (when he complains about the strictures surrounding his own project, he is told he is overreacting).

There is a dialogue in *The Dharma Bums* between Ray Smith (Jack Kerouac) and Japhy Ryder (Gary Snyder) about Snyder's translations of Han Shan. It is a crucial framing device of the whole book, given that, by the end of the novel, Ryder essentially (and problematically) embodies the "spirit" of Han Shan for the Beat counterculture (more on this "embodiment" in my conclusion below). In the excerpt I want to focus on here, Ryder explains how he must translate Han Shan's poetic lines to meet "the approval of Chinese scholars here at the university" (Kerouac *Dharma Bums* 14). In order to meet that approval, Ryder/Snyder must "have it clear in English," rather than, as Kerouac/Smith suggests, "just translat[ing] it as it is, five signs, five words" (Kerouac 14-15). Ryder explains that "I have to put in Western prepositions and articles and such," instead of more directly translating the "sign for climbing, sign for up, sign for cold, sign for mountain, sign for path" (14). Smith suggests: "Well then, translate it 'Climbing up Cold Mountain path'" (14). But as Ryder explains, he cannot translate in this one-to-one way because it has to be rendered into English so as to pass muster with the scholars of Chinese "here at the university" (at the time depicted in the novel, Snyder would have been studying Chinese language and culture at UC Berkeley) (15). I focus on this dialogue because it mirrors the lifelong frustration that Charles Leong had with the American university's approach to Chinese language and literature. This difficulty is also a problem for Snyder, as is clear in Kerouac's storytelling—but Snyder solves this problem by moving abroad and translating Han Shan as *he sees fit* (though he appears to have drawn from the support and expertise of Leong).

However, Leong must operate within the same university strictures described by Ryder, except that for Leong, there is the added element that, in addition to distrusting Leong's ability with Chinese dialects, his colleagues also appear to distrust Leong's mastery of English. These strictures appear to be one of the major reasons that Leong leaves the academy and does not produce a scholarly monograph or book of translated poems. Leong's letters reveal an instance of harmful silencing and othering that occurred, not necessarily interpersonally, as in Alan Watts's relationship with Sokei-An Sasaki, but within and because of the structuring of Oriental/Far East/Area Studies departments of the mid-to-late century.[176] (Though this particular departmental ethos may have passed into obscurity, there remains a distrust of Asian/Americans' mastery of English within the academy: David Mura discusses this distrust in *Song for Uncle Tom, Tonto, and Mr. Moto: Poetry and Identity*) (2002).

These strictures are evident from the outset of Leong's Master's thesis. At the time in 1957, Leong's adviser in the Far East/Oriental Studies department—Dr. Hellmut Wilhelm, son of the noted sinologist Richard Wilhelm—had no sense of how many poems Han Shan had written, nor of how many Leong would need to translate:

> Initially, my adviser, not knowing the total nos [numbers] of the poems airily stated that I should do them all (there's 311). When I gave him the score, he was stopped cold. I got the impression that he will still expect at least one-third of the total. A rough calculation makes the paper a minimum of 250pp.[177]

[176] I say it was not "wholly" interpersonally because it is likely that Leong's silencing also occurred through interpersonal interactions—what we might now call microaggressions or racial bias. In his letters, Leong occasionally implies that personal encounters with colleagues have contributed to his immense frustration at being disallowed to engage with southern Chinese dialects in his translation projects.
[177] Leong to Snyder. 19 February 1957. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 27.

Leong is at the cutting edge of Chinese-English translation here. He admires Snyder's poetic sense greatly, asking how much Snyder had translated ("how much did you do on the old boy anyway?"). Leong "secretly think[s]" that Snyder "should be the boy to do the topic," partly, as later letters reveal, because of Snyder's mastery of poetic language in English.[178] But Leong's Master's project, and "everything [he] was interested in, even when approved [by the department], must be treated in a certain way."[179] He is continually frustrated with the narrowness of academic inquiry that is being imposed by his department on his own project, and registers a "hostil[ity], ungrateful[ness], belligeren[ce]" (Hong 57), and depression:

> I am not a professional rebel, but I just can't see doing a job slanted toward some hidden purpose. Please tell me whether my attitude is childish. It's been called everything from independence to stubbornness. They tell me I shouldn't mind too much since the Master's isn't too important. If so, then why must it be written in the way they want? But maybe that's why you want to be on your own.[180]

His work is circumscribed by asinine rules about how his work should be packaged; produced; even written, it seems. Leong is being told how to write about Chinese language and culture, how to translate from the Chinese, and how to deliver that inquiry—and is also being told that his reactions to those strictures are "stubbornness, "independence," "childish." He is being told that he is overreacting.

In turn, he is both belligerent—"Chinese studies, here at least, certainly is getting to be a laugh"—and depressed: "study is a slow process when no immediate discussion is possible."[181]

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[178] Leong to Snyder. 19 February 1957. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 27.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Leong to Snyder. 19 February 1957. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 27; Leong to Snyder. 21 January 1960. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 38.

Interestingly, in the last line of the above excerpt, he also registers a desire to be able to engage with Chinese cultural materials as Snyder does: "why must it be written in the way they want? But maybe that's why you want to be on your own."[182] Leong wonders whether Snyder went to Japan to "be on [his] own" so that he had greater freedom in his work with the *same* cultural materials with which Leong is working. It may be that the difference is not just that Snyder is "on his own," working outside of an academic department, but that Leong is a Chinese American man in the late-1950s United States, working in a department that is markedly Orientalist in its mode of inquiry and in its treatment of Leong himself. Certainly, Snyder in his detachment from the institution of the university has fewer strictures on his work, but Snyder is also white and has different freedoms in his scholarly inquiry as a result. In the tradition of Orientalism, it is Westerners who "know," and master knowledge of, the Other; doubtless, Leong's racialized presence would have upset some of the hierarchies of thought that were innate to, even if not made explicit within, the Far East department.

Indeed, Leong noted in 1955 how much the department's logic and methodology still owed to colonialism: "The high priests of Egypt (& everything else) did not die with the last dynasty."[183] And in a letter of 1962, he points to the connection between department's methodologies and its forebears:

> It is of course impossible for the Western "experts" to escape from making unconscious projections in their "objective" analyses. If only they'd admit they're still their fathers' sons they'd be a lot better off. Puritanism-shmuritanism. The crowning criterion in Oriental social usage is Good Taste! Traditional Chinese society (that's a neat term)

[182] Leong to Snyder. 19 February 1957. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 27.
[183] Leong to Snyder. 4 May 1955. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 23.

> could not be neatly typed "open" or "tight." The social evaluation embraces a wide scale of behavior. A few well turned phrases could not do it full justice. I am well aware of the glib sensationalists who have cashed in on the subject. But when one considers that the Chinese culture is really an amalgamation and distillation of who knows how many tribal mores—some of which still operate in isolation—it's a foolhardy soul, indeed, who'd dare to type the national culture within the stricture of a few academic cliches.[184]

His phrase "if only they'd admit they're still their fathers' sons" may be a way of connecting then-contemporary Sinology and Far East Department methodologies to the very discourses that produced this "science" that these "Western 'experts'" think is so "objective" (these scare quotes are Leong's). One might, in other words, simply admit to one's position within history, within "institutional" facts, rather than assuming, as did Descartes, that one is simply a knowing mind capable of producing "objective analyses." This inability to connect themselves to this long, fraught tradition of knowledge-gathering about the Other is why Leong notes that it is "impossible for" such "'experts' to escape from making unconscious projections in their "objective" analyses." Leong sees those "unconscious projections" in the "few well turned phrases" that such scholars use to describe "Chinese culture" (as if one could adequately define this).

Leong sees that China and its cultures are "really an amalgamation and distillation of who know how many tribal mores—some of which still operate in isolation." Leong argues that his contemporaries and colleagues need not be so "foolhardy": "if only they'd admit they're still their fathers' sons they'd be a lot better off," he writes, showing how it is through understanding

[184] Leong to Snyder. 11 September 1962. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 50.

one's relationship to *institutional facts* like Veblen wrote about (habits of mind, taste, etc.) that one might come closer to "do[ing] it full justice."[185] The problem with his colleagues ("glib sensationalists") is, first, they conceive of themselves as objective minds making objective analyses; and second, in reaching after a totality like "Traditional Chinese culture," they end up "typ[ing] the national culture within the stricture of a few academic cliches."[186] His frustration here is that these "experts" do not take into account that their own approaches to the study of culture are *themselves* circumscribed by culture, habits of mind, and traditions of thought that are anything *but* "scientific."

In turn, the two friends Snyder and Leong brainstorm about how to describe *their* unique mode of study. Snyder suggests an idea of the "Oriental Humanities," but Leong is skeptical:

> As for your designation 'Oriental Humanities,' yikes! I was the first to use that ugly last word here and the heads haven't forgiven me yet for daring to suggest even by implication that teachers should teach thoroughly. Tsk, tsk, are you aware that 'this' dept is determined to make specialists of us all? No one goes to the wheelhouse, much less the crow's nest on this 'ship' – look through only one porthole at a time, s-so. Ugh. Nope, there ain't no projects going on here anywhere resembling the humanities by the greatest stretch of your imagination. It doesn't take a Nero to fiddle at the wrong time. Our halls of ivy make that a continuing project with every type of inappropriate inquiry possible to dream up.[187]

[185] Leong to Snyder. 11 September 1962. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 50.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Leong to Snyder. 11 November 1960. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 45.

Many of Leong's letters diagnose (and rant about) this problem. Quite simply, he states that the experts in the Asian Studies departments of the period are short-sighted in their approach to culture, looking at Others' cultures "through only one porthole at a time" and thus behaving like a theorist who thinks first, then fashions scholarship—produces knowledge about "the East"—based on narrow preconceptions. Such "specialists," actual Orientalists, attempt to put cultures and languages into a corner ("look[ing] through only one porthole at a time"), unable to make their way to "the crow's nest" and see with a wider perspective. We cannot perhaps expect the department to behave any differently in this historical context, but one would think that Leong's point of view as a Chinese American man of Cantonese heritage might be more respected in such a department. Instead, it appears that his expertise and points of view were completely disregarded in the department's emphasis on "the East"; indeed, the Asian Americanness of Leong might have been part of the "problem" ("the heads haven't forgiven me yet").

Leong's diagnosis of this short-sighted approach has to do with more than his own personhood within the department; it encompasses the specifics of translation and the specificities of Chinese dialects over time and across geographical regions. These specificities are not brought into "the graduate seminars on literature" in the "Far East department at Wash [University of Washington]," which is "still in the same old rut" four years after the above letter about "Oriental Humanities" was penned.[188] They are in this "rut" because of a confusion about what texts to assign and the dialects in which students are asked to write: "one prof is now asking for modern Chinese written papers from his students in the graduate seminars on literature. A step in the right direction."[189] It appears some professors asked students to write in ancient

[188] Leong to Snyder. 16 November 1959. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 36.
[189] Ibid.

Chinese script, and Leong thought this practice the "wrong" direction. Meanwhile, Leong approves that "one young prof is engaged in trsltg [translating] some of the basic modern writgs [writings]" but still, "the major preoccupation is still with studies and papers that serve little purpose as far as I can see. It is so pointless to wax polemical over Chinese philosophy when the readers—so very few of them—ever completely read one Chinese philosopher."[190] Leong is frustrated that contemporary students were not seriously engaging in full with Chinese philosophy—not even reading the full works of "one Chinese philosopher." Then, if that wasn't enough of a problem, students are then asked to "wax polemical over Chinese philosophy" in term papers that are meant to demonstrate the students' familiarity and expertise in Chinese philosophy. "I am beginning to suspect the motives behind such dubious industry," Leong rightly registers.[191]

This suspicion of motives is a major part of his complaint: beyond inaccurate or poor translations of southern Chinese dialects, Leong sees that the next generation of Far East scholars may not have a nuanced appreciation of Chinese language and culture (his adviser Hellmut Wilhelm appears to have considered the *I Ching* as representative of "the essence" of Chinese thought. Ideas of cultural "essences" can of course obstruct a complex understanding of cultures) (Knechtges). One can imagine Leong is also attuned to where these "specialists" on Chinese culture will eventually work, how their "expertise" will later be applied for specific, perhaps geopolitical or national, uses (in one letter, he notes that it "looks like there's gold in studying now. One student is getting $5800 from the Nat'l Def. Fund. No labor at all").[192]

[190] Leong to Snyder. 16 November 1959. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 36.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Leong to Snyder. 9 June 1973. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 42.

A further problem has to do with the specificities of forms and usages of Chinese languages and dialects. In an April 1960 letter, Leong recommends that Snyder do "research into Tang colloquial" writing, which will be "valuable not only for your field, but in literature also" (it is unclear to me whether Snyder followed this advice, though scholars working in Chinese-English translation might be able to shed light on this question).[193] Leong is befuddled at why his colleagues and contemporary scholars ("gallivanting savants") do not consider southern Chinese dialects:

> with all due respects to the gallivanting savants, I've often wondered why they never bothered to study some of the interior dialects of Guangdong/Canton. The way they concentrate on metropolitan forms, and then trying to intuit older usages from them, seems too much on the order of getting into Chaucer through studying modern English of the large cities.[194]

Scholars seem to have concentrated largely on dialects of Chinese language that were grounded in cities. Such dialects tend to have a longer and larger written record, and that may be a reason why midcentury scholars of East Asia focused so heavily on these. But Leong's point is incredibly resonant: how and why would one use the contemporary spoken and written English(es) of 1960s Seattle, for example, in one's attempt to "get into Chaucer"? The inaccuracies of translation, not to mention the inaccuracies in one's appreciation of Chaucer's world, would abound. The same applies to scholars' lack of appreciation for "the interior dialects of Guangdong/Canton." Leong explains the nuances further:

[193] Leong to Snyder. 9 April 1960. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 40.
[194] Ibid.

> Fact is the 官话 with its phonetic variation cannot make the old talk intelligible. Many common usages in Mandarin even violates the root meanings of words. Dialects which preserve the final stops, however, still retain much of the old expressions in daily speech. Village Cantonese uses expressions of Han times, and who knows—maybe even Shang and older? E.g. 邑 is still used in ref. to one's native place. 父兄, 手足, etc are everyday terms. These are classical binomes only vaguely apprehended by what we Cantonese call 外汉, the outlanders. Ciao.
>
> -Chas. 9 April 1960[195]

In other words, the dialects he is pointing to have a closer relationship to classical Chinese than the standardized Mandarin 官话 dialect of today, and this is relevant to his department because his colleagues are studying and translating classical Chinese texts. He points to the ongoing use of an older term for town or village 邑 to demonstrate this. One might also see this closeness to classical Chinese in Sichuanese, another southern Chinese dialect. These dialects sound old-fashioned to contemporary ears and include figurative, lyrical phrases that Leong points to (father and elder brothers 父兄; siblings 手足) that are passed down over time. The "outlanders" 外汉 have difficulty apprehending these classical binomes, which for Leong are a conduit as far back as the Shang dynasty (1600-1046 B.C.E.). This longevity may be a bit exaggerated, but he wants to communicate the oldness and ancient cultural resonances embedded within southern dialects *not* spoken in city centers, seen in his emphasis on that word village/town 邑. In this

[195] Leong to Snyder. 9 April 1960. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 40.

excerpt, Leong wants to suggest that the dialects so devalued and underacknowledged by his contemporaries are in a sense closer to the ancients than the Han, who have so influenced contemporary Chinese language and script. (Han words are also used in ancient texts, but are simply used differently).

Leong clarifies in his next letter of July 1960 that he is not "campaigning to abolish Mandarin. Not at all"; instead, his point here is that "with the living speech equivalents *still around in the numerous dialects*, it did struck [sic] me as strange that so called scholars continue to evaluate the classical idioms in the framework of modern Mandarin" (my emphasis).[196] Leong is not simply hearkening back to a "dead" dialect, but is pointing to the fact that these southern dialects are "still around," are part of the embodied experience of many Chinese and Chinese American people, his own parents and himself probably included. "Man!" he writes,

> The wealth of classical phraseology and even archaic ones still current in backwoods Cantonese (鄉下话) would knock over a multitude of the smug if they'd only bother to look in that direction. And how about the other dialects. In fact, if one only faced the issue squarely, the so called 'literary' style of very old times will be seen as polished ordinary phrasing. That is, if one knows any of the older dialects.[197]

Armed with an appreciation of the still-living dialects, one could, he suggests, approach the "so called 'literary' style of very old times" and find it familiar, "as polished ordinary phrasing," rather than ancient and stylized. One can imagine this would enable more resonant translations, too. His complaint, in other words, is that scholars are evaluating culturally specific idioms in the

[196] Leong to Snyder. 8 July 1960. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 41.
[197] Ibid. 鄉下话 (xiangxiahua) means country or rural speech/dialect.

framework of modern Mandarin, even though those idioms were created using a dialect that modern Mandarin can hardly access. Mandarin, the formalized, standardized language of bureaucrats (of the Mandarin class of old, the Guanhua 官话), is being mapped onto older dialects. It is a backward way to approach translation because many of those languages and dialects have existed almost totally apart from the formalized writing systems: many of the communities in which these dialects were spoken may have been largely illiterate; therefore, Mandarin may not connect or interact with those spoken languages.

Put simply, Leong is saying: instead of coming from the top down (using the language of the Mandarin class) and from the present moment backward in time, a better way to approach translation and cultural specificity is to work from within the language community and bring those dialects *up* and into the university's translation practices. He recommends this "better way" of approaching translation to Snyder, writing that "whether it is patent or not – t'ang [sic] colloquial vestiges exist in the speech today"; and given that both Leong and Snyder are translating Tang-era poetry, the "way into" Han Shan's poems would seem to be through contemporary spoken southern Chinese dialects.[198] Whether or not Snyder paid heed to Leong's recommendations to learn southern Chinese dialects and find a Cantonese tutor while in Japan, these letters' observations about contemporary Chinese-English translation practices certainly impacted Snyder's philosophy of translation, which "emphatically claims that authentic transmission is possible through poetry" (He 46). Snyder appears not to have used modern Mandarin in his translations; instead, he aimed to produce "the same poem in a different language, allowing for the peculiar distortions of my own vision—but keeping it straight as

[198] Leong to Snyder. 5 December 1955. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 25.

possible" (Snyder *The Real Work* 178). I see this practice—of *literary* rather than literal translation—as something derived from Leong's advice and expertise.

Leong provided examples of his own translation philosophy many times. In addition to sending Snyder his term papers, Leong provides Snyder with in-depth detail of how he dug himself out of a translation problem in 1955. Turning to southern Chinese dialects helped with gridlock once when he was criticized by his advisor Dr. Wilhelm for "somewhat dictionary" translations—this is a criticism that his translations are too clunky, too "by-the-book."[199] Leong agreed and saw the problem; "each reading made it more evident to me." But he defends himself a bit: "I did translate like that in order not to be accused of padding. It is a problem—to be literal to non-sensicalness, or really get the thought across?" "Padding" here appears to refer to incorporating meaning or inflection that may not be present in the text one is translating. But it was when Leong attended to the sounds of a Cantonese dialect that he unlocked this problem of his translation and was enabled to make "radical alterations of the original":

> Dr. Wilhelm is familiar with Mandarin, and had his ideas about certain lines. The others on the staff have the same limitations—most are Northerners, so not much help there. I really had to struggle and plow over this one. Had to change gear in my mind. When I read it aloud in 國話, made little sense. Then I turned to Cantonese, especially 四邑 dialect. It wasn't until I attended to sound rather than words that a glimmer of light came. After that, it was just a matter of scanning more deliberately.[200]

[199] Leong to Snyder. 5 December 1955. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 25.
[200] Leong to Snyder. 5 December 1955. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 25. Guohua 國話 is a southern way of referring to the national language, which Northerners tend to call common or ordinary speech (Putonghua 普通话).

"Attending to sound rather than words" is a way of accessing resonances that had been inaccessible when he worked solely with Guohua 國話, the national language (his reference to Northerners is another nod to this, as Northern Chinese dialects tend to be closer to the standard Mandarin of contemporary China). The Siyi or Sze Yap dialect 四邑 preserves some of the orality of older forms of Chinese: there are commonalities to those older forms that one can find in Siyi words, even though the characters may not be the same. In other words, one can scan the same Chinese characters with two different spoken dialects. It was when Leong read the lines aloud in Siyi that he was "startled more than once by the very straightforward matter of fact expressions that [Han Shan] used."[201] This only happens "when I read 'unawares,' i.e. when I forget the academician's approach so long pounded into me by the 'high priests' of the ivory tower."[202] Presumably, Leong's education and the requirements of his graduate work have meant that he himself has become distanced from the "phraseology still in the living Cantonese."[203] "Attending to sound rather than words" might also be described as a *poetic* mode of translation, and certainly one that Snyder might have valued (Snyder, after all, saved this letter for a reason).

Snyder's translation philosophy certainly shares more with Leong's careful attentiveness to sound than with Dr. Wilhelm's "ideas about certain lines." The above letter was written in 1955, a time when Snyder's interest in Cold Mountain was growing. Snyder would publish his first few translations in 1958 (He 45). By 1960, Snyder's translation style and philosophy have grown such that Leong finds them remarkable. He praises Snyder's translations even as he is skeptical that:

[201] Leong to Snyder. 11 November 1960. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 45.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Ibid.

> I frankly don't think any Northerner will ever get any feeling of immediacy out of our boy [Han Shan]. But they'll try and try though Mandarin is far removed from Tang Chinese. Your line 'The sun is but a morning star' packs a lot of wallop. Gad and Gadzooks – what a world of implications, connotations and what have you in simple English words! Fact is, most of us take the native language too much for granted – and too lightly. Know it well and use it right – then what need is there to resort to tricks or devices. The individual uniqueness will come of itself.[204]

Leong's admiration of Snyder comes through as praise not just for Snyder's "Oriental sense" ("it is undeniable that you are more Oriental in many ways than a lot of Orientals"[205]), which is to say, Snyder's appreciation for East Asian culture, but also praises Snyder for his talent in translation, which he directly contrasts with those who use primarily Mandarin in their translation work. In Snyder's work, Leong finds solace from the short-sightedness of Far East Studies departments. "Know it well and use it right" does not just refer to an informed use of southern dialects like Siyi in one's translations, but also means that one's understanding of Chinese culture will be multiple, complex, perhaps contradictory, and multilayered; then, "the individual uniqueness" of a line of poetry "will come of itself."[206]

Though Snyder's translations have been criticized for reflecting his own sensibilities, Leong *celebrates* Snyder's work because of how different his translations are from the remarkable short-sightedness of his university colleagues, who, in his estimation, are butchering

[204] Leong to Snyder. 11 November 1960. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 45.
[205] He continues, "often have I marvelled [sic] at the ease with which you seemed to have intuited some subtle bit of eastern imagery." Leong to Snyder. 21 January 1960. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 38.
[206] Leong to Snyder. 11 November 1960. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 45.

translations by using modern Chinese to translate ancient texts.[207] In turn, he sees a looser, "crow's-nest" approach to language and culture in Snyder and is delighted by it. We might call this approach to culture the Maker ethos, and Leong's celebration of it is a strong reminder of how revolutionary Snyder's work would have been at the time, even if, in hindsight, "Snyder's translation of Han Shan constitutes a classic example of how a 'foreign text is not so much communicated as inscribed with domestic interests'" (Venuti 468, He 46).

"Maybe it is only in this slow and trying manner that anything that is good earns the right to survive"[208]: Leong in the "Remnants" of Chinatown

Leong himself, unable to take the crow's nest approach to Chinese language and culture—even though *he* is the graduate student here, working with what are arguably "his own" cultural materials—decides to "forget the academician's approach so long pounded into [him]" and instead seeks out the dialects still living in Chinese and Chinese American communities in Portland's Chinatown. He refuses to force the meaning of old texts into a "porthole" by imposing contemporary Mandarin onto them, and instead seeks out relationships with people in the language communities where these southern dialects are still in use.

Here, we might see in Leong's frustrations a critique of positivist thought. In a number of letters, Leong directly contrasts the "objective experts," "scientific" sinologues, the "academic fatheads," "muscle flexers" and "glib sensationalists" with the "oldsters" he so respects and enjoys in Chinese communities. To provide one example from July 1963:

[207] For more on Snyder's "selective" process of translation, see Yuemin He's chapter (Snyder's selection portrays "a Han Shan that is the quintessence of Chinese Zen Buddhism," she writes) (He 45).
[208] Leong to Snyder. 21 January 1960. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 38.

> It is unfortunate, indeed, that the halls of blah here are so filled with mere muscle flexers. I was at once shocked and yet agreeably surprised on the occasion of my SF visit to find so many of the Chinese colony far superior in the classical learning than many I'd run across in my campus rambles. The unadorned truth is (and most unpalatable to the academic fatheads) that no serious Chinese study of lasting worth and/or consequence could be carried through with just a dictionary.[209]

Those in his "campus rambles" are inferior to "so many of the Chinese colony," who are "far superior in the classical learning" than the "halls of blah" at UW. It is interesting that he himself is "shocked" and "agreeably surprised" to find that Asians in America are "far superior." It is as if he needed reminding that "serious Chinese study of lasting worth" might be found in the language communities of Chinatowns, rather than in the use of "just a dictionary," no matter how esteemed the philologists with whom he is working ("things aren't helped any," he adds, "by the format of present dictionaries. They often contain little or no ancient idioms at all").[210]

This is not to say that all "serious Chinese study of lasting worth" should *only* be carried out by persons in what he calls "the Chinese colony." Lest we read within Leong's words an argument that people of Chinese descent are the *only* rightful or accurate interpreters of Chinese language and culture, it is important to note that Leong sees a difference between what the "academic fatheads" are doing and what other contemporaries are doing:

> village Cantonese is especially rich in many of the expressions—even now, many speakers are unaware of their habitual usage of classical terms in idiomatic speech. I have called the attention of the SF scholars to a few instances, and all were excited to some extent.

[209] Leong to Snyder. 26 July 1963. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 53.
[210] Ibid.

> Strangely enough, when I mentioned the obvious correspondence to everyday Cantonese to the profs, I got a chilling reception. As I look back now, I can recall that subsequent mentions of other correspondences seemed to bring a look of pain from my listeners. So that's the lay of the land at this late date.[211]

These "SF scholars" included Whalen, a friend from Hong Kong, members of the "Leong clan," and a Mr. Wong (among many unnamed others).[212] This variety of "scholars" suggests that other contemporaries (whether formal scholars or interested "lay" scholars) are approaching the study of Chinese culture in a more complex way.

Still, frustrated with colleagues in the UW department, Leong's "only recourse in the Portland desert is the occasional trip to the remnant of Chinatown calling on one of the few remaining old scholars of the classics."[213] "Always recharged" when discussing much-loved Chinese texts with a friend who, like Leong, takes good care with such texts and is able to view them from the "crow's nest" rather than "through only one porthole," it is, Leong writes, "maybe…only in this slow and trying manner that anything that is good earns the right to survive."[214] Yet the "anything that is good"—which is to say, an appreciation for Han Shan (an appreciation for classical Chinese texts based in the living dialects that are far closer to the original meaning than contemporary Mandarin)—receives a major boost after Snyder's poetic translations are published to wide acclaim. Leong is a major resource for Snyder's work at a time when the Far East and Oriental Studies departments were stuck in that "porthole"; however,

[211] Leong to Snyder. 26 July 1963. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 53.
[212] Leong to Snyder. 23 July 1962. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 49.

[213] Leong to Snyder. 21 January 1960. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 38.
[214] Ibid.

Leong's role in helping Snyder translate is not part of that success; nor are the friendship and expertise of the "oldsters" in Portland's Chinatown.

Leong's mode of study is "slow and trying" because it takes into account differences in dialect. It has to be "slow and trying" because his department disallows Leong from working with Chinese cultural materials in the ways he sees fit while also telling Leong that his frustrations are "overreactions." Once he retires from academia, it *remains* "slow" (if not "trying") because in learning from friends of a wide variety of ages, backgrounds, and in a number of different areas (San Francisco, Portland, Seattle), it simply takes time to develop friendships; to travel; and to eat together. About a year after leaving academia, he writes, "successfully weathered the first full yr of being 'at liberty' without going to pieces"—but things are far better than he suggests:

> Being free gave me chances I rarely had before to look up a number of Chinatown oldsters. Ah-h, the long sessions we had discussing everything from ancient China to the latest international ploy. I recall an instance when I dropped in at noon on a 75 yr old friend. His 77 yr old cousin from Yakima was with him. The talk started, and before I'd realized it, 5:30 was upon us. The 5.5 hrs flew like minutes. Remarkable thing was how stimulated we all became. This 'youngster' went away 'charged' for days afterwards.[215]

Leong also reports on "the Seattle group," which encompasses both an "academic group" in Seattle as well as "friends in Chinatown." These are groups "composed of younger friends. All are my juniors by many yrs":

[215] There is not perhaps room here to discuss this in full, but in this excerpt, he rightly implies that contemporary "international ploy[s]" of nation-states have some bearing on how those cultures are studied, even if one is studying "Traditional Chinese culture" or "ancient China." Leong to Snyder. 3 January 1963. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 52.

> They give me a different type of inspiration. But I think the most important feature of the Seattle contacts lies in the age range of the group, 25 to 42 or so. This among the academic group. Then, there are the friends in Chinatown and off campus. Decidedly a wider range than what I thought would've been easy to find right in Portland.[216]

Leong seems to have found a way to continue his studies even if he did not produce scholarly writing or translations; as he notes, "looking back I'd say quite a few friends had a part in the good result. The trips to North and South also helped. They brought the heights to balance the intervening low-key periods"—and I believe this last sentence to refer to the belligerent depression we have seen in his writing.[217] For these reasons, and because of the manner in which the Far East Department treated him, Leong's approach to study is "slow and trying" for many years.

On the other hand, Snyder's approach does not need to be "slow and trying" because he approaches cultural materials with an arguably much more aggressive approach than that of even the Orientalists. As a Maker, Snyder does not need to look through "only one portal at a time," but can see from the "crow's nest" (while also, it seems, not seeing that his position in the "nest" *is* a position). He can gather the materials of Han Shan, Daoism, Chinese mountains and rivers painting, and Zen Buddhism into his work however he sees fit—hence Leong's insightful note, "maybe that's why you want to be on your own," detached from the institution of the university.[218] This Makerly approach is not only why Leong loves him and eagerly looks forward

[216] Leong to Snyder. 3 January 1963. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 52.
[217] Leong to Snyder. 3 January 1963. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 52.
[218] Leong to Snyder. 19 February 1957. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 27.

to receiving Snyder's letters, but also partly accounts for why Snyder is so remarkably successful as a translator-poet, even if he is a part of this period's unequal distribution of art.

Of course, another reason for Snyder's success might be found in the argument that he "cherry-picked" (Najarian 317) poems that reflected his own cosmo-political project, thereby (mis)representing a Han Shan that is more palatable to American readers:

> Choosing literary over literal translation while "keeping it straight as possible," the spirit of Han Shan's poems, as understood by Snyder, also allowed for "peculiar distortions" and shows affinity with Snyder's "own vision." Han Shan's poems are presented as spiritual medicine to cure America of its materialistic ills. (He 46)

As Yuemin He shows, and as we have seen in Snyder's own words in *The Real Work* (1980), "Snyder's philosophy of translation emphatically claims that authentic transmission is possible through poetry" (He 46). Given Leong's own, often-thwarted attempts at translation, is it possible that the above philosophy of translation owes *much* to Leong? "When importing the life of an important figure from one culture and language to another," He writes, "we must try to assemble the details as best we can, given the historical ambiguities inherent" (He 47). Much of this "ambiguous" information about Han Shan came from Leong, as in one letter that responds directly to a question Snyder had asked about Han Shan's Buddhism or Buddhist practice. Leong tells Snyder that, even though many have focused on "the religious aspect," that Han Shan's interests were wide and varied—Han Shan is difficult to characterize. "Regarding Han Shan," he writes in answer to Snyder's query, "I haven't done much more on him, tho I catch myself frequently bringing him into a conversation."[219] Leong's interest in him, as he explains, "has

[219] Leong to Snyder. 6 October 1958. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 31.

been more on his thoughts and attitude rather than in the various academic questions involved in a study of him"; then, Leong provides a brief literature review:

> As you well know, Dr. Hu Shih's research on him is of that type [on his thoughts and attitude]. Other Chinese critics I've read treated the subject in somewhat similar fashion. In the main, there was a lot of attention calling to the colloquial style and little notice of the content…In Margoulie's piece on Han Shan, an interest in the man is quite evident. Yet, the main preoccupation seems to be on the religious aspect. Certainly a careful reading should show that Han Shan directed chaff in every direction. Boors & poseurs, the vain, the pretentious, the incompetents—they were all among his targets. As a critic, he was truly catholic in that denominational tags spared none on whom his barb was directed. My Chinese advisor and I had many discussions on the type of man Han Shan might have been. Privately, I'd venture the thought that he wouldn't fit any strict category. I daresay, only closer and more careful reading of his poems, and some digging into the history of the period would aid in getting additional light.[220]

Similarly, Yuemin He provides a catalogue of the interests, themes, and content of Han Shan poems that were *not* translated by Snyder, showing that "a consideration of the *non-Snyder* Han Shan [visible in the poems untranslated by Snyder] foregrounds the (pro-Buddhist) ideology undergirding Snyder's selection process" (He 49, my emphasis). This "non-Snyder Han Shan" exhibits "various poetic interests beyond the Buddhist concerns that Snyder's selection tends to offer its audience"—i.e., an interest in secular subjects; anger toward social inequality; advocacy for civic-minded education of children and the value of literacy; an interest in people, events, and

[220] Leong to Snyder. 6 October 1958. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 31.

anecdotes from the Confucian classics and the dynastic histories; a desire to embark on the usual career as a scholar-official; and "evocations of the evanescence of youth and beauty," which were "highly esteemed" in the period and do not contain anything "Buddhist" (He 48-50). Again, as He notes, "while these concerns are not antithetical to kinds of postwar Zen Buddhism with which Snyder strongly affiliated himself," this "non-Snyder Han Shan" is the Han Shan that Leong presents to Snyder; this broader, more wide-ranging Han Shan is the poet Leong recommends that Snyder take into account as he translates.

In his study of how the "polyvalent, philosophical term" emptiness transforms/is figuratively translated within twentieth-century American poetry and poetics, Jonathan Stalling urges that "it is important to track the transformations of meanings across linguistic (and cultural) systems but foolhardy to search for exact equivalents" (*Poetics* 197). This is the work that Leong recommended, and which Snyder appears to have succeeded in doing: in not searching for exact equivalences in meaning, he was enabled to "glimpse one of the more progressive elements of heterocultural poetry and poetics: it seeks to find *new* forms of perception, not equivalent ones" (Stalling *Poetics* 197, my emphasis). Snyder certainly found "new forms of perception" in Han Shan; I suppose the question is whether those "new forms" have made an error similar to the errors in translation that Leong is identifying in the Far East department.

Though Snyder is the one with the poetic sensibility, Leong is the expert on southern Chinese dialects and enables Snyder to find these "new forms of perception." Even if Snyder has ignored Leong's points about Han Shan's broad interests, and even if he does not appear to have taken seriously Leong's advice to learn southern Chinese dialects, Leong provides invaluable insight into Chinese culture; classical literature; and, in summarizing the problems of his

department, also cautions Snyder against translating "exact equivalents." However, there is something uncomfortable about the collegial relationship here.

Leong announces he will write his thesis on Han Shan in 1957, explaining that he will translate some 100 of Han Shan's poems with no emphasis on "the Zen aspect."[221] Leong notes that this leaves about 200 poems to work on privately. Presumably, it is from these 200 that Snyder translates his 24 poems? This suggests Snyder would have understood that a strong translation could omit Zen and still be accurate and resonant. And then there is the timeline. In a 1957 letter, having announced his Master's thesis topic in an earlier letter, Leong expands on the details of his project:

> My plan is now to do 99 of the poems only (if that many at all). The reason is that the school reserves all rights on thesis material. So I will only extract poems having some bears on points of the thesis. Thus, there'll remain over 200 items *to work on privately*. I am very happy that you've offered your helping hand. I am not a poet—enough said, no? So you see how presumptuous this tenderfoot has been in committing himself to writing on Han Shan – I do need guardian angels by the division!... your interest has enabled me to contemplate the task before me with greater zest. Locally, the whole air is deadening. You can see how you've injected a feeling of renewal in me. And, when you bring in persons of known accomplishment with a like interest – what more can be added to the rejuvenation? You can be sure that I will call on you (and pester you) for necessary help, and advice.[222]

[221] Leong to Snyder. 19 February 1957. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 27.
[222] Leong to Snyder. 12 March 1957. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 28.

The collaborative energy is palpable here; Leong is delighted to work together in translation. Despite the strictures of the university, which "reserves all rights on thesis material," Leong plans to keep "over 200 items to work on privately," a line that suggests he may translate in his free time. Snyder has offered to help with the poetry side of things ("I am not a poet—enough said, no?"). Leong closes the letter with:

> As to your comment on future collaboration on Han Shan's poems, I think it a splendid idea (I mentioned this previously). Only one thing disturbs me – I repeat a phrase, I am no poet. I do agree with your idea of a fairly complete representation. Too many excerpt jobs on every author are dragging the market. We keep the project in mind, yes?[223]

But then, as He explains, "Snyder translated twenty-four of Han Shan's three-hundred-odd classic Chinese poems, publishing them first in *Evergreen Review* in 1958 (a year after the above letter) and then including them with a 1965 reprinting of his 1959 collection *Riprap*" (He 45). Did Leong send any of the extra 200 poems out for publication under his own name as translator? If he did, he does not mention this. And despite Leong's broad understanding of Han Shan, the poems that Snyder "cherry-picked" (Najarian 317) "all emphasize the spiritual and the philosophical, characterizing nature as sentient and interconnected with men, and life as impermanent" (He 45). "In short," He writes, "Snyder's selection portrays a Han Shan that is the quintessence of Chinese Zen Buddhism" (He 45).

These letters and this publication history raise a rather befuddling set of ethical questions, but it is worth noting that Leong himself does not seem to have been offended by any of it. His ire was reserved for those in his department—the figures he calls "scientific sinologists"[224]—and

[223] Leong to Snyder. 12 March 1957. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 28.
[224] Leong to Snyder. 3 May 1955. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 23.

his praise was reserved for Snyder, even though both Snyder's translations and translation philosophy seem to owe quite a lot to Leong's influence. Their translation philosophies appear to have more in common with each other than with the Far East department's philosophy of translation, certainly. Even if we cannot quite discern the ethics of use and translation here, we can ask: what does it mean that Syder's translations of Han Shan boosted his celebrity (and that of Han Shan); while Leong's work—indeed, Leong himself—is absent? What does it mean that Leong produced no artifact but, in addition to being a great influence on Snyder's translations, was *also* a great influence on the Beats more generally?

"Just what was it in me that moved you to style yourself my disciple?": Leong's Influence on Whalen, Snyder, and Ginsberg[225]

Beyond Leong's shared interest in and collegial support for Snyder's work on Han Shan, Leong was an elder, someone who assisted Snyder in "breaking through modernism," a phrase Snyder wrote to Leong about in a clear request for advice (more below). Why is it that these Euro American authors credit the Modernists, Kenneth Rexroth, and *even* Han Shan, but do not credit an "elder" like Leong except in private correspondence? Leong appears to have chalked up his lost academic career as a problem of the Far East department, not a problem with Snyder (even if he acknowledges, as early as 1955, that if Snyder *had* credited his work as an influence, it would have aided Leong):

> Yours of the 21st here in time to keep me from having kittens. Your delight is my delight. By all means, make a copy. As for suing you for royalty in the future—it hadn't occurred to this slow wit. However, since you so generously revealed this possibility (and it would be a legitimate one), who am I, an impecunious student, to overlook any legal addition to

[225] Leong to Snyder. 22 October 1965. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 54.

> a dribble income. Especially so, when I can foresee your sooner coming into fame and fortune!"[226]

Why did Snyder neglect to help his friend out? Regardless of the answers to that question, this neglect was not what Leong remained saddest about. It was this identity—as a "grandpappy" of the Beats—that Leong seems saddest about. In this section, I will focus on this "elder" status Leong held as I transition toward thinking about the "disembodied" avant-garde.

Snyder very clearly asked Leong how to "break through modernism"—a concern visible in many Beat interviews, autobiographical texts, and even in Beat poetics:

> As to 'breaking through modernism,' etc: to use the best of the past and the new is but a natural extension of the 温故而知新 idea. I am sure you're quite aware of this eclectic approach as being a prominent characteristic of the genuine Chinese scholar. Of course, living out this string of words is not the same as writg or speakg it.[227]

It is rare to find an Asian American *person,* not a text or a translation of Zen Buddhist thought, who is directly aiding these young poets to earn themselves a spot in the avant-garde by innovating poetry. Here, a Chinese American man shows Snyder how that "breaking through modernism" might be achieved based on this "prominent characteristic of the genuine Chinese scholar." "To review the old and know the new" or "to recall the past to understand the future" 温故而知新 is an idiom used in Confucius' *Analects.* Was this advice influential in Snyder's poetic fusing of his interests in Zen Buddhist "dharma bums" and "the old" wisdoms of Cold

[226] Leong to Snyder. 28 December 1955. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 26.
[227] Leong to Snyder. 1 June 1967. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 59.

Mountain poetry? I find this a strong parallel to Whalen's explanation that Zen Buddhism was the catalyst for writing his first "good" poem that owed nothing to the Modernists.

Snyder told Leong that he had been a great influence on himself and other Beats. Leong registers this in a letter, in which he explains that "one note" of Snyder's previous letter "heartens and simultaneously frightens me":

> your closing remark. I had no idea that I influenced anyone; much less that you or Phil or Harry, (men of individuality, all) gave special heed at all to me outside of a considerate friendliness which I've treasured to this time. Whatever the truth of the matter is, tho I feel more humble than ever, one thing stands out clearly. All of you have thus far ably proved the truth of the Chinese saying: 青出于蓝而胜于蓝. And who won't join Confucius: 後生可畏. I'll close, then, on those thoughts. For my part, it is the young trio that keeps life interesting for me. Good fortune![228]

The literal meaning of the Chinese saying he references is "the color blue is made out of indigo but is more vivid than indigo"; figuratively, its meaning might be read as: "the student surpasses the master" 青出于蓝而胜于蓝. Joining this with Confucius' saying, "the younger generations will surpass us with time" or "the younger generations are formidable" 後生可畏, suggests a humble recognition that the work of these friends/mentees have surpassed his own work. Phil, Harry, and Gary had clearly all remarked on Leong's great influence upon them—that they "gave special heed" to Leong, seeing him as an elder or teacher. And Leong responds with a

[228] Leong to Snyder. 21 April 1957. The Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 29.

mentorly, even fatherly, blessing to continue their great work. Leong therefore is an elder to these youngsters and looks to "the young trio" to "keep life interesting."

As Leong ages, he reminds Snyder and others of his value to them: "It was a source of some disappointment that there was so little chance to engage you in longer talks on your last visit," he says. "I'd meant to ask: Just what was it in me that moved you to style yourself my disciple?"[229] Again, this line seems written in response to a specific line penned by Snyder. Leong scolds Snyder a bit here with this note of "disappointment" combined with the question "[what] moved you to style yourself my disciple?" Since they were unable to "engage in longer talks," Leong requests a different kind of support, in a sense asking for Snyder to explain in detail what Leong's value is to him; he wants an explanation of why he is calling himself Leong's "disciple." In the same letter, Leong asks Snyder to pass this along to Allen Ginsberg:

> Please remind Poet Ginsberg I'm serious about giving him information on various aspects of Chinese culture. But, only if he asks for it. I shan't be pushy on the subject.[230]

This is as close as Leong gets to criticizing the Euro Americans' Makerly treatment of East Asian cultural materials, and though Leong is not as close to Ginsberg as is Snyder, Leong and Ginsberg chat and socialize together at the same parties and move in similar poetry circles.[231] We might also hear a bit of wry criticism in that he calls him "Poet Ginsberg," capitalizing "Poet" so as to emphasize Ginsberg's celebrity status. (Indeed, by 1967, Ginsberg was hobnobbing with

[229] Leong to Snyder. 22 October 1965. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 54.
[230] Ibid.
[231] After one big party that lasted into the wee hours of the following morning, Ginsberg and Leong talked "Mao" in a bedroom for the better part of an hour. Later, Ginsberg apparently shook Leong's hand and kissed his forehead. Leong thought about the interaction for days.

Paul McCartney and Mick Jagger, his celebrity status far and above Snyder's at the time) (Morgan 93).

In response to the famed *Oracle* No. 7, which transcribed the "Houseboat Summit" discussed in chapter three, Leong places himself within the group of men from which he was physically absent. He writes:

> I was greatly tickled by your remark in the course of the discussion on dropping out: One could get a job in the P.O.! Hah. Really fits me, But as I read on, I've come to some conclusion about my status. If the range of definitions are considered I'd dropped out right smack in the midst of the Depression, circa 1932! Which should make me the grandpappy. Hey, hey.[232]

Readers may recall that "dropping out" is a major part of the theorization of the "cosmo-politics" of counterculture in this Summit. Over the course of their conversation, Snyder is held up as the ultimate dropout, but here Leong reminds him that he had already dropped out by 1932—*and* that in leaving academia for a career in the Post Office, he had essentially dropped out once more. "I've come to some conclusion about my status" is a strong reminder to Gary that his "range of definitions" about counterculture *must* include Leong, too, making him "the grandpappy" to these famous figures (again, it was Watts, Snyder, Ginsberg, Timothy Leary, and Allen Cohen who were present at the Summit). In the same letter, he explains to Snyder that their seeming originality in the summit may not be terribly original:

> your comments on the refreshening of "tribal wisdom" (ah, so much like the Chinese-- 修厥德) --wonderful! It might interest you to know that I've been bleating and blatting

[232] Leong to Snyder. 21 May 1967. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 58.

> somewhat along the lines of your panel discussion within the Chinese community since the late '30s. Locally, ever since then, I've been considered a rather quaint anachronism….[233]

Though Leong states he was "greatly tickled" by Snyder's remarks in the Summit and tells him how "wonderful" his comments were, this letter shows a Leong who *is* a part of the "dropout" ethos and community; it is just that, since he was "bleating and blatting somewhat along the lines of [the] panel discussion" in the Chinese community, he is put in this position of having to *remind* his very close friend that their values are the same. Indeed, many of their life choices ("dropping out") are the same. He demonstrates this further by emphasizing that Snyder's ideas are "so much like the Chinese" idea of cultivating, embellishing, or building one's own virtue: 修厥德. These ideas, therefore, are not unique to Snyder.

My point here is that Leong is an important elder to the Beats who recognizes his own position and reminds them of it, continuing to aid the figures of counterculture. Yet what sustains Leong in his old age is the following:

> it warms me to the roots of being to learn through you that the ancestral lessons have been reconstituted by the youths of another culture. It is all the more encouraging to see that their conclusions independently, and very likely, intuitively reached, concur at so many points with the random sagely chartings. Aye! The mother lode of Truth awaits all knowing miners! Ye gads, how I've droned those ideas, these past million yrs throughout the various Chinatowns! What joy to know that they could be in action 'most anytime.[234]

[233] Ibid.
[234] Leong to Snyder. 1 June 1967. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 59.

"Ye gads," he points out once more, "how I've droned those ideas, these past million yrs throughout the various Chinatowns!" But his "joy" is that the ideas he has believed in for years are "in action"—that his own beliefs have "been reconstituted by the youths of another culture."[235] It is enough, in other words, that his own beliefs and values are being enacted, "in action," elsewhere, "most anytime"—regardless of whether he was the origin, teacher, or receives credit for teaching the same ideas "throughout the various Chinatowns" (ibid). This is enough of a reward, it seems, for Leong. Though he reminds Snyder that the Oracle panel was reiterating the ideas he has talked about for years, he remains unhurt, does not call Snyder out, and when Snyder *does* "come into fame and fortune," as Leong suspected he would, Leong does not "su[e] [Snyder] for royalty" as Snyder himself suspected Leong could do.[236] It may be difficult to believe that a scholar such as Leong would not perhaps wonder that he was not adequately credited—not perhaps in a citation, but in an acknowledgement section of a book, or perhaps in an interview? But ultimately, Leong is only disappointed when Snyder does not make enough time for him, whether on his visits to the U.S. or in his letter writing.

For all his problems, Snyder is doing something different than the academy, which, first, confirms my argument in chapter three: Snyder is a Maker, not a scholar; he works under different ethical demands. And perhaps this is why Leong lets go of all these slights. It is certainly why Leong loves him: Snyder, for all the ethical problems of appropriation, is trying to get a sense of Chinese language and culture that does not "dare to type the national culture within the stricture of a few academic cliches," as did the "scientific sinologues."[237] That Snyder then goes and publishes translated poems from ancient China pushes him into the category of

[235] Leong to Snyder. 1 June 1967. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 59.
[236] Leong to Snyder. 28 December 1955. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 26.
[237] Leong to Snyder. 11 September 1962. The Gary Snyder Papers. D-050 II, Box 107, Folder 50.

celebrity. Meanwhile, Leong is wholly absent. That absence is now a conduit for us: we can now "see" Leong, whose absent presence in the Beat lineages offer a unique way into considering the avant-garde's claims to "outsiderness" and "disembodiment."

The "Disembodied" Avant-Garde: Naropa's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics

Josephine Park notes that "one of the side effects of Beat cultural appropriation was the sudden visibility of whiteness," which Kerouac partly registers in his "first frightened realization of what to be Japanese really meant" (*Big Sur* 80). Kerouac more fully expresses this "sudden visibility" in his "lament against his existence as 'a white man disillusioned'" in *On the Road,* in which he yearns to be "a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap" but especially desires to be one of "the happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America" (Kerouac *On the Road* 180, Park 118). This lament "racialized whiteness and read it in a spectrum with minority groups," and while "individual Beats felt the burden of their own whiteness, they did not then imagine its oppressive weight for the groups they desired to be" (Park 118).

This inability to imagine the oppressive weight of whiteness on Others in America meant that Euro Americans did not understand their cultural productions to have been generated from relationships with Asians in America. Avant-garde lineages saw their "fathers" in Modernism and would be connected by literary lineage to the late-twentieth century avant-garde writers, as well. Because of whiteness's occlusions in the 1950s and 60s, the 1970s and 80s avant-garde would carry those occlusions into newer articulations of its ethos, one of which was Naropa University's school of poetics, which emphasized "disembodiment" and a certain "outrider" identity that I explain further below. (We saw another articulation of late-20th century avant-

garde identity in Ron Silliman's autobiographical writing, which Yu analyzed in *Race and the Avant-Garde*).

In this section, I want to suggest that this "outrider"/"outsider" positioning is an effect of the occlusions we have already seen in this dissertation. It seems likely that Naropa can claim "disembodiment" as an ethos *precisely because* of the erasures we have already discussed. Even if the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics (JKSDP) hiring practices, course offerings, and student population suggest otherwise, the *ethos* of the school still emphasizes white Buddhist celebrities and Buddhist practices seen in largely white sanghas. I am interested in one of John Yau's questions, which I reiterate below: can one claim to be "outriders" or "outsiders" if the ethos is still very Beat?—for, as we have seen, the "Beat" category is suffused with whiteness.

In "seeing" Leong now, I want to bring his central argument—that the academy in which he works renders their understanding of Chinese culture into mythified totalities—alongside the Beat lineages that were built into the late-twentieth century, asking: if Leong is urging the academy to attend to the complexities of culture; and with his absence from Beat literature in mind, can we see the "disembodied" school of poetry at Naropa as an outgrowth of Leong's absence?

This is not to say that Leong was consciously excluded so that white poets could reign triumphant as the great Buddhist Poets and translators of East Asian cultural materials. That is not what I am suggesting. It is more likely that Leong was an accidental casualty of the overwhelming impulse of the Euro American Beats to look "outside of" American society, whether to the romanticized ancient Chinese past, to "Nature" in the United States, or to a flawed understanding of Native American cultural practices. This valuing of "outsideness" and the "outsider," as we saw, only went so far: though Kerouac romanticized the "ecstatic Negroes of

America" (Kerouac *On the Road* 180), and it seems that broadly, Beat writers may not have attempted to understand what was occurring with the Civil Rights Movement (see Snyder's letter of 1968 on his "cosmo-political project"). Their valuing of "outsideness" is visible in dualistic conceptions of Nature/Capitalism and East/West (despite their interest in the nonduality of Buddhism). The malaise of the West, therefore, could be answered by the "wisdoms" of Nature, being closer to one's water and vegetables (dropping out), and by the wisdoms of "the East." This valuing of "outsiderness" prevented these figures from understanding the experiences, choices, and identities of Asian Americans. It is, therefore, not surprising that this valuing of "outsiderness" would easily carry over into the avant-garde ethos and lineages—that these values would travel into the late-twentieth century relatively unexamined by the avant-garde itself.

I want to suggest that absences like Leong's enable the continuation of a seemingly innocuous sense of the "outsider" status of avant-garde white poets and crystallizes into that articulation of a "disembodied poetics," which I believe we can now see as an extension of the problem of Leong and Snyder's uneven distribution of artistic fame. It may be that part of what grants Naropa the ability to term itself "outrider" and "disembodied" is both Snyder's translations of Han Shan (which tend to reduce him to being a Buddhist Poet) *and* Snyder's failure to bring Leong's work to a wider audience. This is to say that two factors contributing to the problems of race in the avant-garde are: 1) the fact that Euro Americans tended not to take care with Others' cultural materials; and 2) the fact that Euro Americans tended not to acknowledge the influence that Asian/Americans have had on their work. This may seem so obvious it is not even worth stating, but the avant-garde continues to appear unaware of these problems.

"Disembodied" Poetics

Naropa's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics (JKSDP) is known for two major things: for its history as an institution that carries the Beat lineage into the late-twentieth century and for a scandal related to its religious leader Chogyam Trungpa, which I will discuss briefly below. Naropa's main achievements "include becoming the first Buddhist-inspired university in North America to earn accreditation and giving the Dionysian energies of Beat poetics and writing an institutional foothold" (Whalen-Bridge "Poetry" 157). The school was formed in 1974, as the JKSDP homepage notes, by "Beat authors and luminaries such as William S. Burroughs, Ken Kesey, Gregory Corso, Joanne Kyger, Philip Whalen, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti."[238] The webpage language foregrounds "minds" rather than bodies: "the school was merely a vision born of creative minds and their commitment to poetry and poetics." But why is the school branded as "disembodied"? In an interview, Anne Waldman responds to this question:

> I threw in the word *disembodied* because we didn't have a site, a desk, a building, stationery, a telephone, finances, or the usual accoutrements to be a school. But we did have a vision and a view, and a community and our own experience to draw on. We want to have desks and buildings, but at the same time we don't want to over- reify this identity of "poet" or say this is the career track that we have here and this is what you have to do to get somewhere. In addition to a serious commitment to writing and scholarship, the training is about being a human being in artistic community, with attention to the larger world as well. Treading with respect and wanting to be helpful to the world. (Whalen-Bridge "Trungpa" 45)

[238] *Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics.* (2022, February 1). Retrieved from Naropa University: https://www.naropa.edu/academics/schools-centers/jack-kerouac-school-disembodied-poetics/

Though bodies are not the same thing as desks, this is the logic for the term disembodied; the title recognizes "the heroic efforts to conjure a program out of nothing—no desks, no library, no budget, no salaries—meaning, 'disembodied' in the sense of being free of institutional resources, not just institutional constraints" (Whalen-Bridge "Poetry" 157). Allen Ginsberg also said that the "disembodied" term was a joke: "'Kerouac was DEAD—it was a JOKE!'" (Whalen-Bridge "Poetry" 157). The name of the school of poetics is also meant to point to "its open-genre, experimental approach," says the school's homepage: "though the school was brought to life by the Beats, it doesn't ascribe to any particular literary movement or set of rules."[239]

A further term used to describe the school's ethos is "what Waldman calls the 'Outride Lineage,' a heritage of powerful scholarship and counter-poetics operating outside the normative academic mainstream":

> What is an outrider? In the words of Jack Kerouac School co-founder Anne Waldman, "'outrider' means being outside the academic mainstreams of poetry yet not 'outside' the worlds of poetry. You ride parallel."[240]

This is the language by which the avant-garde has defined itself in many eras and in many communities of artists. Recall that Renato Poggioli noted that "what is distinctive about the avant-garde" is not aesthetics, style, or method, but rather "its emergence as a 'social fact,' a 'society in the strict sense' that positions itself against 'society in the larger sense'" (Poggioli 4, qtd. in Yu 4). The avant-garde claims its identity as a "critique of this eclectic and presumptively universal culture by means of 'stylistic dissent' (Poggioli 120), insisting on and agitating for the

[239] Ibid.
[240] *Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics.* (2022, February 1). Retrieved from Naropa University: https://www.naropa.edu/academics/schools-centers/jack-kerouac-school-disembodied-poetics/

particularity and distinctiveness of its own style in order to achieve 'the radical negation of a general culture by a specific one'" (Poggioli 107, qtd. in Yu 5). As a result, "the avant-garde becomes an analogue of that culture through its artificial construction of a community whose social being and ideology can be directly expressed in aesthetics" (Yu 5). But here, the Jack Kerouac School's "stylistic dissent" is articulated as "outrider" and "disembodied" because Beat figures ostensibly conjured a school "out of nothing."

Under the rubric of "general culture," it seems, fall the concerns and identities of a very wide range of people, art, and interpretive communities. Here, "stylistic dissent" manifests as a *de-emphasizing* of embodiedness over against "the academic mainstreams of poetry," which in the 1970s were starting to include newer voices of the Asian American movement. Such contextualization makes this *de-emphasizing* of embodiedness sound a lot like *emphasizing* whiteness.

For these Beat figures did not conjure the school out of nothing; they had a keen sense that they were continuing the project of the avant-garde (as is quite clear in the above language describing the school's heritage); and that *is* a conjuring out of "s*omething*." We might again return to the Beat figures' own original struggles to place themselves within the lineage of Modernist poets like William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound, of which they saw themselves the "sons" and "heirs"—heirs of *something* quite real, even if abstract and constructed. To claim "disembodiment" while still benefiting from the *fact of* one's embodiment (i.e., as a white subject, as a white poet who can unproblematically claim to be an heir of the twentieth-century avant-garde going back to Gertrude Stein or Ezra Pound) does not feel quite right. Even as we recognize that these poets, writers, and religious figures (like Chogyam Trungpa) did indeed lack the support, resources, and legitimacy of mainstream American letters at the time—not dissimilar

to the San Francisco Renaissance coterie we saw in chapter one, who lacked both the momentum of the earlier leftist generation's political commitments and the legitimacy of the New Criticism's access to the university, to publishers, to literary prestige—we can also see that "disembodiment" is probably not the best way to describe this lack. We can see, actually, that "disembodiment" may not belong in this discussion at all—not for these largely white, European American figures.

Unless, of course, we tilt our head a bit and see that "disembodiment" is in fact what occurred throughout the rest of the twentieth century, as the avant-garde's view of itself shifted away from "embodiedness" altogether in the face of social and political movements that pointed to the *importance* of the lived experience of embodiedness. At the same time that the Asian American label was being theorized, Naropa did not see any parallels between those two groups—this is similar to Silliman's reflections on how the politics of the "New Sentence" were not the same as contemporaneous sociopolitical movements. Why this inability to see parallels between these two *ethnicized* groups, the avant-garde and the Asian American Movement? In part, this can be answered by some of Waldman's descriptions of the school's founding.

In an interview, Waldman describes the formations of the school. The following influences inspired her thoughts on how the school would be structured: the Berkeley Poetry Conference in 1965; the vision of a poetic *sangha* (Sanskrit for spiritual community); her time at The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery (which inspired her to "include more women, inspire more diversity"); and "the Bohemian model and the School of Night, a group of sixteenth-century Englishmen…which may have formed a kind of literary underground" (Whalen-Bridge "Trungpa" 43). Waldman was, therefore, looking for "communities of poets that would gather, discourse and exchange; younger writers sitting at the feet of older writers, the

apprentice model, which still goes on in Europe to some extent" (43). Very consciously putting Naropa in a class apart from Iowa's "singular creative writing program," Waldman envisioned a school where "you would seek out an elder…meeting mind to mind with another artist—an elder—historically and otherwise," meaning that the school would steer clear of the problems of "institutionalization and certain kinds of deadlines and requirements" (Whalen-Bridge "Trungpa" 43).[241] It remains true that many writers see Naropa as the more experimental, more avant-garde alternative to the Iowa workshop, which is often seen as a factory producing writers whose work will be palatable to meaning-making institutions like the National Endowment for the Arts; to publishers; and to a broad American readership.

Waldman's idea of the elder transmitting poetry and poetic practice, "meeting mind to mind with another artist—an elder"—has a similar logic as Alan Watts's vision of how Buddhist communities in America would be structured. Confronted with the more institutionalized ("Protestantized") Buddhism of Japanese American Buddhist communities, Watts described the converts' "ashram" style of Buddhism in a similar way:

> Buddhism began as an ashram—a group of disciples studying under Gautama the Buddha. Temple life came later, as a way of paying respect or giving thanks to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for their compassion in pointing out the way of deliverance from illusion. (Watts "Program" 21)

There are parallels here in how Watts and Waldman are positioning their projects: the idea of "meeting mind to mind with an elder" in Waldman's description mirrors Watts's notion that "a group of disciples stud[ied] under Gautama the Buddha." Both are also invested in an ostensibly

[241] This is also the model that Snyder champions in interviews. See *The Real Work*.

anti-institutional stance: for Watts, "temples" as institutions "came later" and are therefore *less* authentic, in his view, than the "proper" mode of Buddhist practice in "ashram" communities composed of a central teacher and disciples. The Jack Kerouac School's entire ethos is that of the "disembodied outrider," lacking institutional support but *better* for that lack because, with this elder-student "apprentice" model, the school could presumably carry on the tradition of the avant-garde as a result.

In trying to shed that feeling of the educational institution ("I was interested in an alternative to straight academia," said Waldman) (Whalen-Bridge "Trungpa" 34) or Iowa's "poetic factory," of which Waldman is clearly critical, she therefore tells a story of Naropa's founding remarkably similar to Watts's own vision for Buddhism in America. (Note, too, echoes of Leong's own frustrations with "straight academia" here.) But the language of "finding an elder to learn from" means that Waldman's contemporaries Garrett Hongo and Janice Mirikitani in a sense had to create these elders themselves, which they did, in writing voices that had been silenced. And somehow, this has further meant that elders like Charles Leong remain absent. This ethos is not quite honest, then, since it seems there are unspoken requirements for achieving that status as an elder. One of these requirements appears to be that you are either dead/ancient, like the Buddha or Han Shan, or that your reputation—even if it is built on claims to spiritual authority—approaches celebrity status, like Trungpa and Waldman herself. A third requirement is that one publishes acclaimed work that is later hailed as avant-garde, like Kyger, who became one of these "elders" after the founding of Naropa.

Waldman's idea of "younger writers sitting at the feet of older writers, the apprentice model," works very well for certain bodies and certain poets who can claim poetic authority based on the fact that they "see" themselves in these forebears like those of the Black Mountain

School and the School of Night, for example (Whalen-Bridge "Trungpa" 43). We saw in chapter two that "the apprentice model," like the historically male-dominant avant-garde poetic lineages, worked well for Euro American male poets in the San Francisco Renaissance, but did not aid Joanne Kyger, whose poetic identity was to some extent forged in correspondence with Philip Whalen and confirmed after her publications achieved acclaim (Russo "How You Want"). Would this "apprentice" model feel workable for a Japanese American poet who, as Garrett Hongo has written, did not see himself at all in American poetry, in the entire western canon? Or, would it be possible for "elders" like Charles Leong to be acknowledged as such? No, because he never produced a book and made no claims to spiritual enlightenment/authority, as Trungpa did. Those two characteristics seem to be major.

If, as the Jack Kerouac school homepage notes, "disembodied…points to its open-genre, experimental approach," it would appear this ethos only works if one agrees that white bodies *are not* bodies, but are "creative minds."[242] The positioning of the avant-garde as "outrider" or "outside" from mainstream culture is not new; what is new about Naropa's positioning here is its emphasis that bodies are not important. Drawing out some of the resonances of the meaning of the French term "avant-garde" as a military formation, Rey Chow has urged that "as intellectuals," we "need to remember…that the battles we fight are battles of words":

> What academic intellectuals must confront is thus *not* their 'victimization' by society at large (or their victimization-in-solidarity-with-the-oppressed), but the power, wealth, and privilege that ironically accumulate from their 'oppositional' viewpoint, and the widening

[242] *Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics.* (2022, February 1). Retrieved from Naropa University: https://www.naropa.edu/academics/schools-centers/jack-kerouac-school-disembodied-poetics/

> gap between the professed contents of their words and the upward mobility they gain from such words. (Chow *Writing Diaspora* 17)

Naropa's founders, for all their oppositional positioning outside of institutional or mainstream support, gained upward mobility from the contents of their community—and, I am suggesting, part of this upward mobility accrues from the apprentice model, which appears to be a liberatory, inclusive approach to education because it is ostensibly *anti*-institutional, but *actually* serves to exclude, as we saw, again, in the experience of Kyger. Of course, once she published her work, she earned a place in the apprentice model and then for years taught at Naropa as one of its elders. Power and privilege have ironically accumulated from their "oppositional" position, not unlike the later institutionalization of the ostensibly anti-institutional Language writers.

In contrast, consider Charles Leong's experience in the university. Where Snyder had the ability and privilege to seek out an "outrider" position, Leong appears to have had no alternative but to work within the strictures of the Far East Department. Except that is not quite true: as we have seen, *another* alternative is to learn, write, and translate within and in conversation with both the Portland Chinatown communities *and* with Snyder himself, an absent friend whose insight was invaluable to Leong. These are *not* "bad" alternatives: they are in fact quite ethical alternatives; it is just that these audiences have less power to make careers (except for Snyder, who might have boosted Leong's career). Leong's letters further an *embodied* poetics that connect the poetry of the Tang dynasty to Chinese people, spoken dialects, and even specific Chinese/Americans in the United States, as his friendships with the Portland Chinatown "oldsters" reveal. His letters complain about, diagnose, and resist the problem of the "porthole" view of cultures furthered by the institution of the American university—a problem Kandice

Chuh has identified as inextricable from the liberal humanist orientation of the humanities as a whole:

> the history of the humanities and the disciplinary structures organizing their emergence is of a piece with the history of the civilizational discourses subtending the legitimation of empire and capital, and bespeaks the onto-epistemologies that have come to secure liberal modernity's common sense. (Chuh *Difference* 1)

Two recent onto-epistemologies that have "come to secure liberal modernity's common sense" are multiculturalism and pluralism, which arise out of the university's earlier placing of cultures in specific departments, as in the University of Washington Far East Department. Because the humanities are "of a piece with the history of the civilizational discourses subtending the legitimation of empire and capital," cultures are generally allowed one expression each: this is evident both in the idea of multiculturalism, which suggests that there are many cultures, all equally valuable and valid in the present (thus erasing histories of trauma and dispossession) and is also evident in Leong's experience in the university. We can therefore accurately say, in the same breath, that Snyder's prestige in American letters is unquestionably warranted, even as we can also point to "the power, wealth, and privilege that ironically accumulate from [his] 'oppositional' viewpoint" (Chow 17). This last point is especially resonant when reading Leong's letters.

"UTOPIC MIND IS FREE OF THEORY & CIVILIZATION IS NOTHING ELSE – THE GOLDEN AGE CAN'T BE DESIGNED FROM OUTSIDE – IT MUST HAPPEN LIKE DAWN OR DARWIN'S FINCHES"[243]

One thing that is incontrovertible about Waldman's positioning of Naropa *and* about Snyder's translations of Han Shan's poetry is that these "texts" are theoretical in their construction. Snyder's translations confirm his "cosmo-political" project's thesis: i.e., that the West is broken and the salves/solutions for that malaise can be found in Nature and in Buddhist philosophy and poetry. Noting the "intellectual and spiritual strength of the Chinese Mahayana philosophy that is embodied in Han Shan's poetry," one can see why Snyder has been seen as "criticizing a culture that misunderstands nature and wallows mindlessly in its own destructiveness" (He 46). Indeed,

> Snyder also altered Han Shan in ways that aligned his selective translation with the particular cultural formations such as those we associate with Beat writing. Such movements specifically rebelled against the broad social, political, and religious characteristics of American culture of the 1950s. (He 52)

This framing marshals a clear theoretical critique through one "man" (even though "the Han Shan poems probably came from more than one hand") (He 48). That is a theoretical frame applied to ancient Chinese poetry.

Similarly, Waldman's creation of Naropa's ethos is theoretical first: even if it is interested in "poetic community," it privileges the *idea of* student-teacher apprenticeship relationships. But I am interested in bringing Saijo's poetry into this question of Theory: Saijo

[243] Saijo (154). This is taken from his poem "IF NOT CIVILIZATION THEN WHAT" in *Outspeaks: A Rhapsody*.

rails against the influence of "THEORY" on "CIVILIZATION" and the "SCIENTIFIC MADNESS" that has produced the Anthropocene. He writes, "THE GOLDEN AGE CAN'T BE DESIGNED FROM OUTSIDE– IT MUST HAPPEN LIKE DAWN OR DARWIN'S FINCHES" (Saijo 154). As we saw in chapter four, Saijo's critique is easily applied to the Maker ethos, not just to imperialism and settler colonialism. I wonder, therefore, whether this line (THE GOLDEN AGE CAN'T BE DESIGNED FROM OUTSIDE– IT MUST HAPPEN LIKE DAWN) could be put into conversation with the avant-garde's continual, ongoing, perhaps tired valuing of "outsiderness." Saijo's line suggests that one cannot theorize one's way into something better from the position of *being outside*.

Let us consider the rhetoric of "outsiders" in another context. In 1994, John Yau commented on the "outsider" language of the award-winning translator Eliot Weinberger's anthology titled *American Poetry Since 1950: Innovators & Outsiders* (1993). Yau was critical of "something deeply disturbing" in Weinberger's "logic and didactic reasoning" in bringing the "innovators and outsiders" together in a single volume. His review sparked a heated debate between Yau and Weinberger, which a portion of the American "poetry world" of the late 1990s watched with interest (the review itself and the heated debate, recorded in letters, were published in the *American Poetry Review*). Ezra Pound, an "elder" of the avant-garde and a figure whom Weinberger (echoing T.S. Eliot) holds up as the poet who "established Chinese poetry for our time," is the hero and father of Weinberger's group of "innovators and outsiders," and it is Pound's own logic, echoed by Weinberger both in his actual writing and in the anthology's contents itself, that Yau reveals to be "disturbing." Though I am not suggesting that Weinberger's anthology has made the same choices as Naropa's founders, I do want to examine the "outsider" logic in his editorial choices.

Yau's major argument is that the logic of the anthology and of Weinberger's choices are that of the Maker; though Yau does not use that term, his critique explains that:

> Pound's aesthetics are based on the idea that anything and anyone can be appropriated, and, in this regard, he is very much a man of his times. For at the beginning of the twentieth century, imperialism and colonialism were still going strong. Pound's belief that one can speak in the voice of the Other seems very much the aesthetic counterpart of colonialism; both can be understood as self-serving, paternalistic enterprises, which appropriate the raw materials, goods, and culture of the Other for themselves…Pound revered Tradition, its idea of "handing on" something of use to a younger generation. But what informed both Pound's view that "all ages are contemporaneous" and his estimation of the Cantos as "the tale of the tribe" is his belief in the assimilationist view that anything can be turned into poetic matter, as well as the imperalistic notion that the work of other individuals, countries and cultures belongs to whoever takes it. (Yau "Neither")

Here, Yau, like Saijo, connects the Maker ethos to imperialism and colonialism. But what is the connection between Yau's writing here and the founders of Naropa, who would undoubtedly protest that though Pound is a "father" of the avant-garde, Naropa does not condone many of Pound's poetic choices? The problem is that the Jack Kerouac School holds many of the tools that Pound passed down in the lineage-apprentice model of the avant-garde. Pound "handed on," to use Yau's phrasing, the practice of utilizing Others' "raw materials, goods, and culture" to the midcentury Euro American Beat writers, as we have seen. And it may be that Naropa has taken up this mantle unquestioningly: what the term and ethos of being "disembodied" allows poets to do is avoid reckoning with their own cultures, their own (white) bodies, and turn Others' cultures "into poetic matter" (Yau "Neither"). To frame an entire school and mode of inquiry as

"disembodied" is to disallow "representations of the Other by the Other," and thus, Naropa can be seen to replicate the blindness of Weinberger's anthology and the blindness of Pound himself, which originated in their model of the Other (Yau notes that "while Pound invented Chinese poetry for the West, he also left future generations another legacy, his model of the Other") (Yau "Neither").

Therefore, as Yau writes, "not surprisingly," in Weinberger's anthology "there is a paucity of "representations of the Other by the Other." In the rest of his review, and indeed, in the rest of the heated exchange between the two (which was recorded in published letters for all to follow), Yau goes on to illustrate how, because of this extractive logic of the avant-garde, Asian American poetry is often discounted, dismissed, and not included in the ranks of so-called "innovators and outsiders" (Yau "Neither").[244] Weinberger excludes Asian American poetry from an anthology of American poetry titled "Innovators and Outsiders" (and is therefore further unable to see the irony of the title itself). What is painfully ironic, then, is that Weinberger's anthology of "outsiders" is in fact a collection of (Euro American) poets who imagine and embody Otherness in their work:

> in a great majority of the poems Weinberger has chosen, the poet refers to a culture other than his or her own. Adept travelers, dislocation is something they *want to experience*, rather than something forced upon them. (Yau "Neither," my emphasis)

In this desire for "dislocation" and being an "outrider," is it possible that this is a similar yearning as Kerouac's, when he expresses a "lament against his existence as 'a white man disillusioned'" in *On the Road,* in which he yearns to be "a Denver Mexican, or even a poor

[244] Eliot Weinberger, John Yau, Esther Allen, David Hinton, Forrest Gander, Roberto Tejada, and Cecilia Vicuña. "Letters." *The American Poetry Review* July/August 1994, Vol. 23, No. 4. pp. 43-47.

overworked Jap" but especially desires to be one of "the happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America" (Kerouac *On the Road* 180, Park 118)?

If, as Yau shows, "Weinberger's ideas about tradition, about what must be handed on, has blinded him to a richer, more complex history than the one he has given us" in the 1994 anthology, it *also* has kept many other well-meaning cultural producers from seeing Asian American poetry as part of the avant-garde, which in its oft-emphasis on building and making using the materials of Other cultures, cannot "see" Asian American poetics as part of that tradition:

> [Weinberger] wants to honor the poem which embodies Pound's "complex of inrooted ideas of any period," but he refuses to address either pluralism, multi-culturalism, or the relationship between identity and gender. (Yau "Neither")

In its ethos, Naropa, too, neglects to address these relationships, even if some of Naropa's *classrooms* now seem to address them (one class offered in the Creative Writing and Literature major is "Cultural and Ethnic Lit," which, even though it is cordoned off from other classes like "Experimental Writing" and thus replicates the separation between "experimental aesthetics" and "minority" literatures, is at least present in their course offerings). I suppose I would like to ask: Given recent scholarly work in the fields of Asian American literature, settler colonial studies, and critical race theory, can the poetic avant-garde continue to position itself in this "outsider"/"outrider" way, particularly if the ranks of these "outriders/outsiders" are made up of largely white writers and critics who benefit directly from that positioning because it downplays their own embodiedness as white?

Naropa is well-known not just for its robust continuance of the Beat avant-garde tradition, but for a scandal surrounding its early religious leader Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, who, at a now-infamous retreat, ordered attendees to forcibly strip two individuals of their clothes because those two individuals were not complying with the directives of the retreat. The incident has led to many articles, accusations that Naropa was cult-like, and even a reckoning with what American Buddhism "is." When asked how he sees this infamous moment in Naropa history, Ginsberg, "the most well-known representative of Naropa and as arguably the country's most visible political poet," bracketed off "the question of power relations," Tony Trigilio notes, and "conclude[d] that the forcible stripping of two individuals by a group of disciples following the orders of their religious leader was merely 'the unveil[ing] of the 'Wisdom of the East'" (Trigilio 11). We might ask whether such "Wisdoms of the East" are in fact *grounded* in embodiedness, as in this infamous instance, which was clearly abusive and traumatic in its effects—rather than in the false disembodied posture of the school as a whole.

It may be that for all its positioning as "outside of" the university, the Jack Kerouac School operates under the same problematic liberal humanist approaches to culture—except, instead of operating from the "porthole", it operates from the "crow's nest": that is to say, it approaches Other cultures as if they are monolithic and unproblematically available to (white) cultural producers; whereas, it is only white people who are able to jump in and out of their own cultures, their own bodies. Leong seems to think that Snyder's Maker approach is better than the "porthole" approach of the sinologists. This is because Snyder sees complexities in Chinese language and culture that Leong's colleagues cannot see: their "scientific" methodologies obstruct nuanced understanding. But as we step further into the late-twentieth century, when

Others increasingly speak *for themselves,* is the "crow's nest," "outrider" point of view defensible?

Perhaps we might examine claims to individual genius, spiritual authority, and the stories that Buddhist Poets tell about themselves. Perhaps we might also continue to interrogate the relationship between individuality (seen in Waldman's "elder"-apprentice model, Watts's "ashram" Buddhism, and Snyder's emphasis on the "individual working out his path by lonely self-enquiry and meditation"), American Buddhism, and the creation of poetry. Rather than positioning himself as "outsider" in the ways that Snyder and other Euro Americans do—a positioning that, as we saw, has been almost completely unavailable to Black Americans (think of Ellison's *Invisible Man*) and to Japanese Americans, for whom "dropping out," at least in the 1950s, meant a kind of social death—Leong goes *into* Chinatown communities. Leong sees the Chinatown oldsters for who they are: experts on classical Chinese language, culture, and literature. Like Naropa, Leong also registers a critique of the university; only, instead of calling his critique of the university "disembodied" and formulating a theoretical "outsider" critique, he leaves academia and goes *into* Chinese communities who are much more accurately termed disenfranchised outsiders. In contrast, note what Kerouac's character Ryder says about Han Shan. In answer to the narrator Smith's query, "I wondered why Han Shan was Japhy's hero," Ryder explains:

> "Because," said he, "he was a poet, a mountain man, a Buddhist dedicated to the principle of meditation on the essence of all things…And he was a man of solitude who could take off by himself and live purely and true to himself." (Kerouac *The Dharma Bums* 16)

It is through right training, right behavior, and an individual, solitary connection to Nature that this version of Han Shan displays Beat values. But the absent presence of Leong, who informed Snyder's translation philosophy, suggests something else: it is through the "slow, trying process" of working with people—Snyder himself included, of course: the correspondence itself was a labor of interpersonal learning—that "anything that is good earns the right to survive."

Conclusion

Because Snyder saved these letters from Leong, we can *see* Leong now. Part of this "seeing" must mean that we recognize that Snyder may have extracted valuable expertise and information from Leong. And yet, part of this seeing also means we must pay homage to one of Leong's own major recognitions: that Snyder's approach to cultural materials was *not* that of the scholar or Orientalist—this is why Leong so loved Snyder and respected his work. In other words, in addition to seeing another example of Makerly extraction in Leong's absent influence on this period's great cultural productions, "seeing" Charles Leong means *also* seeing Leong's great appreciation for the work that Snyder did—an appreciation informed not by fandom, but by Leong's insightful critique of the liberal humanist, "porthole" approach to culture of the American university. His appreciation was informed by his expertise, mentorship, wide-ranging experience, interest in Han Shan, and heritage as a person of Chinese descent. I hope, therefore, that this chapter may begin to assuage readers' fears that Snyder must be dislodged from his position as a masterful and important figure in American poetry; in American Buddhist poetry; in American Buddhism; and in the broader twentieth-century "translations" (both literal and figurative) of East Asian art, poetry, and religion. One of the key things I see in reading Leong's letters is that Snyder and Leong's approaches to cultural materials, language, and literature were remarkably similar; it is just that Snyder was capable of gaining wider fame than Leong.

I want to close with Kerouac's depiction of the second coming of Han Shan, who is problematically embodied in the white body of Japhy Ryder/Gary Snyder. (It is worth noting that Snyder himself seems to have been chagrined at how he was represented in *Dharma Bums*).[245] The narrator Smith/Kerouac tells us about his months as a fire lookout on Desolation Peak in the North Cascade Mountains in Washington state. These lookout posts were "dropout" jobs championed by Beat figures because of one's closeness to Nature and because these posts, which placed one atop a mountain alone for months on end, served as a kind of cleanse from society. Kerouac describes the natural surroundings, the weather patterns, and his own attempts to feel connection: "I called Han Shan in the mountains: there was no answer. I called Han Shan in the morning fog: silence, it said…On my calendar I ringed off the fifty-fifth day" (*Dharma Bums* 185).

That evening, "my fire roaring with three big logs," Kerouac/Smith is "exulted to hear" his supervisor "Burnie Byers over the radio telling all his lookouts to come down that very day. The season was over" (185). He can finally contemplate leaving his shack and returning to civilization. "Sixty sunsets had I seen revolve on that perpendicular hill. The vision of the freedom of eternity was mine forever…For the last time I went out to the edge of Lightning Gorge where the little outhouse was built right on the precipice of a steep gulch" (*Dharma Bums* 185-186). As he gazes out across the precipice his earlier calls to Han Shan are answered:

> suddenly it seemed I saw that unimaginable little Chinese bum standing there, in the fog, with that expressionless humor on his seamed face. It wasn't the real-life Japhy of rucksacks and Buddhism studies and big mad parties at Corte Madera, it was the realer-

[245] Najarian writes that *Dharma Bums*" participates not only in Kerouac's Buddhist and literary celebrity, but to his chagrin, Snyder's, in the character of 'Japhy Ryder'" (316).

> than-life Japhy of my dreams, and he stood there saying nothing. “Go away, thieves of the mind!” he cried down the hollows of the unbelievable Cascades. It was Japhy who had advised me to come here and now though he was seven thousand miles away in Japan…he seemed to be standing on Desolation Peak by the gnarled old rocky trees certifying and justifying all that was here. “Japhy,” I said out loud, “I don’t know when we’ll meet again or what’ll happen in the future but Desolation, Desolation, I owe so much to Desolation, thank you forever for guiding me to the place where I learned all”…And in keeping with Japhy’s habit of always getting down on one knee and delivering a little prayer to the camp we left, to the one in the Sierra, and the others in Marin…as I was hiking down the mountain with my pack I turned and knelt on the trail and said “Thank you, shack.” Then I added “Blah,” with a little grin, because I knew that shack and that mountain would understand what that meant, and turned and went on down the trail back to this world. (Kerouac *Dharma Bums* 186-87)

In these last lines, Han Shan/Cold Mountain is embodied in the figure of Japhy Ryder. The two merge into the body of the "unimaginable little Chinese bum,” his “seamed face” and bodily presence serving as a sign that Kerouac’s time on the mountain has been good. Han Shan/Ryder stands there, chasing away “thieves of the mind!” and “certifying and justifying all that was here.” In “certifying,” Han Shan/Ryder is an elder who blesses Kerouac's spiritual seeking. In keeping with the unique Christian-Buddhist religiosity of Kerouac himself, this is an incarnation in which Japhy is a Christ-figure clothed in the body of Han Shan. Kerouac prays to Japhy: “Japhy,” I said out loud, “I don’t know when we’ll meet again or what’ll happen in the future but…thank you forever for guiding me to the place where I learned all” (187). In this, one of the most famous images of Buddhist American literature, Japhy is rendered into Han Shan’s bodily

presence to produce an experience in which "the vision of the freedom of eternity was mine forever" (187).

Leong's absence haunts this striking image of Ryder-as-Han Shan. Where Kerouac writes that "it was Japhy who had advised me to come here and now…he seemed to be standing on Desolation Peak by the gnarled old rocky trees certifying and justifying all that was here," he recalls the elder-student relationship that Smith and Ryder had enjoyed throughout the book. Smith seeks out a final blessing from his mentee, and receives one: Snyder blesses ("certifies and justifies") Smith's Buddhist practice and his "dropout" choices. Yet as the "grandpappy" who dropped out in the 1930s, Leong might have served this role for Smith; Saijo, who taught many of the Beats to meditate, might have been the "elder" Smith sought out (we saw in *Big Sur* that Kerouac refers to "George Baso"/Saijo as the "old Zen master"). The reason it is *Snyder* who embodies Han Shan is due to the same logic behind the avant-garde's "disembodiment." The elder-student, apprentice model is again reflected here as a distinctly *white* relationship, illustrated by the fact it is a white guru who embodies the ghostly presence of the now-famous figure of Han Shan. Indeed, the whole scene is enabled by Asian/American erasures and absences.

Further, this *re-embodiment* (which is to say, this erasure of Asianness) produces that "vision of the freedom of eternity," a totalizing vision that "is mine forever," no less. The transcendence and totality of this scene is circumscribed by whiteness all around, not least because of Kerouac's choice to clothe Japhy in Christlike imagery and depict himself as a devoted disciple. It is the absenting of the figure of Han Shan, combined with the elder-student blessing that Ryder grants Smith, that are catalysts for the moment's transcendence—an aesthetic best analyzed through the reading practice of whiteness. Leong's letters detail a life lived in

relationality, a life's work that is impossible to render into this kind of transcendence because we saw Leong's body decay; we saw his Otherness (because his department saw it, too); we saw his sadness; we saw him disappear into obscurity; and we *do not see* his actual translations because there is no book. My hope is that Leong's letters may now haunt transcendent Buddhist literary inscriptions like this—indeed, may haunt the "disembodied" avant-garde—"ruining" them because his life details the disintegrations *un*available in such scenes.

Conclusion:

Buddhist Poetics, Beat "Cosmo-Politics," and the Maker Ethos: Asian Americanist Critiques of Whiteness in Midcentury American Beat Writing

This dissertation has attempted to delineate "Beat" literature's placement within broader twentieth-century shifts in philosophy, poetics, and politics. Its aim has been to provide a more accurate view of this period's texts, including the literary texts; in particular, it has desired to reveal Beat literature's relationship to other Asian/American cultural productions of the twentieth century that have only lately been recovered. The goal is not chastisement, but accuracy, and a broader sense of how these writers have informed twentieth century American literature, given the Beat era's great influence on other cultural objects and productions—including the formation of culture that we understand alternately as "American Buddhism," "Western Buddhism," and "Buddhist Modernism."

The dissertation's major intervention is to answer the call for the "ruination" of Western Buddhism put forth by scholars who have commented upon the ubiquity of "mindfulness" in mainstream American culture. It answers this call not by relying solely on Marxist literary criticism to reveal how "Buddhism" is now part of neoliberal capitalist culture, but by examining the Asian American critiques (implicit and explicit; loudly voiced, as in Saijo, and absent, as in Leong) of the Beat cultural productions and countercultural communities. The project merges a Marxist critical sensibility with the critiques of Asian Americans, who reveal that a major culprit for this period's erasures, absences, and appropriations is not some timeless, transhistorical Orientalism innate to Western society and Westerners themselves, but is, instead, the Makerly fact that, to make poetry, one needs poetic material. This is a critique parallel to contemporary

scholars who have worked to return Edward Said's *Orientalism* to the ground of materialist thought. They show that it was the material interests of those in power that generated colonial and imperial projects, rather than Orientalism itself being causal to colonialism (as Said's work suggests). Building from these insights, I offer the idea of the "Maker ethos," the idea that the extractive appropriations of this period arose from the need to make new poetry with "new" poetic matter. This term gives us a more precise sense of how Others and Others' cultural materials have been utilized and operationalized in American poetry. In turn, this allows for a clearer understanding both of how Buddhism is "translated" in American poetry—recall the ways we can now interpret the "Buddhism" in the work of Hoa Nguyen, Shin Yu Pai, Albert Saijo, and Garrett Kaoru Hongo—and how that Maker ethos erased and absented Asian/Americans from Beat literature and also, to some extent, from the dominant images and understandings of what American Buddhism "is." These dominant images have had the effect of making American Buddhism appear as an overwhelmingly white phenomenon, despite the multiple and varied Buddhisms in the U.S.

I have argued, first, that Euro American poets, who saw themselves as the inheritors of the Modernist poetic avant-garde, imported doctrines and practices of Buddhism into a poetics of "timely uncertainty" in the face of a postwar impulse to return to established "certainties" of truth grounded in transcendence or empiricism. Chapter one places these cultural producers—Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, Joanne Kyger, Philip Whalen, and others—within these broader postwar cultural contexts to show that their Buddhist-informed work, indeed their interest in East Asian cultural materials generally, is part of a broader shift in thinking that parallels the later work of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the revelations of quantum physics. Chapter two shows how the Zen poetic lineage's poetics of "timely uncertainty" was informed by two different

conceptions of Buddhist meditative practice. The chapter broadens our scholarly understanding of Buddhism in American culture and provides a "prehistory" to the transpacific phenomena of "mindfulness" as it is understood today.

Though many have commented upon the Orientalisms and vaguely culturally appropriative qualities of Beat writers' interests in Buddhism, most of this scholarship has tried to trace Beat writers' interests in Buddhism to "real" or specific (i.e., clerical and historical) schools of Buddhist thought. This has meant that our understanding of Beat cultural appropriations is imprecise. In chapter three, I theorize the following: that because these midcentury Euro American poets saw themselves as an extension of the Modernist avant-garde poetic tradition, they actively sought to build a poetics that made new, to use Ezra Pound's phrasing. In working to innovate American poetry, some of the primary tools they utilized were drawn (extracted) from East Asian textual materials and from Asian/American friends. Many midcentury writers' modes of "making new" involved a figurative translation of East Asian cultural materials into Anglophone poetry. This meant that, instead of approaching these cultural materials from the position of the Orientalist or anthropologist--scholars tasked with a certain ethics of carefully presenting information about a given culture--these self-consciously avant-garde poets sought to utilize East Asian cultural materials to make and build. I term this approach to culture and cultural production the "Maker ethos" because in this need to make, the Maker appropriates (takes and uses) cultural materials indiscriminately. Some of these materials (like sutras and East Asian art curated in galleries for American viewers) were available for appropriation; other cultural materials were not on offer to the Euro American cultural producers. Because these Makers did not operate under the same ethical demands as a scholar, however, we cannot perhaps hold these figures accountable for "getting Buddhism wrong"--after all,

Buddhism as it was available to Euro Americans in this period was already a product of hybridization with many Western ideologies. Instead, I suggest that the more egregious problem of this "Makerly" appropriation lies in Euro American cultural producers' extraction from Asian diasporic communities and in the resulting erasure of the great influence these Asian American friends had upon what we now know as "Beat literature."

Drawing from the fields of settler colonial studies and Asian American literature, chapter four elucidates how Asian American writers inscribe Buddhism in their poetry in various ways. In addition to shaping the artistic choices of Euro American cultural producers, whiteness has also informed how we understand Buddhist poetry. This is my central argument in chapter four. My contention is not primarily that Asian American writers should be classed as part of Beat literature, though Garrett Hongo and Albert Saijo are Beat writers; instead, I render the whiteness of the Beat category legible, which means we can better come to understand how Buddhism has been integral to American poetics. My readings of how Asian American writers inscribe (or do not inscribe) Buddhism in their poetries show us that the adaptations, appropriations, and adoptions of Buddhist thought and practice in American poetry are not uniform. This is to say that what makes the use of cultural materials extractive in one context (as when a Euro American harmfully appropriates East Asian cultural materials) can in another context be empowering (as when some Asian Americans inscribe similar Buddhist tools, but to different ends).

Utilizing whiteness as a reading practice may allow many readers to identify, for example, how Albert Saijo's inscriptions of the "poetic tools" of Buddhism are directed toward different poetic ends than those of much Euro American Buddhist poetry. Saijo's poetics of MAJOR feeling also scathingly excoriate the modes of logic that informed colonialism and imperialism, which are the logics that render (some) Makerly extraction harmful. These logics

follow from liberal humanist conceptions of "Man" over against Nature. In this critique, his work proclaims the causes of colonialism and harmful extraction to be, not Orientalism, but *material interests* that follow from science's normative view of humans as "a species of nature, yet to be human is to transcend that nature" (Ingold 5). In this normative view, "it is already taken for granted that the world is given...not as part of any offering or commitment but as a reserve or residue that is there *for the taking*" (Ingold 5).

In chapter five, I ruminate on the absence of Charles Leong from the artifacts of Beat literature and consider what his correspondence with Gary Snyder suggests about the late-twentieth century poetic avant-garde. Leong's letters offer a powerful, yet private, critique of the positivist "porthole" approach to cultures in the Far East Department at the University of Washington. His letters diagnose the problem: approaching language and culture from a "scientific" or empirical position means that one *misses* things, like the fact that other Chinese dialects might allow for stronger translations or the fact that one's own interpretive biases come into the translation process (which is to say, that *being* and ontology are part of intellectual inquiry: "objective" approaches to the study of Chinese culture, in other words, are a fiction). Leong wishes his colleagues would ground their analysis in "one moment within temporal contexts," thus subjecting their study of culture to time. Such an approach to study allows one to *see* absences: As we saw in Werner Heisenberg's work, absences only signify when contextualized in time and when discerned retrospectively. Leong's frustrations with the translation methodologies of his colleagues are an outgrowth of his own ability to see such absences and bring them into his own study.

Leong's frustrations with this approach are recorded in the letters and were expressed to his colleagues, who interpreted his presence, preferences, expertise, and expressions as

"overreactions"--this is why I see his letters as part of Cathy Park Hong's "literature of minor feelings." He therefore celebrates and supports Snyder, whose approach to cultural materials is that of the Maker, while his letters exhibit the "ruinous" sensibility that the passing of time does not mean progress, but rather, disintegration. Similarly, intellectual work may not arise into wholeness or completion, as in the publication of a book, but may instead remain fragmented, a "slow and trying" process of learning which, because it took place within Chinatown communities, has no record other than in the memories of friends. Leong's letters further a "ruination" not only of the Far East department at UW (in their urging that this department ground its inquiry in time), but of these transcendental Beat texts. As in the allegory, in which "history does not assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay" (Benjamin *Origin* 178), the insights of Leong's letters remove the ephemera of these Beat artifacts, returning the knowledge therein to the decayed ground of the ruin.

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